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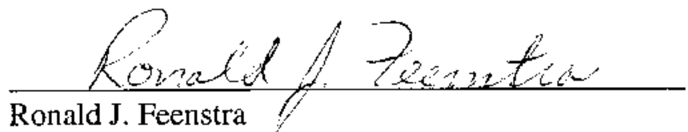

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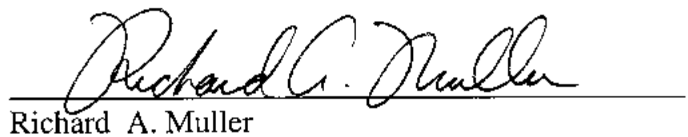

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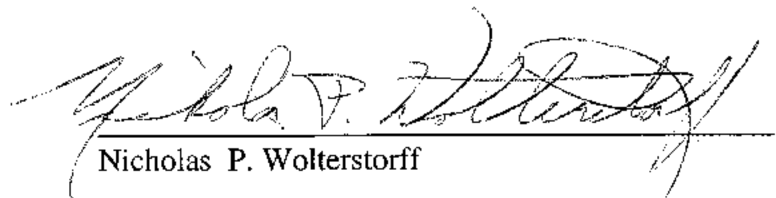

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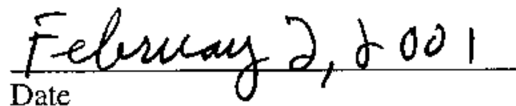

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To my father, Lynn H. Vande Brake

The whole creation groaneth and travaileth; and if God is love rather than power, it follows that He gains his victories by pain rather than by force.

-Reinhold Niebuhr

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PREFACE

I have written this dissertation on the suffering of God because of my own experiences with suffering. My father sustained a closed head injury when I was sixteen and has been severely disabled ever since. I lost a daughter to a congenital heart defect in January of 1995. These experiences have had a great impact on my life and on my thoughts about theology. They have driven me to think about the problem of evil in the world and its effects on Christian thought. I began with the notion that I would work on the problem of theodicy in some capacity but later narrowed my subject to the passibility of God. I chose this because, after reading Jürgen Moltmann in my course work, I surmised that it was a central issue to the problem of theodicy. I was also interested in studying the apparent change in thinking about the passibility of God from the Middle Ages and Scholastic era to the present time--the reasons why the passibility of God now seemed to be an acceptable position when it was clearly unacceptable in these former periods. I have learned much in my journey over the last five years in writing this dissertation both about what it means for God to suffer, what it means to write a scholarly work, and about myself.

I have not done this project without the help and support of many people. I want to thank my wife, Susan, for her patience and willingness to give me the time I have needed to work on this project. It has been a long haul, and I am grateful for her love and support as I have spent my summers, weekends, and vacations at the library studying and writing. I thank my children Olivia and Annake who have had to be without their dad for many a weekend, for continuing to love me anyway. I thank my mother, Katie, for spending hours editing and making corrections of the text. I am grateful to Cal Van Reken for his encouragement and his guidance as I have gone through this process. I thank Deb

Sugiyama and Kari Spruyt for taking more work on themselves and thereby lessening my workload in the summers so that I could devote more time to this dissertation. I thank the Board of Trustees at North Hills Classical Academy for making allowances for me to finish this work for my degree.

I am especially grateful to all my professors who have mentored me in this program (John Cooper, Cornelius Plantinga Jr., Calvin Van Reken) and especially to my committee: Ronald Feenstra, Richard Muller, and Nicholas Wolterstorff. I am thankful for the comments and suggestions that they have given me as I have worked through my dissertation; they have helped me to clarify my thinking and to make my work better. I am most thankful for the example that they have set for me as scholars. They have been wonderful models as teachers and learned men, and they have taught me much in the years that I have taken instruction from them. Any lapses in scholarship or poor argumentation in this thesis are completely my own fault and are not due to any lack of effort on the part of my mentors to teach me to do otherwise.

All biblical references cited in the text will be from the New International Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

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ABSTRACT

The majority position in modern theology is that God is passible. Most modern theologians assert that the God portrayed by traditional theology is utterly impassible. They contend that the classical conception of God has been unduly influenced by Greek philosophical thought rather than biblical thinking. This, however, is a hasty generalization that has little historical support. The word "impassibility" when it is used as a reference to God in modern theological discussions is taken to mean exclusively that God is "without the ability to have emotions and unable to experience suffering." The historical material that deals with the issue of the impassibility of God makes the distinction that impassibility refers to the passions of God--those feelings or inclinations to participate in or commit sin. There are also very few theologians in any era who are willing to say that God cannot experience emotions.

Thus, we may more accurately say that God is impassible with regard to passions that lead to sin, but he is passible in that he can experience emotion or even suffer if he chooses to. This assertion is made under the assumption that divine emotions are very different from human emotions just as divine suffering is also very different from human suffering. We may presume that God suffers in some capacity because of the analogical material that we are given in the Bible that portrays a suffering God and because of the suffering that is manifested in the life of Jesus Christ.

Jürgen Moltmann's theology of the passibility God is examined as an example of a modern attempt to construct a theology with the suffering of God as its center. His theology is found wanting in that it portrays God as one who is not free to be himself without suffering. Ultimately, Moltmann's theological construct leaves us with a depiction

of a God who suffers with us, but who is not powerful enough to do anything about the problem of suffering.

CHAPTER 1
HOW COULD GOD SUFFER?

Introduction

God suffers. This is a widely accepted theological maxim in our day. This was not always the case in theological discourse. One or two centuries ago, this simple statement about the passibility of God was much more likely to be considered heretical than orthodox.[1] The reasons for this change in theological climate are several and have to do with the continual quest to make theology and Scripture relevant for our lives in our own time. In some cases, the unfortunate result of this very legitimate endeavor is that the attempt to make the concept of God sensible for contemporary people is carried out without a serious attempt to integrate theological truths that are important to the formulation of sound doctrine. In the last century or so, theology pertaining to the suffering of God has been directed in large part by emotional and experiential influences rather than by Scripture and tradition. The problem with most modern theology positing God's suffering is the foundations on which it rests: sentimentality and faulty reasoning, both leading to untenable theological positions. To say that God suffers is a true statement, but the extent of this concept of passibility must be carefully defined within the bounds of what is allowed by the biblical testimony and the rich tradition of Christian thought.

This dissertation will examine the idea of the suffering of God by looking at several aspects of the problem. It will define terms and concepts such as "divine suffering," "impassibility," "immutability," and "divine emotions/affections." Some of these terms,

[1]Ronald Goetz, "The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy," *Christian Century* 103 (April 16, 1986): 385-86.

especially "impassibility" and "immutability," are being used differently in the present era than they have been used historically. The history of the idea of the impassibility of God will be surveyed in order to observe how this problem has evolved in theological history and how the terms above have been utilized to describe the passibility or impassibility of God. A chapter will be devoted to biblical interpretation and the use of analogy or metaphor in the Scriptures to describe God as passible or impassible. The next section will scrutinize the theology of Jürgen Moltmann, a twentieth century German theologian, whose theology is based on the suffering of God which stems from the crucifixion of Christ. In the conclusion, the findings of these various chapters will be used together to explain the limited way in which one may understand that God is passible.

This introductory chapter will examine several aspects of the present debate about the passibility of God through a survey of modern literature and by looking at different arguments used for and against passibility. It will also introduce and define the terms being used in the present discussions about God's passibility.

Why Is the Impassibility of God Being Questioned?

It is widely perceived that the prevailing understanding of God was inherited from the era of Scholastic Orthodoxy, and that the Reformation portrays a God who is utterly impassible. This description of God entails a God who is unemotional, stoic, unchanging, distant, transcendent, and uninvolved in the lives of human beings. This notion, although it is an inaccurate generalization, has worked as a catalyst to spark the modern movement to argue for a God who is passible.

There are at least four reasons that would lead one to think that God is capable of suffering. One is that there are several verses of Scripture in the Old and New Testaments that anthropomorphically depict God as one who suffers in response to the sin, brokenness,

and callousness of humanity.[2] A second is the suffering that is evident in the life and especially the death of Jesus Christ, the One who is sent by the Father to be the perfect and final revelation of God. It seems to make sense to say that if Jesus is truly God and Jesus suffered, then God must suffer in some respect. A third has to do with arguments that are based in the nature and acts of God including the idea that God is love. For example, if God is love, and one would agree that love is inherently passible, then God must not only be capable of suffering, but He is required to suffer by his nature. The fourth reason in recent theological literature stems from the problem of evil. The basic premise here is that if God is a compassionate and loving God who sees the tremendous pain and evil that human beings suffer in this world, then he must suffer too, or he cannot be the kind of God that is worthy of our devotion and praise.

Many theologians today will argue along these lines or others to reject the idea of an impassible God. Kelly James Clark states that "the pressures to reject divine impassibility are clear: to modern sensibilities an impassible deity seems woefully out of touch with both biblical and personal experience; we value a God who suffers with us, who hears and responds to our prayer, who is active in redemptive history and attentive to our personal needs."[3] It is a great consolation for many to believe that God suffers too, and that he understands their situation from within.[4] These kinds of sentiments and "sensibilities" are the principal influences in much of the theology being written in the modern era that

---

[2]Some examples of this are Genesis 6:6, Hosea 11:8-9, Isaiah 63:9-15, 2 Corinthians 5:19, and Ephesians 4:30.

[3]Kelly James Clark, "Hold Not Thy Peace at My Tears: Methodological Reflections on Divine Impassibility," in *Our Knowledge of God: Essays on Natural and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 167.

[4]Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 31.

portrays God as passible.

Marcel Sarot suggests that the problem of evil itself has been recast in recent years to reflect this pervasive feeling among theologians and philosophers that God must be passible from "How can a good and omnipotent God exist if there is evil in the world?" to "How can a morally perfect God can remain unaffected by the suffering of the human beings he has created?" Sarot asserts that "theodicists who formulate the problem of evil in this way are sure to agree in their answer: only a suffering God is morally credible in the face of the world's ills."[5] There are those who would even go so far as to say that the understanding of God as impassible is heretical. Douglas White wrote in his book, *Forgiveness and Suffering,* that "the doctrine of impassibility of God taken in its widest sense, is the greatest heresy that ever smirched Christianity; it is not only false it is the antipodes of truth."[6]

Vincent Tymms, who published *The Christian Idea of Atonement* in 1904, agrees with White's sentiments in his estimation of an impassible God. He feels that if we deny that God can be grieved, then we cannot attribute to God pity or love. He states that "we shall be committed to a denial of all relations, and then the only God left to us will be the infinite iceberg of metaphysics."[7] For Tymms, God will have no personality or ability to relate to us if we cannot assert that God is passible. Dorothee Sölle, a contemporary theologian, takes this a step further to say that if God cannot suffer and feel the pain of those who are hurting and despairing, then God must be sadistic. She narrates this opinion

[5]Marcel Sarot, "Auschwitz, Morality and the Suffering of God (Divine Passibility Needed but Not Proven)," *Modern Theology* 7 (January 1991): 135.

[6]Douglas White, *Forgiveness and Suffering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 83ff.

[7]T. Vincent Tymms, *The Christian Idea of Atonement* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904), 311.

as follows:

> In a recent conversation about God being the all-powerful ruler, a young woman from an evangelical perspective remarked, "Auschwitz was God's will. Otherwise it would not have happened." When questioned, she added, "God has created the world and us without asking our opinion. He can act as it pleases him. Our task is to glorify him nevertheless." In these words I heard a traditional timeless theology, untouched by reality and conceived in a coldness free from pain and love. The young woman identified God with Fate, and obviously believed more in the power of destiny than in God's love. Her God has become a sadist.[8]

Sölle represents the feelings of many theologians in the aftermath of the Holocaust and other tragedies of the 20th century: one cannot responsibly believe in a God who is unable to dissociate from evil and participate in the pain of suffering people.

However, this theological trend that asserts the passibility of God has not convinced everyone. There are still some who argue that to portray God as one who suffers produces more problems than the comfort that one may derive from such a doctrine is worth. Marc Steen states that one cannot derive consolation from the idea that God suffers with us, but only hopelessness:

> It is difficult to understand what advantage accrues to a suffering person for the idea of a suffering God! Religious people who are afflicted by suffering do not need a weak fellow-suffer; they are looking to a God who is effectively able to help and save, a God who experiences and communicates an unmitigated bliss. To transfer suffering onto God makes everything seem more hopeless.[9]

Against those who would argue that God has a moral obligation to suffer because of the evil that is endured by his creatures, Richard Creel asserts that God is not obligated to suffer even if he is the direct or indirect cause (and Creel believes that God is the direct or indirect cause) of all the evil that is suffered in the world. Creel reasons:

> Because God is good, he would neither allow nor cause us to suffer unless such suffering was instrumentally ingredient to the achievement of a good such that we each would agree that the suffering was an understandably unavoidable risk and was

---

[8]Dorothee Sölle, "Remembrance, Pain and Hope," *Witness* 74 (March 1991): 25.

[9]Marc Steen, "The Theme of the 'Suffering' God: An Exploration," in *God and Human Suffering*, ed. Jan Lambrecht and Raymond F. Collins (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Press, 1990), 90-91.

> more than made up for by the good to which it was a means. God would understand this eternally, and from such a perspective it does not seem that he, anymore than the responsible parent, has an obligation to suffer because of the suffering that he has intentionally allowed or caused.[10]

Thus, God is not morally obliged to suffer with us in our pain, according to Creel, because God is able to see the larger picture and knows that the present circumstances of suffering are a "necessary evil" that will ultimately produce a greater good.

Ronald Goetz points up the problem that the affirmation of divine suffering does not at all help us in solving the problem of evil, but it only exacerbates it. This is so because we are no longer able to "retreat into the hidden decrees of the eternal, all-wise, changeless and unaffected God."[11] If God is understood to be affected and changed by current events, then he must not have a perfect understanding of how evil circumstances will work toward good ends. He says that "God the fellow sufferer is inexcusable if all that he can do is suffer."[12] The fact that God is sympathetic does us no good in moving toward a solution to the problem of evil in the world; it only make it more hopeless. In the same vein, Joan Northam states that the God who suffers "may indeed be a sympathetic God, but certainly he is not one who can rescue the perishing! He appears to be perishing himself."[13] Suffering people need a God who is strong enough to save them, and some theologians still assert that a suffering God does not seem up to the task.

So then, is there a theological advantage to believing that God suffers or to believing,

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[10]Richard Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 146-47.

[11]Ronald Goetz, "The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy," *Christian Century* 103 (April 16, 1986): 389.

[12]Goetz, "The Suffering God," 389.

[13]Joan Northam, "The Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory," *Expository Times* 99 (July 1988): 302.

contrarily, that he does not? As in any debate, there are at least two extreme opinions, and, in this case, both opinions are trying to protect a property or even several properties of the divine nature that are essential to an orthodox understanding of what God is like as he is revealed to us through general and special revelation. Those who are of the opinion that God can suffer are very often trying to preserve or emphasize the immanent qualities of God's nature and the importance of the relational aspects of God's love, compassion, and governance of creation. The person who believes God to be impassible is usually trying to guard what could be identified as the more transcendent qualities of God's nature such as: immutability, omniscience, and omnipotence. Of course, God is both immanent and transcendent and possesses all of the aforementioned qualities. The difficulty comes in balancing the attributes of God in such a way that both the transcendence and immanence of God are appreciated.

Initial Considerations

Francois Varillon wisely warns that if we are not careful in our thinking, then the resulting theology is of no use. The unwanted outcome is a "theology without pastoral concern, and a pastoral concern without theology."[14] In other words, we must be careful not to separate God so completely from the world by intently emphasizing the vertical or transcendent aspects of God's nature that there is little or no relational or immanent quality with which we may console those who are suffering. Nor should we, out of a pastoral concern, portray God as one who is less than transcendent and omnipotent in an attempt to make God acceptable to the oppressed, or we will have abandoned the power of God to overcome their suffering.

In theology, it is rare to find an easy balance between the transcendence and

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[14]Francois Varillon, *The Humility and Suffering of God*, trans. Nelly Marans (New York: Alba House, 1983), 190.

immanence of God because these concepts are in tension with one another in many respects. Henri Blocher comments:

> When one has just read Philo or Thomas Aquinas on divine eternity and immutability, the first shock in Scripture is the liveliness of the biblical God. He is the mobile God who acts and reacts, the God who utters threats and withdraws them, the God who turns from wrath to grace, and also chastises with frightening blaze those who betray him among his chosen people.
>
> The second shock, however, comes, in contrast with much modern writing, when we realize that the affirmation of God's unchangeableness spreads its roots far and wide in all Scripture. *It is a biblical theme*, and not a minor one at that![15]

When we contrast the portrayal of God by a particular theology with the God of the Bible, there are often some discrepancies. These discrepancies may be a matter of perception or of a hermeneutical method. The theology we write should reflect the God we find in Scripture if we are formulating Christian theology. The God we find in the Bible is not one-dimensional or easily defined. Hence, when we use words to describe God, we must carefully articulate how we understand the terms that we are using. This is certainly the case when we speak of God being passible or impassible.

Both personal experience and philosophical presuppositions must be weighed against the revelation of Scripture and the enduring truths of the orthodox Christian tradition. The problem of the passibility of God is the predicament of coming to terms with a God who is both immanent and transcendent, a God who is concerned with the smallest details on this insignificant planet and concurrently overseeing the macrocosm of the whole universe, a God who sends his only Son to die for sinners so that they may spend eternity with him and yet needs no one. How do we wed the transcendence of God with God's immanence? How do we speak of a God who, for some untold reason, loves Jacob and hates Esau (Romans 9:11-15), and thus appears to be distant and even capricious; but, nevertheless, is also so near and attentive as to be afflicted in all the afflictions of his people

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[15]Henri Blocher, "Divine Immutability," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 6.

and grieved by their sins (Isaiah 63:9-10), a God who wishes that no one should perish (2 Peter 3:9)? Or is it impossible to reconcile these two pictures of God so that we have to choose to believe either in a God who is immanent or in a God who is transcendent? The God that is revealed to us in the Bible is both transcendent and immanent, and if one is to claim that God is passible or impassible, then both of these attributes of God must be taken into account.

Survey of the Literature Concerning the Suffering of God

Pre-World War II

Discussion about the suffering of God goes back to the beginning of the record of the Christian faith. Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tatian, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Gregory Thaumaturgus and others address the subject of God's passibility at least cursorily in their writings as will be seen in the next chapter. However, there is much more being written about the question of God's passibility in contemporary theology than there was in early Christian debates. The contemporary discussion about the suffering of God has its beginnings in British theology. Doubt concerning the doctrine of the impassibility of God took hold in England and the British Isles in the late nineteenth century. The First World War advanced the questioning of whether God could suffer, and by the time of the Second World War, British theologians generally accepted the idea that God suffered.[16]

The pivotal work that collated much of this early material was *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought,* written by J.K. Mozley in 1926.[17] Mozley briefly traces the history of the thought about the impassibility of God and goes on to survey the

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16Marcel Sarot, "Patripassionism, Theopaschitism and the Suffering of God: Some Historical and Systematic Considerations," *Religious Studies* 26 (September 1990): 363.

17J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926).

then recent literature dating from the mid-1860s to the mid-1920s. At the time of his writing he comments that the only monographs he can find avowedly devoted to the question of impassibility of God are the work of Gregory Thaumaturgus in the third century, *De passibili et impassibili in Deo,* and the work of Marshall Randles, at the end of the nineteenth, *The Blessed God: Impassibility*. He laments that no classic German monograph has yet been written. He cites and discusses several works by his contemporaries such as Arthur J. Mason, William N. Clarke, Horace Bushnell, Vincent Tymms, David W. Simon, Andrew M. Fairbairn, George B. Stevens, Douglas White, Charles A. Dinsmore, C.E. Rolt, G.A. Studdert-Kennedy, William Temple[18] and others that contain material related to the discussion of God's impassibility. Several of these works are focused primarily on the doctrines of atonement and redemption, and they address the suffering of God as an issue related to these doctrines, but not as a topic unto itself. Most of these British theologians argue that God suffers in some way. In his book, Mozley does not make any judgements about the material or inflict his own position upon the reader. He wants the material to stand on its own so that the reader can come to his or her own conclusions about the matter. At the end of his work, he raises six questions that he feels are important to answer if one is going to scientifically approach the discussion of God's

---

[18]Arthur J. Mason, *The Faith of the Gospel: A Manual of Christian Doctrine* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909). William N. Clarke, *An Outline of Christian Theology* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1899). Horace Bushnell, *The Vicarious Sacrifice* (New York: C. Scribner and Co., 1866). T. Vincent Tymms, *The Christian Idea of Atonement* (London: Macmillan, 1904). David W. Simon, *Reconciliation by Incarnation: The Reconciliation of God and Man by the Incarnation of the Divine Word* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1899). Andrew M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1913). George B. Stevens, *The Christian Doctrine of Salvation* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1905). Charles A. Dinsmore, *Atonement in Literature and Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Co., 1906). C.E. Rolt, *The World's Redemption* (London: Longmans, Green, 1913). G.A. Studdert-Kennedy, *The Hardest Part* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1919). William Temple, *Christus Veritas* (London: Macmillan, 1924). Douglas White, *Forgiveness and Suffering: A Study of Christian Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913). H. Maldwyn Hughes, *What Is the Atonement?* (London: J. Clarke & Co., Ltd., [1924]).

impassibility. These questions are the following:

> (1) What is the nature of God as the Absolute, as the ultimate reality, and, at the same time, as personal?
> (2) What is the true doctrine of God's relationship to the world, and, especially, with reference to creation?
> (3) Can the life of God be essentially blessed and happy, as being that eternal life which cannot, as such, be in any way affected by the time-series and its contents, and yet also a life in which suffering finds a place, in so far as the life of God enters into the time-series and works within it?
> (4) How is feeling in God related to feeling in men?
> (5) Is a real religious value secured in the thought of the passibility of God?
> (6) What is the relationship of the Cross as the historic means of God's redemption of the world to that eternal background of God's love out of which the Cross is given?[19]

This dissertation will deal with all of these questions except the way in which God's passibility is related to his eternality or participation in a time sequence of events (question 3) in varying degrees. It seems that to answer the third question adequately would, in itself, be the subject of another dissertation.

Besides the approach of the aforementioned British theologians which was grounded in the mode of traditional metaphysics and hermeneutics, a British mathematician formulated a different method for thinking about God and all of reality in his all-encompassing process thought. The process theology of Alfred North Whitehead, which originated in America in the late 1920s, provides another important voice in the discussion about the suffering of God.

Whitehead and later Charles Hartshorne were the primary formulators of process theology. Whitehead, a British mathematician and scientist of some renown, who collaborated with Bertrand Russell to write *Principia Mathematica,* came to the United States in 1924 to teach philosophy at Harvard University. During the time that he was at Harvard, he worked on general philosophical issues and developed a comprehensive metaphysical system that has become known as process philosophy. This system is

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[19]Mozley, *The Impassibility of God,* 177-182.

explained most fully in his book, *Process and Reality*,[20] which was the result of his 1927-1928 Gifford Lectures. In this work, Whitehead eschews substance as the basic metaphysical category and suggests the idea of an *actual occasion*. An actual occasion is not an enduring substance, but a process of becoming. An object has existence in the process of becoming that is an actual occasion. He maintains that the perceived world is in a constant state of flux and change. Whitehead integrated traditional theism into his metaphysical system by naming the order that is found in nature as the "primordial nature of God."[21] God is also deemed a participant in the cosmic process and a sympathetic collaborator in human existence. As such, he is susceptible to all of the problems and afflictions of the human condition.[22] This is well illustrated by the most frequently quoted phrase from Whitehead's work: God is said to be "the great companion--the fellow-sufferer who understands."[23]

Charles Hartshorne, an American philosopher and theologian, advanced the theological ideals found in Whitehead's work concerning process thought and helped to promote process theology in his work, *Divine Relativity*.[24] Process theology has become a widely recognized theological system of thought. Generally, it advocates that God suffers

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[20]Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929).

[21]Some of the above information was gleaned from A.D. Irvine, "Alfred North Whitehead," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2000 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2000/entries/whitehead/

[22]Gerald Hanratty, "Divine Immutability and Impassibility Revisited," in *At the Heart of the Real*, ed. F. O'Rourke (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1992), 139.

[23]Whitehead, *Process and Reality* , 532.

[24]Charles Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948).

as a result of the evil and suffering in the world. God is not in control of the events of history, but he reacts to human decisions and to the situations that occur in the world. God is good, but ultimately unable to do anything to rectify the problem of evil because he does not have the power to do so. In process theology, it is assumed that an immutable and impassible God is not "religiously available."[25] Process thought states that God is evolving and becoming in the same manner that creation is also evolving and becoming.

Gerald Hanratty has suggested that process thought has become accepted by many theologians in both the Catholic and Protestant traditions "because it seems to resolve what are perceived as the antinomies of classical theology, and because of its theoretical cohesion and attunement to modern sensibilities."[26] Nevertheless, process theology framework will not be considered as a viable option for this dissertation because it resolves the perceived antinomies of classical theology by assuming that God is less than omnipotent, omniscient, immutable, and transcendent. This approach may reach an easier resolution of the problems encountered by classical theism, but the primary object of theological study, namely God, has been radically changed and reduced from the understanding of God that classical theism proposes.

Post-World War II

The modern movement toward the acceptance of divine passibility began to spread more rapidly after the Second World War. After World War II, many theologians from several different countries took up the issue of the suffering of God. The Holocaust itself effectively spawned a whole genre of literature concerning the suffering of God. There are many articles by theologians that center on the horror of the Nazi death camps and the

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[25]Hanratty, "Divine Immutability," 138.

[26]Hanratty, "Divine Immutability," 139.

response of God to the tragedy of the Jewish people and others who were involved in that terrible event.[27] Most of the literature that is written about the passibility of God after World War II at least makes mention of the Holocaust. This also incites the involvement of many Jewish voices in the discussion of the passibility of God. There is a feeling among several modern theologians that theology has had to change since World War II; the theology that was acceptable in the past is no longer adequate to explain God after the events of war on such a grand scale.[28] The dialogue about the suffering of God spread from Britain and America around the globe to the Far East and many other places following the war to end all wars.

Kazoh Kitamori, a Japanese theologian, wrote *The Theology of the Pain of God*[29] after watching the suffering of his people in the aftermath of the atomic bombs that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In this work, Kitamori bases his claim that God suffers on Jeremiah 31:20. God's compassion for Ephraim is indicative of his attitude toward humanity, especially as it is illustrated in the sacrifice of his own Son for our sins.

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[27]Cf. Yehuda Bauer, et al., eds., *Remembering for the Future,Vol. 1: Jews and Christians during and after the Holocaust* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989).

[28]Cf. Richard Bauckham, "Theology after Hiroshima," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38, no. 4 (1985): 538-601. Emil L. Fackenheim, Johannes B. Metz, and Jürgen Moltmann, "Hope--After Auschwitz and Hiroshima?" in *The Future of Hope*, ed. Walter Capps (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1970), 92-101. Hans Jonas, "The Concept of God after Auschwitz: A Jewish Voice,"*Journal of Religion* 67 (January 1987): 1-13. Marcel Sarot, "Auschwitz, Morality and the Suffering of God (Divine Passibility Needed but Not Proven)," *Modern Theology* 7 (January 1991): 135-52. Dorothee Sölle, "God's Pain and Our Pain: How Theology Has to Change after Auschwitz," in *Judaism, Christianity, and Liberation*, ed. O. Maduro (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 110-121.

[29]Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1965).

He states that "the pain of God is the forgiveness of sins."[30] He suggests that "forgiveness exhibits (love's) true nature, and pain proves to be real, only when intent love enfolds others, forgetting its pain."[31] He expresses the pain of God as it is exhibited in his wrath toward sin and in the sacrifice of his Son as follows:

> This is the pain of God--that he sent his only beloved Son to suffer and die for the salvation of us sinners. The suffering and death which Jesus had to endure reflect, in fact, the reality of the wrath of God. Here the double meaning of the pain of God is united into one.[32]

The pain of God is what happens, he says, when God reveals his nature to us in the forgiveness of our sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Moltmann's theology was also greatly affected by the second World War. He was held as a prisoner of war in Great Britain during much of the war , and this situation forged his experience of God and his theology as a theology of the suffering of God. His book, *The Theology of Hope,*[33] gave him wide exposure in European and American theological circles. He followed that effort with *The Crucified God* [34]and later wrote *The Trinity and*

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[30]Kitamori, *Pain of God,* 40.

[31]Kitamori, *Pain of God,* 40.

[32]Kitamori, *The Pain of God,* 120.

[33]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope,* trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967).

[34]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974; reprint, New York: Harper Collins, 1991; reprint, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

the Kingdom of God.[35] It was in these two later works that he formulated a theology of God based on the forsakenness of Christ on the cross. It is in the event of the forsakenness of Christ, according to Moltmann, that we are able to see God revealed most clearly, and in this event, God suffers. The fourth chapter of this dissertation will be devoted to an analysis of his theology.

One of the more important Jewish voices in the contemporary dialogue about the passibility of God is Abraham Heschel's. Born in Poland in 1907, he was educated in Germany where he taught for a few years. The Nazis deported him to Poland in October, 1938. At the outbreak of World War II, he moved to Great Britain, and then in 1940, he came to America to teach at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1945, he took a position as a professor of Jewish ethics and mysticism at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in New York City. He made a great contribution to the discussion of the passibility of God with his book, *The Prophets*. In this work, Heschel discusses the "pathos of God" as it is portrayed in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament. In this book, he asserts that "to the biblical mind, the conception of God as detached and unemotional is totally alien."[36] He makes a sharp demarcation between the God of the philosophers and the God of the Bible. The God of the philosophers, he says, is an aloof, immutable, transcendent and distant God. The God of the Bible, according to Heschel, is a God who interacts with his creation and reacts to events in human history. Pathos denotes a relational quality of God; "it is an act or attitude composed of various spiritual

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[35]Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1981; reprint, New York: Harper Collins, 1991; reprint, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

[36]Abraham Heschel,*The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 257.

elements."[37] It is most often related to the suffering of God as he interacts with a stubborn and stiff-necked people by means of his prophets. These prophets experience God as an emotional, passionate, and loving father who is jealous for the single-minded love of his chosen people.

More recently, Jung Young Lee, a Korean Methodist, has written a book, *God Suffers for Us,*[38] in which he stresses that the love of God necessarily entails suffering. In his explanation of the suffering of God, Lee uses the term "empathy of God" in the following manner:

> The empathy of God or the participation of divine pathos in the sinful world of man creates in Him the inner tension which is characterized as His suffering. This inner tension of God is manifested in divine wrath, which represents the symbol of the action of God's estranged love.

The wrath of God against sin creates a conflict in God because God also loves human beings unconditionally *(agapically)*. This conflict within God results in the empathy of God. God's love ultimately leads to the redemption of humanity through suffering that takes place on the cross. Lee states that "neither love without suffering nor suffering without love is redemptive. . . . to deny the suffering of God is to deny the redemptive work of God."[39] He asserts that "we see that Calvary is but the concrete expression in time and space of a great reality, i.e., that God suffers because of man's sin."[40] In Lee's understanding, love, suffering, and empathy work together to constitute the passibility of

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[37]Heschel, *The Prophets*, 224.

[38]Jung Young Lee, *God Suffers for Us: A Systematic Inquiry into a Concept of Divine Passibility* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

[39]Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 60.

[40]Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 59.

God. "Love directs the course of divine movement, empathy connects the movement of the world, and suffering endures the sinful rebellion of the world for redemption."[41] Thus, Lee attempts to bring together the immanent and transcendent aspects of God's nature in his concept of empathy, and he claims that the love of God necessarily results in suffering because the love of God is redemptive love and must suffer the scourge of sin.

Going against this tide of passibilist sentiments, Richard Creel has written the book, *Divine Impassibility*,[42] which proclaims that God is immutable, unchangeable, and impassible. Creel makes some important distinctions concerning the impassibility of God. He recognizes that one may discuss the impassibility of God in four different categories: nature, will, knowledge, and feeling. He attempts to offer a conception of a God who is both impassible and yet loving. A major drawback of Creel's work is that it has no dialogue with or recourse to Scripture; it is an entirely philosophical construct founded on the theological assumption that God must be apathetic toward his creation if he is to be consistent with the God of the tradition. Questions of biblical evidence for the passibility of God are not considered and are therefore not addressed. There are also some flaws in Creel's work as a strictly philosophical endeavor. The following is one example of Creel's reasoning as to why one should think of God as impassible:

> We can imagine an individual who has the gifts of awareness, abstract understanding, will, and feeling, who works diligently and intelligently against poverty, injustice, and loneliness in his society, yet who is equally happy no matter whether he meets success or defeat. Unusual as such an individual would be, I see no reason why we should not think of him as a person. Indeed, we might envy him. Consider the Stoics. They were not trying to cease to be persons by nursing the virtue of *apatheia*. They were trying to become persons with a proper attitude to the vicissitudes of life. . . . Further, the ideals to which we aspire by right thinking and right effort we usually assume to be God's by nature. Hence, we may coherently think of a person as

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41Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 19.

42Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

emotionally impassible, and we should think of God as such.[43]

Creel does not give us any reasons to support his assumption that the Stoics' attitude of *apatheia* is the proper perspective toward the vicissitudes of life; he simply states that this is so. Nor does it follow, as Creel supposes, that merely because one is able to think of a certain kind of person that he or she considers to be ideal that one should then think of God as such. One's conception of the ideal person could be substantially flawed.

Arguments For the Impassibility of God

As was said previously, the primary motive for the assertion of divine impassibility is to preserve the transcendence of God. This idea of transcendence includes that God must be "aloof from the world, and possessing a life of his own which has no points of contact in respect either of purpose or of feeling with the life of the world."[44] This also includes the idea that it would be wrong to apply any human finite limitations to God.[45]

The second argument for an impassible God is that the life of God must be a blessed life. The idea that the sufferings and sins of men could impair that blessedness of God, which arises out of the perfection of His own nature, is interpreted as giving the world a power to affect God's life that is incompatible with the belief in God's independence of the world and his bliss.[46] "God is full of loving care and sympathy for human beings, but suffering is intrinsically a form of imperfection and evil, and is therefore not to be ascribed

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[43]Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 117.

[44]Mozley, *Impassibility of God*, 173.

[45]S. Paul Schilling, *God and Human Anguish* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977), 251.

[46]Mozley, *Impassibility of God*, 173.

to him."[47] In order for God's life to remain blissful, he cannot be affected by anything outside of himself, especially anything that is considered to be evil in and of itself.

A third reason for the impassibility of God is that God cannot be limited by anything. To experience suffering implies an inner frustration. Thus, it cannot be attributed to a God who is infinite in power and freedom. There are no legitimate external limits that can be placed on God to hinder him.[48] Suffering is also thought to be evil *in se* by some theologians, which immediately eliminates it from being something that God could experience.[49]

Fourth is the dread of anthropomorphism. It does not seem right to interpret the language concerning the emotional life of God in such a way that he is involved in the flow of changing and often irrational human passions.[50] God is unmovable, immutable, and unswayed by feeling in order to be called absolute. The passages of Scripture that seem to portray a God who shares our sorrows should be taken merely as figures of speech and not literally. Passion narratives about Christ that seem to point to a God who suffers refer only to the human nature of Christ and not the divine nature.[51]

The fifth reason for an impassible God is that "the enlightened religious consciousness demands an omnipotent, all-knowing Ultimate who can accomplish whatever

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[47]Schilling, *God and Human Anguish*, 251. Also cf. Lee, *God Suffers For Us*, 32.

[48]Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 32.

[49]Marshall Randles, *The Blessed God. Impassibility*, 27 and 35; quoted in J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 168.

[50]Mozley, *Impassibility of God*, 174.

[51]Schilling, *God and Human Anguish*, 251.

he wills and before whom it can bow in adoration."[52] A God who is involved in suffering is subject to sorrow and frustration. This would not be in line with the perfection that is required of an object of worship.

A final consideration in support of God's impassibility is that he is omniscient. If God knows everything that there is to know, then he knows the outcome of every tragic and painful situation. He knows the good that will result from the trials and suffering that may be endured for a time. Thus, if God knows the good outcome of present tragic circumstances, then He would have no reason to suffer, and He would, therefore, not suffer.

These reasons for an impassible God all have to do with the preservation of the transcendence and absoluteness of God. They attempt to protect the concept of God from any transference of attributes that are applicable to fallible human beings. The perfection, freedom, and immutability of God are guarded by asserting that God is essentially different from created beings and that he is immune from the travails and discomforts that are part of human existence. It is supposed that God must always be blissful and without disturbance or change in order to coincide with the understanding of God as a being of perfect transcendence, immutability, and freedom. If God were deemed passible, this transcendent perspective of God would be threatened. A suffering God would be less than blissful, he would be limited by circumstances external to his being, he would be subject to frustration, and his nature would be defined more by a projection of uniquely human attributes than by the revelation of more carefully discerned divine attributes. For these reasons, some theologians argue that it is impossible to consider that God suffers without significantly altering the basic understanding of what God's nature is like.

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[52]Schilling, *God and Human Anguish*, 251.

Arguments Against the Impassibility of God

On the contrary, many of those who argue against the impassibility of God would assert that they are not altering the basic understanding of God's nature at all, but that they are portraying God's nature more accurately because they are offering a more accurate biblical picture of the person of God. A vast number of theologians would contend that God is capable of suffering while also purporting to uphold the transcendence, immutability, and freedom of God. However, there would almost certainly be some differences in the definitions of these terms between those who were arguing for and against the impassibility of God. Some theologians who argue against God's impassibility would concede that they are redefining some of the attributes of God in order to elicit a more reasonable understanding of God; further, they think that the passibility of God takes precedence over other attributes. For example, the process theologians abandon the traditional understanding of the omniscience of God. They deny that God could know any future events because he is in process with the creation and will only know the future when it happens in the course of time. The arguments presented here for the passibility of God will deal only with those that attempt to maintain the traditionally understood nature of God and his attributes.

A common argument used against God's impassibility is that God must suffer because there is so much evil in the world. Ronald Goetz cites the factor of "the problem of suffering and evil, both as it relates to the scientific understanding of natural history and as it relates to the peculiar impact of suffering and evil on the modern consciousness" as a reason for the reaction against impassibility.[53] The fact that there is so much apparently senseless suffering in the world makes people think that God, if he is a truly good God, must also suffer. Otherwise, God would be a masochist who stands by stoically (or even

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[53]Goetz, "The Suffering God," 386.

worse, in a state of unmitigated bliss) while human beings are unjustly tortured and killed, while children die of cancer, and while millions of other tragic situations play out before his eyes.

There is comfort for many in the thought that we are not alone in our suffering-- that God cares enough about us to suffer with us in our grief and misery. Paul Schilling notes that

> the awareness that God suffers with us imparts strength to endure the ills that assail us and points the way to healing. . . . Perennially, God does descend into the depths of our holes, whether we dig them ourselves or are thrust into them. But he is there with us, and in this consciousness we can find with him the way of healing.[54]

One of the main reasons that theists gravitate toward the idea of a suffering God is that such an idea appears to help resolve the problem of evil. It at least softens the blow of tragedies and horrible disappointments if one can believe that the God who created the universe cares enough about his or her situation to grieve along with him or her. There is comfort in not feeling so terribly alone in a miserable situation.

However, careful thought about the idea that God suffers with us leads to disappointment, if one is looking to this belief as a resolution for the problem of evil. The notion that God suffers does nothing at all to help resolve theodicy. As Ronald Goetz points out: "Appeals to God's suffering only shift the ground on which the problem of evil is discussed."[55] The idea that God suffers does not help to explain why evil exists--it does not bring us any closer to a resolution of theodicy, it merely is able to provide consolation to those who feel solace in the suffering of a companion God, and for some this comfort is enough. But for the more inquisitive or searching soul, the thought that God suffers with us may bring further hoplessness. If God is primarily a "fellow sufferer," then he is also a

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[54]Schilling, *God and Human Anguish*, 256-57.

[55]Goetz, "The Suffering God," 388.

victim of tragedy and is unable to do anything to overcome it.

Christian theology finds a powerful antidote to the problem of evil in the cross of Christ. Kenneth Surin reminds us that "in the Christian faith, the cross is inextricably bound up with the resurrection."[56] The problem of "theodicy must always be viewed from the perspective of soteriology."[57] It is not enough to merely suggest that God is a victim with us or the "fellow sufferer who understands." In the Christian message, God, in the person of Jesus Christ, not only becomes the helpless victim on the cross, but he also assures us of the victory of goodness over evil, and of life over death by his resurrection.[58] It is by means of suffering and death that God is the conquerer of suffering and death. God does not merely suffer with us. He gives us strength, endurance, and hope to bring us through our trials. Through the power and love of God we are able to overcome the evil that assails us, not by means of his willingness to share in our suffering.

Young Jung Lee takes a different approach in his understanding of why evil would cause suffering in God. He explains:

> As long as there is evil in the world, God suffers because of His nature to participate in the world. . . . Without evil, there is no suffering in the divine. Therefore, if we believe in the reality of evil which opposes the order of creation, we cannot escape the idea that the God who wills to participate Himself in the world to preserve the goodness of creation eventually suffers with us.[59]

Here, Lee proposes that God suffers because evil is in the world opposing the order of

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[56]Kenneth Surin, "The Impassibility of God and the Problem of Evil," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982): 115.

[57]Surin, "The Impassibility of God and the Problem of Evil," 115.

[58]Surin, "The Impassibility of God and the Problem of Evil," 115. Cf. also T. Vincent Tymms, *The Christian Idea of Atonement* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904), 324-25.

[59]Lee, *God Suffers for Us,* 51-52.

creation. Because God wants to participate in the preservation of the goodness of creation, He must suffer the opposition of evil. However, according to Lee, evil cannot cause God to suffer, but it can only occasion the suffering of God. He states:

> The passibility of God is always subsequent to the reality of evil, while the reality of evil does not always presuppose the passibility of God. The passibility of God is always a result of His voluntary and providential care, because evil does not have power to cause suffering to God but only to occasion it. [60]

God must make the choice to suffer in His providential care of the world. Lee asserts that evil is the providential occasioning of divine passibility, but not the cause of it.

Lee's argument that God suffers because of evil differs slightly from the argument that Goetz offers. The argument cited by Goetz relates that God must suffer because human beings are suffering and God is expected to suffer with them if he is a good God who loves and cares for his creatures. God then suffers out of compassion for a person who is experiencing a difficult or devastating situation. Lee asserts that God suffers because it is God's nature to participate in a world where evil exists. The evil causes God suffering because it opposes his created order. That God suffers, in Lee's view, is his own prerogative. The evil in the world cannot cause God to suffer, but it merely provides an occasion for God to choose to suffer if he volunteers to do so.

Another closely related argument against the impassibility of God is that God suffers because of sin. Andrew Fairbairn states that

> theology has no falser idea than that of the impassibility of God. If He is capable of sorrow, He is capable of suffering; but were He without the capacity for either, He would be without any feeling of the evil of sin or the misery of man. The very truth that came by Jesus Christ may be said to be summed up in the passibility of God. To be passible is to be capable of sacrifice; and in the presence of sin, the capability could not but become the reality.[61]

Fairbairn argues that God must have the capacity for suffering because without it, he would

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[60]Lee, *God Suffers for Us,* 49-50.

[61]Andrew M. Fairbairn, *The Place of Christ in Modern Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1913), 483.

not understand the evil of sin or the misery of man. The fact that Jesus Christ came to be sacrificed for the sins of humanity is proof, for Fairbairn, that God is passible. The presence of sin triggered God's sorrow and suffering which, in turn, led to the sacrifice of Christ to atone for the sins of humankind.

Bertrand Brasnett argues that morality and religion demand that God suffer on account of sin.

> God is passible in the sense that he really suffers for the sins of men; they are, quite simply, agony to him. Morality and religion alike demand this. If my sins are nothing to God, there is no particular reason why they should be anything to me, and so far as I am moral, it is impossible for me to worship a God to whom my immorality is a thing of no account. God suffers in the sins of men; and is content so to suffer. He suffers because by the act of creation he so placed himself that if man sinned it meant suffering for God.[62]

For Brasnett, it is a natural consequence of the created order that God must suffer if and when sin entered the world. God suffers when he sees the immorality of man. The sins committed by human beings result in the suffering of God because they cause him pain and agony. Maldwyn Hughes makes a similar assessment of God's response to sin:

> God, whose inmost nature is love, therefore, yearns continuously for the highest well-being of His creatures. If love is rebuffed, this yearning is unsatisfied, and unsatisfied desire is suffering. It is an entire misuse of words to call God our loving Father, if He is able to view the waywardness and rebellion of His children without being moved by grief and pity.[63]

According to Hughes, the suffering that God experiences is a result of an unsatisfied desire. God desires the best for us, and we do not attain it, thus God must be moved to grief and pity by our continuous shortfall.[64]

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[62]Bertrand R. Brasnett, *The Suffering of the Impassible God* (London: The Macmillan Co., 1928), 11-12.

[63]H. Maldwyn Hughes, *What is the Atonement?* (London: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., [1924]), 92-93.

[64]Cf. Francois Varillon, *The Humility and Suffering of God,* trans. Nelly Marans (New York: Alba House, 1983), 101-102; and K.J. Woolcombe, "Pain of God," *The Scottish Journal of Theology* 20 (June 1967): 134-35.

These thoughts expressed by Brasnett and Hughes echo the sentiments revealed about God in Genesis 6:5-7.

> The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

These verses manifest a correlation between the instance of human sin and the grief of God. It is the wickedness of the human race that fills God's heart with pain and causes him to subsequently resolve to purge the earth of all living things except for Noah, his family, and the animals packed into the ark.

A correlation also exists between sins and suffering in the life and death of Christ. Jesus Christ came into this world as the second person of the Trinity in order to save sinners. The sins of humanity are the reason for the suffering endured by Christ on the cross. Kazoh Kitamori asserts that the pain of God is communicated to us in our sin because "the God who bears man's dreadful sin, could only be God in pain."[65] According to Kitamori, God's direct reaction to sin is wrath, but he experiences pain when he determines to love us, the objects of his wrath. The iniquity of the human race causes God grief not only because it is an occasion for disappointment and sadness for God, but also because God takes the offenses committed by men and women upon himself in the atoning work of Christ.

A third reason given to oppose the impassibility of God is a "scholarly critical reappraisal of the Bible" in modern times that has reevaluated the heretofore accepted conclusions about the significance of the anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms that portray God as suffering.[66] It was often assumed that these portrayals of God in the Bible were to be understood strictly as an accommodation to our weak capacity as humans beings

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[65]Kitamori, *Pain of God*, 54.

[66]Goetz, "The Suffering of God," 386.

and did not to illustrate any truth about the nature of God's personality or being *in se*. They are still understood to be accommodations to our human capacity to comprehend the being of God, but these anthropomorphisms are also are being interpreted more literally to reveal a depiction of a God who is passible. The immanence of God and his participation in human history are stressed. Colin Grant states that

> the obvious source of the change of heart on divine passibility is the renewal of interest in the Bible over the last century. Examination of the Bible itself exposed the inadequacy of the immutable and impassible model of God.[67]

Many scholars believe that the impassible model of God does not do justice to the interpretation of the biblical text. Scripture seems to represent God as one who is capable of suffering.

Many contemporary thinkers would say that Ancient, Medieval, and Scholastic theologians were more influenced by Platonic or Neoplatonic philosophy in their thought about God than they were by biblical interpretation. The picture of God that we are given by theologians of past eras is too heavily laden with the Greek characteristic of *apatheia* and too closely related to the Stoic ideals to match the portrayal of God given by the Bible. A great number of scholars today believe that the Hellenistic influence on theology in its earliest stages and throughout the Middle Ages and the Reformation era has tainted the attributes of God with Greek philosophical ideals rather than biblical traits. Thus, many moderns say that the perspective of God that has been inherited in the present age is one that is impassible, immutable, immovable, and simple because of the sway of Greek philosophy and not because that is how the biblical material portrays him. Much more will be said about this in the next chapter under the heading of "The Greek Assumption."

Many proponents of a passible God also believe that the incarnation provides another basis for an argument in their favor. If Jesus suffered, then it must follow that God

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[67]Colin Grant, "Possibilities for Divine Passibility," *Toronto Journal of Theology* (Spring 1988): 9.

also suffers. Theodore Simpson argues that

> If God cannot suffer, then when Jesus is said to have *wept*, it must be that he was deliberately assuming an appearance of human weakness in order to accommodate himself to our condition. If we now reject this kind of doecetism, indignantly denying that Jesus was merely play-acting, then we must be prepared to affirm with equal logic that if Jesus really suffered then God can and does suffer.[68]

According to Simpson, the acknowledgement of the idea that Jesus really suffered leads us to the conclusion that God must also suffer. Paul Schilling argues in a similar way that if the Christ event is truly revelatory then "what we discern in the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ must manifest central truth regarding the life and character of God." And he adds that the "cross speaks to us decisively of the suffering love of God himself."[69] The gospels portray Christ suffering in many different instances, and these aforementioned scholars and others believe that we are to conclude from this fact that God the Father must also participate in suffering.[70]

Schilling also believes that there is creedal evidence to support his affirmation. He disagrees with those who are willing to separate the humanity of Christ from his divinity in order to pronounce that it is possible for God to suffer in his humanity but not in his divinity. He explains that "those who distinguish sharply between the human suffering of Christ and his divine incapacity to suffer seem to overlook that, according to the Definition of Chalcedon, the two natures belong to one Person, without division or separation."[71]

However, Schilling's assessment is directly opposed to the pronouncement of

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[68]Theodore Simpson, "A Very Present Help in Trouble,"*Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 21 (December 1977): 44.

[69]Paul S. Schilling, *God and Human Anguish.*, 253.

[70]Cf. Dennis Ngien, "The God Who Suffers," *Christianity Today* 41, no. 2 (February 3, 1997): 40-41.

[71]Schilling, *God and Human Anguish,* 253.

orthodoxy made at the Council of Constantinople in 553 to end the Theopaschite controversy. The Council of Constantinople was also attempting to uphold the truths set forth in the Chalcedonian Creed. Constantinople's decision of 553 allows one to say that the "human nature of Jesus suffered, that the Second Person of the Trinity suffered, that the Logos incarnate suffered, but *not* that the divine nature of Jesus suffered."[72] This decision was thought to protect the Chalcedonian Creed concerning the two natures and one person of Christ.

Bertrand Brasnett agrees with Schilling and alleges that orthodox theology, such as that which is professed by the 553 Council of Constantinople, is faulty. He claims that it creates a "great gulf between passible man and impassible God" and that it presents a "insoluble dualism in the person of Christ."[73] Instead, he offers that we should think that

> there is no such gulf between God and man, and that therefore also there need be no insoluble dualism in our theology of the person of Christ. On our view the attitude of perfect man to suffering is precisely the attitude of God. He suffers, but in the unshakable tenacity of his will he is so much the master of suffering that he can treat it as unworthy of regard.[74]

Brasnett advocates that we can say that Christ really suffered in his divinity as well as in his humanity, but that his suffering was very different from any kind of suffering that we might experience because of his perfect attitude. Christ is able to master suffering and treat it as something that is not even worth noticing. This is a difficult issue that needs further thought and development. It will be discussed further in a section in the next chapter concerning the Theopaschite controversy, but to deal satisfactorily with this issue and to reach definite conclusions goes beyond the scope of this dissertation.

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[72]Marcel Sarot, "Patripassionism, Theopaschitism and the Suffering of God: Some Historical and Systematic Considerations," *Religious Studies* 26 (September 1990): 373.

[73]Brasnett, *Suffering of the Impassible God,* 39.

[74]Brasnett, *Suffering of the Impassible God,* 39.

The most commonly used argument against God's impassibility is that God is love, and that is why he suffers. The notion that divine love entails divine suffering is widely accepted by contemporary theologians.[75] Douglas White illustrates this point by stating:

> . . . to us the crucial point is that He is love. Now love is passible; and if God is love, God is passible. A person who can love, and yet cannot suffer, is unimaginable; and if God is such, He is unthinkable; for we cannot think of a love that is out of range of suffering. Love and suffering dwell in the one house. Nay, they are twin sisters; they live and grow together; hardly are they known apart, but that the dress of one is of a more sombre hue.[76]

It is impossible for White, and for many other thinkers to separate suffering from love. If an agent loves, then the agent must also suffer.

Nicholas Wolterstorff pinpoints the reason for this suffering when he affirms that the love of God must include the concept of sympathetic love. He comments:

> Far and away the most commonly used argument in the contemporary discussion is that if God truly loves his suffering children, then he himself will feel their misery with them. God's love must include that mode of love which is sympathy, *Mitleiden*.[77]

The idea that love must entail suffering is a recurrent concept in the literature that advances the perception of a passible God. Wolterstorff adds that this love of God cannot be merely that of well-doing, benevolence, or agape, but it must be a love that includes sympathy for the beloved.[78] To support this idea, Wolterstorff appeals to Richard Swinburne's assessment of the proper valuation of loss. Swinburne asserts that

If agents pay proper tribute to losses and failures, if they are sad at the failure of

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[75]Sarot, "Auschwitz, Morality and the Suffering of God," 148.

[76]White, *Forgiveness and Suffering*, 83-84.

[77]Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Suffering Love," in *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, ed. T. Morris (South Bend, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 211.

[78]Wolterstorff, "Suffering Love," 212. Cf.also Goetz, "Divine Burden," 300; Fiddes, *Creative Suffering*, 17.

> their endeavors, mourn for the death of a child, are angry at the seduction of a wife, and so on. Such emotions involve suffering and anguish, but in having such proper feelings a man shows his respect to himself and others. A man who feels no grief at the death of his child or the seduction of his wife is rightly branded by us as insensitive, for he has failed to pay the proper tribute of feeling to others, to show in his feeling how much he values them, and thereby failed to value them properly--for valuing them properly involved having proper reactions of feeling to their loss.[79]

Wolterstorff believes that there is a correlation that can be made between the proper valuation of loss which leads to suffering and anguish and the kind of love that God must have for us which also leads to pain and suffering for him. If we understand a human being to be sensitive in his or her feelings for someone or something by his or her proper valuation of those persons or things, then we also may think of God in a similar way. If God is going to be sensitive to his creatures and manifest what we would believe to be the proper valuation of tragedy or suffering in his relation to humans, then he must participate in the suffering and anguish that a sympathetic love would entail.

Kenneth Surin makes a similar point when he asserts that

> passibility is the corollary of responsiveness, for we cannot respond to someone without relating to that person, and we cannot relate to that person without being affected by him. A God who loves his creation must be a God who is affected by its travails.[80]

Since God loves his creation, he must respond to it and be affected by its agony. Passibility is associated with the part of love that is concerned with another enough to respond to the other's hurts and pains. This suffering stems from a love of involvement or a love of "suffering-with" (sym-pathy).

John Stott believes that the love of God is self-giving, and because that is true, God's love is costly by its own nature. This is what makes love meaningful. He states:

> The best way to confront the traditional view of the impassibility of God . . . is to ask "what meaning there can be in a love that is not costly to the lover?" If love is

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[79]Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 192.

[80]Kenneth Surin, "The Impassibility of God and the Problem of Evil," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982): 113-14.

> self-giving, then it is inevitably vulnerable to pain, since it exposes itself to the possibility of rejection and insult.[81]

Stott believes that God opens himself to suffering which is inherently involved in self-giving love. Any time God is willing to expose himself to rejection or insult, then he is open to the pain that accompanies that.

So then, the arguments against God's impassibility that have been named here are the following:

> (1) The problem of evil implies that God would be considered morally remiss if he were able to watch, or even implicitly or explicitly condone, all of the evil in the world without suffering. Connected to this argment is the idea that God suffers with us in our misfortune and tragedy and is able to give consolation to those who take comfort in the assurance that God is their fellow sufferer who understands their plight. There is also a soteriological and eschatological dimension to this companion suffering in Christian theology because we are assured that God not only became the victim of tragedy and injustice in the person of Jesus Christ on the cross, but he also overcame this terrible suffering in the glory of the resurrection.
> (2) Evil is opposed to creation and is thus the occasion of God's suffering.
> (3) Sin causes God to suffer. Sin may be the cause of God's suffering in a couple of different ways. It has been suggested that suffering would be God's moral and religious response to the immorality and rebellion of mankind. It has also been suggested that God's suffering is the natural consequence of sin's entrance into the world because he takes the sins of the world upon himself.
> (4) The scholarly reappraisal of the Bible has led interpreters to believe that a hermeneutic model that portrays a suffering God is a more accurate and responsible way to read the Bible than to use a model influenced by Greek philosophy that results in God's impassibility.
> (5) The incarnation presents us with the fullest and most perfect revelation of God. If Jesus Christ suffered as God incarnate, then God must also suffer.
> (6) God's love entails suffering. God's love is sympathetic; thus, he will respond appropriately to the experience of the tragedy and misery of those he loves by suffering. God's love is self-giving, and self-giving love is costly in the form of suffering.

These arguments illustrate some of the reasons why many theologians have contended that God is able to suffer. But, they have not explained how the attributes of God such as transcendence and immutability can be maintained if God is portrayed as being passible. The next two sections will deal with how the suffering of God and the terms used for the attributes of God must be understood.

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[81]John Stott, "God on the Gallows," *Christianity Today* (January 16, 1987): 29.

God and Emotion

There are a number of important distinctions that need to be made with regard to the terms that are used to describe God and God's suffering. The first is between the nature of human emotion and divine emotion or affection. There are very few theologians who are willing to say that God lacks the capacity for feelings or affections such as anger, compassion, jealousy, joy, love, and repentance. However, the sense in which God may be understood as being wrathful, joyful, or jealous must be fundamentally different from the way in which a human would experience the same emotions. God's emotional life is unencumbered by sin and the constraints of finitiude. His affections are archetypes of emotions while ours are fallen and carnally-impeded. God can never be thought to be limited or controlled by an emotional state.

The picture of a mental and emotional life in God is common to biblical literature and is especially pronounced in the prophetic literature. The portrayal of God's emotional life is not seen as a weakness in God but as his glory; nor does it detract from the notion that God is faithful.[82] Graham Cole explains that we must view anthropomorphisms in a theomorphic light. "Emotion and affection in us have their counterparts in God; but whereas in our creaturely state we find ourselves under the constraint of circumstances not under our control, in God's case there is no such limitation on Him as Sovereign Will."[83] God is not obliged by the same kinds of circumstances that we are as humans. The ascription of affective capacity to God does not eliminate the possibility that God can be

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[82]Gerald Wondra, "The Pathos of God," *The Reformed Review* 18 (December 1964): 34.

[83]Graham A. Cole, "Towards a New Metaphysic of the Exodus,"*Reformed Theological Review* 42 (September-December 1983): 81-82.

perfect, but it does preclude his being "affectively fallible."[84] God's emotions differ from our own in that they are in conformity with his perfect righteousness.[85]

God cannot be affected by the actions or the state of the creatures that he has brought into being in a way that is contrary to his own determination. God is never compelled to make rash or poor decisions because he has determined to feel or exhibit a particular affection. God has determined to lay himself open to the actions of human beings. He has given them a free will to exercise the ability to make choices, but those choices made by human beings are not threatening or surprising to God. Thus God's emotions are a response to our state and to our situations, but they are not thrust upon him without his consent or control.[86]

God's wrath is truly wrath, but it is never rash or unrighteous. God's joy is the ground and basis of our own joy and spiritual strength, but it is never self-absorbed or fickle. God's jealousy is a jealousy that leads toward proper relationship. God's repentance is not so much a change in God's heart as it is an opportunity for those he loves to change their hearts. And God's love is not a feeling of infatuation or warmth; it is the basis of his steadfast faithfulness toward a fallen creation.

Now that we have explored the notion of God's emotions or affections, we will next contemplate what it means to say that God suffers. We will examine how suffering could affect God and what kind of suffering could be thought of as appropriate for God.

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[84]Robert A. Oakes, "The Wrath of God (Affective Capacity Compatible with Maximal Greatness)," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 27 (June 1990): 136.

[85]Mozley, *Impassibility of God,* 3.

[86]Cf. Brasnett, *Suffering of the Impassible God,* 16-17 for a similar perspective.

Divine Suffering

Colin Grant asserts that there is an intuitive rightness about the recognition of a genuine suffering in God when one reads the Bible, and yet, this rightness is subject to distortion unless it is handled very carefully.[87] Hence, it is important to be able to discuss the suffering of God in such a way that will neither distort the concept of God nor take liberties with the interpretation of the biblical text. In order to do this it is important to establish what is meant by the term "suffering" when it is applied to God and what boundaries this idea must have.

First, we must establish whether or not suffering in and of itself is evil; because if suffering is evil, then God can take no part in it. Marshall Randles states that it is impossible for God to suffer because "whatever suffering may be in its associations, uses or results, it is always *in se* an evil."[88] If God is to be perfectly good, then he cannot participate in something that is intrinsically evil. Randles asserts, "no evil, not even non-moral evil can be in Him who is good in every conceivable respect and to whom no imperfection is possible."[89] This position seems untenable. It is true that suffering is unpleasant, as pain is, but one cannot conclude that it is evil in itself merely because it is unpleasant. For example, surgery is unpleasant and may cause some psychological as well as physical suffering, but that does not mean that it is evil. Maldwyn Hughes opposes

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87Colin Grant, "Possibilities for Divine Passibility," *Toronto Journal of Theology* 4 (Spring 1988): 14-15.

88Marshall Randles, *The Blessed God. Impassibility,* 27; quoted in J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 168.

89Marshall Randles, *The Blessed God. Impassibility,* 35; quoted in J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 168.

Randles's arguments by stating that

> it is very doubtful whether every kind of suffering is to be described as "evil." Certainly that is not how we are wont to regard spontaneous and joyous self-sacrifice, or the "passion for souls."[90]

It would seem then that suffering is not intrinsically evil, but it would be helpful to be able to examine different types of suffering to decide what kind of suffering would be appropriate to God.

Y.J. Lee offers that there are two general categories of suffering: "the suffering which is due to evil and the suffering which is due to vicarious sacrifice."[91] The former is penal suffering and the latter is redemptive suffering. In penal suffering, evil is the cause as well as the condition of suffering; thus, penal suffering can be evil and have a negative effect on the one who suffers, but it is also possible for penal suffering to have a positive effect upon the sufferer. Suffering may the be the needed catalyst to produce a good attribute or result in the person who is oppressed by suffering. Redemptive suffering is occasioned by evil, but it is intrinsically good because its purpose is to overcome evil. Of these two types of suffering, only redemptive suffering may be attributed to God. Thus, the suffering that God participates in is good and works toward the defeat of evil.

When we speak of the passibility of God it is impossible to mean that God suffers anything like physical pain. God is spirit and is not bound to a physical body, therefore pain as a physical phenomenon cannot belong to him.[92] Physical pain being ruled out, we must define the suffering of God as a kind of psychological pain or an inner conflict. Kazoh Kitamori describes the pain of God as the conflict between the wrath and the love of

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[90]Hughes, *What Is the Atonement?*, 91ff.

[91]Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 41.

[92]Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 17.

God. He points to the work of Theodosius Harnack and Martin Luther to support his claim.

> Theodosius Harnack points out that the two elements--the wrath of God and the love of God--produce the "tertiary" (tertium). This "tertiary" is the pain of God. Luther sees "God fighting with God" at Golgotha (da streyedt Gott mit Gott). God who must sentence sinners to death fought with God who wishes to love them. The fact that this fighting God is not two different gods but the same God causes his pain. Here heart is opposed to heart within God.[93]

For Kitamori, it is the combination of the wrath of God against the sin of humanity and his love for the sinner that elicits pain. He stops short of saying that the will of God is set against itself, but he is willing to say that heart is set against heart. God's pain is a consequence of his love for his creatures which is set against his hatred of sin.

Young Jung Lee's assessment of the source of God's pain is also very similar. He suggests that justice requires God's wrath against sin, but God's love for the sinner is in conflict with this wrath. God's empathic love then takes the wrath against sin upon himself. The justice of God's wrath is sufficed by the suffering that God undergoes as a consequence of God's love. Lee wants to differentiate between the terms "suffering" and "pain." Pain, for Lee, is only correctly related to the physical realm while suffering deals with "the psychological and spiritual dimensions of life."[94] He states that "the intensity of suffering is, then, to be measured by the intimacy of the relationship with whom love is directed."[95] Thus, the greater the love, the greater the suffering.

So then, the suffering of God must be a kind of psychological or spiritual pain. It is brought about by an inner conflict. Several thinkers, such as Luther, Harnack, Lee, and Kitamori, suggest that the conflict which causes this pain is a result of the opposition of the

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[93]Kitamori, *Pain of God,* 21.

[94]Lee, *God Suffers for Us,* 17.

[95]Lee, *God Suffers for Us,* 17.

wrath and love of God. This seems like a reasonable claim, but it provides a rather narrow purview of the situations that will evoke the suffering of God. It covers the problem of moral evil in the case of human sin, but what about amoral evil? Does God suffer with a mother whose child is killed by a lightning strike? Does God mourn with a town that is destroyed by a tornado? Is it theologically correct for an eleven year old child whose mother dies of breast cancer to think that God suffers with her in her loss? Does it take something as all-encompassing and as terrible as SIN to rouse the suffering of God or does he suffer for other reasons? Are these situations that are not worthy of divine suffering because God sees the good outcome of these trials and is not moved by the present state of tragedy that he knows will only last for a relatively short time? Although some thinkers might argue that the previous examples are all a part of a fallen world influenced by sin, it seems plausible to think that God could suffer in situations that are not directly caused by human sin if he chooses to do so.

It is an important point to note that God must choose to suffer. Suffering is not something that is thrust upon God by an outside force. It is not something that surprises God or a feeling over which he has no control. God is free not to suffer. He is free not to involve himself in the misery of the world, but he participates in suffering because he freely loves his creatures. Charles Ohlrich professes what many other theologians also believe to be true in these words:

> Many of the objections to passibility are dispelled when we keep in mind that God has *chosen* to forgive, *chosen* to suffer. Faced with the scandal of human sin, he could have destroyed the world entirely. The story of the flood is set before us as a symbol of this possibility. But instead, in his great love, he chose to forgive through suffering. . . . The God of suffering does not passively endure pain, but actively chooses to embrace it.[96]

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[96]Charles Ohlrich, *The Suffering God: Hope and Comfort for Those Who Hurt* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 57. Cf. also Storr, *The Problem of the Cross* (London: J. Murray, 1919), 153; Kitamori, *Pain of God,* 21-22; Brasnett, *Suffering of the Impassible God,* 128.

God makes a choice to endure with his fallen creation the consequences of sin. These consequences are comprehensive and far-reaching. Because God has chosen to take this burden upon himself, there is nothing that is derogatory to his majesty in this suffering.[97]

Pain that is inflicted from the outside that in some way restricts or impairs the sufferer may suggest weakness and involuntary limitation. However, "when submission to pain is voluntary, with motive and object defined, the suffering acquires a dignity, for it lies on the road to achievement."[98] This voluntary submission to suffering differentiates limitation from self-limitation. In God's case, the decision to undergo sacrificial suffering for sin does not result in unhappiness or frustration, but it is the means that God has chosen to gain victory over sin. It is a constitutive element in divine joy and blessedness.[99] There is no weakness in the suffering of God, in fact, it is in this suffering that his power and glory shows through. But this does not imply that the suffering of God is somehow not real in a sense.

Paul Fiddes, the author of *The Creative Suffering of God*, opposes this view and maintains that God does not suffer unless his experience mirrors our own. He states:

> To say that God chooses to suffer without enduring external constraint is a very weakened notion of suffering, since part of the meaning of our suffering is the feeling of helplessness, a falling victim to what we cannot regulate. . . . If God, in choosing to suffer, knows no vulnerability to suffering with its unexpected attacks, then he is hardly sharing our experience.[100]

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[97]Storr, *The Problem of the Cross,* 125.

[98]White, *Forgiveness and Suffering,* (London: J. Murray, 1919), 91.

[99]Harold Knight,*The Hebrew Prophetic Consciousness*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1947), 18.

[100]Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering of God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 60-61.

Fiddes believes that the suffering of God must be an "injury and a constraint"[101] upon him. The suffering of God must include an element of "frustrated desire" on God's part--"a suffering God must be a disturbed God."[102] God's suffering will change him, according to Fiddes, "to become more truly himself."[103]

It is agreeable to say that the kind of suffering that God undergoes is what might be perceived as a "weakened notion of suffering," but to make God vulnerable to the vicissitudes of suffering in the way that human beings are is to deplete the concept of God. Fiddes' understanding of the suffering of God results in a God who is unable to overcome suffering and is impotent to change a situation. Instead, God is changed to become a truer God. This kind of thinking is antithetical to the orthodox understanding of God. It provides an example of how the intuitive rightness about the suffering of God can be distorted so that it rules and directs theology about the person of God. This kind of thinking makes God the "victim"[104] of his created order rather than sovereign Lord over it. God chooses to suffer, not because it will change him in any way, but because it may bring happiness to men by the way of their salvation and peace.[105]

The suffering of God is purposeful and active. Maldwyn Hughes explains this concept in terms of God's "active travail" that works on the hearts and souls of humankind:

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[101]Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God,* 262.

[102]Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God,* 102.

[103]Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God,* 75.

[104]Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God,* 32.

[105]Brasnett, *Suffering of the Impassible God,* 77.

> Deeper than His suffering is His consciousness of the power of his will. This is the foundation of all blessedness, and this nothing can disturb. It may be said that if this be so, He does not really suffer. But the suffering of God is not passible pain or helpless endurance, it is *active travail*. He woos the souls of men and wrestles with them. He is by their side in their conflicts, sharing their burden and nerving their arms for the fight. His heart is wounded by every rebuff, but this does not mean the He is reduced thereby to a state of pitiable misery.[106]

The suffering of God is directed toward the good end of saving humanity and enduring the misery of this world with them. Y.J. Lee exhorts that "the nature of divine suffering is to be understood not in terms of *patheia*, which is inert and defective, but in terms of *agonia*, which is creative and redemptive."[107] The suffering that God chooses to undergo is not suffering for the sake of suffering, but is directed toward restoring creation and effecting redemption. When we approach the subject of the suffering of God, we should not focus on the being of God to the exclusion of God on the cross. Kelly Clark reminds us that "Christian theological reflection cannot be entirely *a priori;* the Christian thinker must consider the nature of God *a posteriori* as it is revealed in Christ."[108] The suffering of Christ reveals much to us about the suffering of God in its depth and in its transformation of evil to good and death to life. The power of divine suffering is enormous. It is this power that lifts humanity out of the mire of sin to a place of righteousness before God.

To recognize that God suffers is not to make suffering the dominant characteristic in the life of God. Joy and bliss are the dominant characteristics in the life of God. However, if joy and suffering are able to coexist in our lives (and this is certainly possible), then there is no reason that joy and suffering cannot coexist in God. God is not overcome by suffering and sadness; rather, he overcomes suffering with joy. But there is a sense in

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[106]Hughes, *What is the Atonement?*, 92.

[107]Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 21.

[108]Clark, "Hold Not Thy Peace," 181.

which the suffering of God is part of the depth of God's nature since the beginning of the world. Sin, or at least the possibility of sin, has been a presence since the foundation of creation; thus, God in the Second Person of the Trinity has always been "the lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world."[109]

The kind of suffering that we may say that God endures is very limited in the sense that it does not affect God as it would affect human beings. However, this does not mean that the suffering of God is not real or that divine passibility does not correspond in some ways to human passibility. God freely chooses to suffer; he is not forced or coerced to be what he does not want to be. For this reason, God's suffering also has direction, purpose, and a redemptive quality that human suffering may lack. God's suffering does not change him into anything better or worse than he was before, but it may change human beings. God's suffering is an active travail that brings about the results that he desires.

Conclusion

The doctrine of divine impassibility has been overturned in modern times with very little resistance. The idea that God suffers is widely accepted in theological circles; yet the way in which this is understood differs widely. There are far too many theologians who want to go the route of Fiddes or of the process theologians. The idea that God suffers has taken over their concept of what God must be like until their perception of God is much more like that of a human who is a victim of evil and helpless to stop it or change anything in the world to any significant extent. Yet, it is possible to maintain the concept of a sovereign God who also suffers if the suffering of God is kept within proper boundaries.

It is also feasible to avoid the dangers pointed out by the arguments for impassibility by maintaining that God's nature is not altered by his suffering. God may suffer and still be significantly different from human beings. The passibility of God does not lead to the

[109]Revelation 13:8

conclusion that God must be disturbed or that God's bliss or joy would be canceled. He is not limited by the circumstances of suffering or by frustration, if he is the one who chooses or initiates his own suffering on behalf of others. It is difficult to conceive of what part of God's transcendence or sovereignty would be lost if he chooses to suffer in such a sense as is outlined above, and in some cases it would seem to detract from the concept of God if he were not able to suffer in some sense. His love would not be as meaningful, nor would his sacrifice on the cross make much sense.

In the next chapter we will build on this concept of the passibility of God by examining some of the presuppositions that have driven the movement toward rejecting the concept of an impassible God, and we will define and differentiate the terms "immutable" and "impassible." The method for accomplishing these ends will be an historical survey of the idea of the passibility of God.

CHAPTER 2
A HISTORY OF THE IDEA OF THE PASSIBILITY OF GOD

Introduction

As was mentioned briefly in the last chapter, there is a strong current in modern theological thought that assumes that theologians of previous eras were unduly influenced by Hellenistic ideas about divinity. However, a consideration of the evidence suggests that the Christian thinkers who have contributed to traditional orthodox theology are not unscrupulously appropriating the ideals of Greek philosophy; rather, they are using the concepts and terms of Greek philosophy to express biblical ideas about God. In order to demonstrate this, the Greek conception of God will be defined using descriptions of divine nature or deity found in the writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus, and then these conceptions will be compared to a description of God given by Augustine who is often considered to be the most influential figure in the classical theological tradition. In the following sections of this chapter, there will also be many other examples from early Christian theology that will be examined to determine whether they tend more toward Greek or biblical conceptions of deity. It is contended here that the philosophical conception of God as it is portrayed in modern discussions about the passibility of God is rightly condemned, but this philosophical notion of God is erroneously attributed to the orthodox tradition of theology as a whole. There are several theologians in the tradition of traditional Christian theology who would advocate for a God who suffers or, at the very least, who do not rule out the possibility that God is capable of suffering.

This chapter will also carefully define the terms "impassibility" and "immutability" as they should be used in regard to the discussion of the suffering of God.

In modern theological parlance, they are often not well distinguished from one another, and at times, they are used interchangeably. It will be illustrated that the term "impassibility," as it is used in theological discussions of past eras, does not necessarily mean that God has no emotional capacity whatsoever, but that God is without "parts or passions." This more proper use of the term delineates that it is a logical impossibility for God to be passible in the sense that he can experience bodily pain or that he may be tempted to sin.

The passibility of God is a topic that is very important for study and thought. It was an important consideration of those theologians who formulated the trinitarian and christological doctrines of the Church as will be demonstrated in the following sections of this chapter.

The Greek Assumption

A widespread assumption among modern theological scholars is that the "orthodox" conception of God is deficient because it is based primarily upon Greek philosophical presuppositions rather than biblical evidence. This is especially true in regard to the notion of the passibility of God. There has been a sizable groundswell of opinion since the late nineteenth century that one must be able to say that God suffers. The inherited orthodox opinion which states that God is impassible or incapable of suffering is said to be incorrect because it relies on a Platonic or NeoPlatonic understanding of divinity rather than a biblical conception of divine attributes. To some extent, this is a correct assumption; it is certainly true that many early Christian theologians were influenced by Greek philosophy and that they used Greek philosophical models or ideas to express their theological perceptions. However, in many ways, it is an unfair generalization that leads to an early dismissal of important truths contained within the traditional understanding of God and ultimately to false conclusions. It is true that Greek philosophy provided a framework and useful terms for the early Christian theologians, but this does not mean that these early

formulators of Christian doctrine used these hellenistic ideas and terms without significantly altering their meaning when they are applied to Christian theology.

Many modern theologians assess that there have been two basic approaches to the contemplation of God, and these two ways of thinking are most often characterized by making a distinction between Greek and Hebrew methods of thought. They are generally outlined as follows: The Greek construct of God is said to be abstract, impersonal, unchangeable, perfect, and transcendent. The Hebrew God, on the other hand, is said to be concrete, personal, responsive, and immanent.

Abraham Heschel is one of these modern scholars who sees this distinction as being legitimate. In his commentary, *The Prophets*, he states:

> Plato thinks of God *in the image of an idea*; the prophets think of God *in the image of personal presence*. To the prophets, God was not a Being of Whose existence they were convinced in the way in which a person is convinced of the truth of an idea. He was a Being Who is supremely real and staggeringly present.[1]

Heschel draws a distinct line between Greek and Hebrew thought in his writing and implies that the Greek conception of God is antithetical to the biblical understanding of the God who is portrayed in the Old Testament writings of the prophets.

There is a common thread of thinking among modern theologians that disparages the Greek line of thought and exalts the Hebrew inclination to think of God as personal and passible because it allows for a conception of God that is much more relational and interactive. Charles Ohlrich concurs with Heschel and supports this view as follows:

> Unfortunately, the formal theological tradition which developed within the early church, as reflected especially in the ante-Nicene and early post-Nicene era (ca A.D. 150-450), was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. Thus, much thought about a suffering Messiah was short-circuited by Greek philosophical assumptions about the nature of God--in particular, his impassibility. The term impassible means "incapable of suffering." For the most part, these early theologians simply carried over Plato's argument that gods are exalted above pleasure and pain and Aristotle's

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[1]Heschel, *The Prophets*, 275.

description of God as the "first cause" or "unmoved mover."[2]

Many, if not most, modern theologians assume along with Heschel and Ohlrich that the Greek model of thought has dominated Christian thinking so that the concept of God that we have inherited is more easily identified with the God of Greek philosophy than with the God of the Bible.

Thus, the modern thinkers charge that the idea of God contained in orthodox theology is one of an apathetic, emotionless, passionless, distant, immutable, and entirely self-sufficient being as a result of the domination of the philosophical assumptions of Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus rather than a proper emphasis on the writings of the patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles. This Hellenistic mode of thinking has effectively disqualified any consideration of a passible God as it is "a metaphysical notion of deity rather than the biblical idea of God."[3] Owen T. Owen explains that "to the Greek mind, the fundamental attribute of God was immutability and the complete absence of any form of human passion."[4] This emphasis on immutability very easily leads those who would follow the Greek line of thinking to the assertion that God is impassible.

Richard Bauckham relates that the doctrine of the impassibility of God is a direct legacy from the Greek understanding that anything worthy of being called a god must display απαθεια-- "impassibility, insensibility, freedom from emotion, freedom from sin."[5] He says that the transfer of the attribute of impassibility to Christian theology was

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[2]Ohlrich, *The Suffering God*, 39.

[3]Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 46.

[4]Owen T. Owen, "Does God Suffer?" *Church Quarterly Review* 158 (April-June 1957): 177.

[5]G.W.H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1961), 170.

further enhanced by the fact that απαθεια was a prominent feature of God in the writings of Philo.

> The idea of divine impassibility (*apatheia*) was a Greek philosophical inheritance in early Christian theology. The great Hellenistic Jewish theologian Philo had already prepared the way for this by making *apatheia* a prominent feature of his understanding of the God of Israel, and virtually all the Christian Fathers took it for granted, viewing with suspicion any theological tendency which might threaten the essential impassibility of the divine nature."[6]

Several modern scholars argue that this concession of impassibility to Greek philosophy is among the greatest mistakes of patristic thought. Kenneth Surin states that the fundamental principle of the changelessness of God as it pertains to God's impassibility is appropriated from Plato who believed that a being who is perfect cannot experience sadness, pain, or sorrow. The assumption that God is impassible, says Surin, must be counted as "perhaps the most questionable aspect of certain forms of orthodox theism.[7]

T. Evan Pollard adds that among the many Greek philosophical ideas imported into Christian theology and into Alexandrian Jewish theology before it, the idea of the impassible God gives us a striking example of the damage that may be done by "the assumption of alien philosophical presuppositions when they are applied to Christian theology."[8] This idea is so alien and so foreign to Hebraic-Christian thought that "it makes nonsense of the revelation of God in the Old Testament, it makes the Incarnation no real

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[6]Richard Bauckham, "Only the Suffering God Can Help, *Themelios* 3 (April 1984): 7. See also Rem B. Edwards, "The Pagan Dogma of the Absolute Unchangeableness of God," *Religious Studies* 14 (March-December 1978): 308-09.

[7]Kenneth Surin, "The Impassibility of God and the Problem of Evil," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982) : 97.

[8]T. Evan Pollard, "Impassibility of God," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 8 (December 1955): 356.

Incarnation, and it reduces the sufferings and death of Christ to a purely human work."[9]

Douglas White agrees with Pollard and goes further by labeling the doctrine of the impassibility of God as "the greatest heresy that ever smirched Christianity; it is not only false, it is the antipodes of truth."[10] He says that the doctrine of impassibility amounts to the negation of Christ's message. Instead, he asserts that we must treat the fact that God can and does suffer as "a cardinal doctrine of Christianity."[11]

Modern philosophers and theologians accuse the early theologians of the Christian Church with careless appropriation of the Greek philosophical concept of deity. The question that this chapter of this dissertation wishes to ask and answer is the following: Is it true that the early theologians of the Church were more dependent on Greek philosophers for their concept of God than on biblical sources? From the scholarship that is cited above, it seems to be a foregone conclusion that the concept of God contained in traditional theology has departed drastically from the Truth and has given itself over to pagan, Hellenistic ideals. However, this position does not withstand close scrutiny. While it is true that some tendencies in orthodox Christian theology can be designated as Hellenistic, it is not true that the early church fathers deduced the impassibility of God entirely from Greek philosophy and not at all from biblical material, nor is it true that early theologians thought that God was impassible in the sense that he has neither emotions nor capacity for feeling. After all, the Bible consistently speaks about God as a being who does not change.[12]

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[9]Pollard, "Impassibility of God," 356.

[10]Douglas White, *Forgiveness and Suffering: A Study of Christian Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913) 84.

[11]White, *Forgiveness and Suffering*, 84.

[12] Psalm 102:26-27, Malachi 3:6, and James 1:17 are a few examples of this.

Plato

This survey of Greek thought about deity begins with the masterful thinker and teacher, Plato. Plato's description of God is often cited as being very influential for the theologians who claim to be orthodox. One of his most complete descriptions of his understanding of the divine nature is in Book II of *The Republic*. In this section of the discourse, Socrates is discussing with Adeimantus the proper way to portray God in poetry. He states that God is always to be represented as truly good and as the cause of well-being but not the cause of evil (379 B). The Divine One is not recognized to be the author of all things, but only the things that are good--the source of evil things should be sought elsewhere (379 C). God always does what is right and just. Because God is just, he may have to mete out punishment to the wicked, but he is not responsible for the misery of those who are punished (380 B).

Socrates then makes his most significant argument for our purposes in the following dialogue with Adeimantus:

> (Socrates:) Then everything which is good, whether made by art or nature, or both, is least liable to suffer change from without?
> (Adeimantus:) True.
> (Socrates:) But surely God and the things of God are in every way perfect?
> (Adeimantus:) Of course they are.
> (Socrates:) Then he can hardly be compelled by the external influence to take many shapes?
> (Adeimantus:) He cannot.
> (Socrates:) But may he not change and transform himself?
> (Adeimantus:) Clearly, he said, that must be the case if he is changed at all.
> (Socrates:) And will he then change himself for the better and fairer, or for the worse and more unsightly?
> (Adeimantus:) If he change at all he can only change for the worse, for we cannot suppose him to be deficient either in virtue or beauty.
> (Socrates:) Very true, Adeimantus; but then, would any one, whether God or man, desire to make himself worse?
> (Adeimantus:) Impossible.
> (Socrates:) Then it is impossible that God should ever be willing to change; being, as is supposed, the fairest and best that is conceivable, every God remains absolutely and for ever in his own form.

(Adeimantus:) That necessarily follows, he said, in my judgement.[13]

The argument here can be stated as follows: God cannot change in any sense whatsoever without becoming worse because he is already the most perfect good. Any change is a step down. It is in this argument that we receive the rationale for the immutability of a perfect being. This type of argument does prove to be very influential in the formulation of the attribute of God's immutability; however, this argument is not the only factor that is considered by theologians when they state that God is immutable. This will become clearer when we examine the concept of immutability below.

Plato continues his discourse on the nature of the Divine by conveying that God is incapable of falsehood, and he summarizes this section by relating through the mouth of Socrates that God is "perfectly simple and true both in word and deed; he changes not; he deceives not, either by sign or word, by dream or by waking vision" (382 E). In Book III, Plato also mentions that the gods must not be given to any kind of emotion, whether it be sorrow and misery or happiness and laughter (388 A - 389A). Thus, Plato's view of God is of a being who is perfect, immutable, good, honest, and emotionless.

Aristotle

Plato's student, Aristotle, is also often cited as being one of these Greek philosophers who contributes to the orthodox view of God by means of his concept of the unmoved mover. In *Metaphysics*, he speaks of this divine being in the following way:

> But since there is something which moves while itself unmoved, existing actually, this can in no way be otherwise than as it is. For motion in space is the first of the kinds of change, and motion in a circle the first kind of spatial motion; and this the first mover *produces*. The first mover, then, exists of necessity; and in so far as it exists by necessity, its mode of being is good, and it is in this sense a first principle. For the necessary has all these senses--that which is necessary perforce because it is contrary to the natural impulse, that without which the good is impossible, and that

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[13]Plato, *The Republic*, vol. 1, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1908; reprinted 1921, 1927, 1936), 381 B-381 C (1936 edition was used for the quotations given).

which cannot be otherwise but can exist only in a single way.[14]

In other words, the first mover--the unmoved mover--is a necessary being and can exist only in a single way. For Aristotle, the first mover, whom he will eventually refer to as God, is a necessary being and a first principle on which "depends the heavens and the world of nature" (1072 b). This first mover is further identified as "thought" that is able to possess the essence or the object of thought.

> And thought thinks on itself because it shares the nature of the object of thought; for it becomes an object of thought in coming into contact with and thinking its objects, so that thought and object of thought are the same. For that which is *capable* of receiving the object of thought, i.e. the essence, is thought. But it is *active* when it *possesses* this object. Therefore the possession rather than the receptivity is the divine element which thought seems to contain, and the act of contemplation is what is most pleasant and best. If, then, God is always in that good state in which we sometimes are, this compels our wonder; and if in a better this compels it yet more. And God *is* in a better state. And life also belongs to God; for the actuality of thought is life, and God is that actuality; and God's self-dependent actuality is life most good and eternal. We say therefore that God is a living being, eternal, most good, so that life and duration continuous and eternal belong to God; for this *is* God (1072 b).

Here we see that Aristotle's conception of God is of a "Mind" that is capable not only of receiving thought, but possessing the object or essence of thought. God is understood to be a living being who is eternally in the most pleasant and best state of contemplation. The Divine is the one who possesses true life by virtue of the fact that God is the actuality of thought. God's self-dependent actuality is the best life, and it is a life that has neither beginning nor end. Thus, from Aristotle, we receive the perception of God as a living eternal being who is actualized through the ability to obtain the essence of objects in contemplation. God is the unmoved mover who initiates the motion of all that is. And because God is the first being, he is also a necessary being.

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[14]Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1072 b. This translation is from Richard McKeon, ed., *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, trans. W. D. Ross (New York: Random House, 1941), 880.

Plotinus

Plotinus is a third philosopher most often mentioned in conjunction with the Hellinization of Christian orthodox belief. He carries on a lengthy discussion of the nature of God in chapter VIII of the *Sixth Ennead*. His influence is particularly important because his philosophical writings had a profound effect on Augustine of Hippo, who perhaps held more sway over the direction of orthodox Christian theology than any other single person.

In the *Sixth Ennead,* Plotinus speaks of God as the self-caused source of all things who is the transcendent, untouched root of all reason:

> Of things carrying their causes within, none arises at hazard or without purpose: the "so it happened to be" is applicable to none. All that they have comes from The Good; the Supreme itself, then, as author of reason, of causation, and of causing essence--all certainly lying far outside of chance--must be the Principle and as it were the examplar of things, thus independent of hazard: it is the First, the Authentic, immune from chance, from blind effect and happening: God is cause of Himself; for Himself and of Himself He is what He is, the first self, transcendently The Self. . . . Thus God is far removed from all happening: the root of reason is self-springing. The Supreme is the Term of all; it is like the principle and ground of some vast tree of rational life; itself unchanging, it gives reasoned being to the growth into which it enters. . . . The Supreme can derive neither its being nor the quality of its being. God Himself, therefore, is what He is, self-related, self-tending; otherwise He becomes outward-tending, other-seeking--He who cannot but be wholly self-poised.[15]

Plotinus' God is the source of all things, much like Aristotle's unmoved mover. All causation comes from that which Plotinus refers to at "The Good" or "The Supreme". Plotinus' God is immune from any kind of chance or accidental cause. He is self-contained and entirely self-related--he needs no other. From this description, we may surmise that Plotinus' God is entirely self-concerned. He is utterly transcendent and uninvolved with the world that may seek him only through contemplation of the things of which he is the encompassment and measure.

[15]Plotinus, *Enneads*, VI, viii, 14-15, 17. This translation comes from the following volume: Robert Maynard Hutchins, ed., *Great Books of the Western World*, vol. 17, *Plotinus*, trans. Stephen Mackenna and B.S. Page (Chicago: William Benton, 1971), 350-51.

Summary

Surely, this is a transcendent and aloof being, a God whose most obvious attributes are self-sufficiency and immutability. These attributes are, of course, affirmed by the early Christian theologians as being integral attributes of the Person of God, but can one say that the very same philosophical notions of these attributes are transferred directly to the God being described in Christian theology? It does not seem plausible to say so.

These Greek philosophers portray a God incapable of relations, emotionless, self-concerned, self-contained, unchangeable, perfect, transcendent, contemplative, good, and uniquely rational. This is the conception of deity that is rightly condemned by modern thinkers as being unbiblical and unChristian, but it is not the notion of God that is recorded in the works of orthodox theologians. The early theologians of the Church do not blindly appropriate these philosophical ideas and apply them to God. There is a sense in which theologians must say that God is perfect, transcendent, uniquely rational, self-contained, immutable, and impassible; but this does not mean that they understand these terms in exactly the same manner that Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus do. The notion of God portrayed in the tradition of orthodox theology is one of a God who is capable of relationships with human beings. He is a God who has emotions and who is concerned with his creation. This God is transcendent, but not aloof or unavailable to those who need him.

The early church fathers use some of the same terms that the philosophers use, but they do not use them in the same way. Most early theologians affirm the emotional capacities of God while making it clear that God's emotions are not commensurate with human emotions. They maintain the transcendence and immutability of God while also asserting that God is immanent and involved with his creation and with his chosen people on a personal level. Most ancient theologians attest to the fact that God is an impassible being, but their understanding of impassibility does not necessarily mean that God cannot

suffer in any capacity whatsoever. Other early theologians even go so far as to profess that God is passible in some sense.

Augustine

It is not difficult to see that the God that Augustine describes in his *Confessions* is different from the God described by the Greek philosophers even though there are some similarities:

> O highest and best, most powerful, most all-powerful, most merciful and most just, most deeply hidden and most nearly present, most beautiful and most strong, constant and yet incomprehensible, changeless, yet changing all things, never new, never old, making all things new; *bringing the proud to decay and they know it not;* always acting and always at rest, still gathering yet never wanting; upholding, filling and protecting, creating, nourishing and bringing to perfection; seeking, although in need of nothing. You love, but with no storm of passion; you are jealous, but with no anxious fear; you repent, but do not grieve; in your anger calm; you change your works, but never change your plan; you take back what you find and yet have never lost; never in need, you are yet glad of gain; never greedy, yet still demanding profit on your loans; to be paid in excess, so that you may be the debtor, and yet who has anything which is not yours? You pay back debts which you never owed and cancel debts without losing anything.[16]

Augustine's description invites us to think about a God who is different from the God of the philosophers, a God who is relational and emotional, in some sense of these words, while maintaining a definite sense of sovereignty and transcendence. This is a God whose most striking attribute is not immutability or self-sufficiency, but instead, this is an all-powerful and yet emotional Being who exhibits love for his creatures by his willingness to pay back debts that He does not owe. The debt being referred to here is, of course, the sin of the world which is not something that is even contemplated by the Greek philosophers. Augustine's God is involved with his creatures and loves them enough to sacrifice his only Son for their sins, even after they have been disobedient and rebelled against him. God is present and near to his creatures and his creation to an extent that the Greek philosophers

[16]Augustine, *Confessions*, I, iv. Translation taken from *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Mentor Book, by the Penguin Group, 1963), 19. (The italicized portion is italicized in the original text).

would never allow. There is a sense of immanence that accompanies God's transcendence.

It is clear that Augustine was helped by the philosophers to solve two basic problems in his thought: materialism and the nature of evil. "He learned to overcome the first of these following precisely the advice of the Platonists, by discovering within himself the intelligible light of the truth. He solved the second by coming to the notion of evil as a defect or privation of good."[17] However, these were not the only problems that Augustine had to solve in his formulation of the Christian faith. Another difficulty was the theological problem of mediation and grace. To resolve this, "he turned to Saint Paul, from whom he grasped that Christ is not only Teacher but also Redeemer."[18] It is often emphasized too little the extent to which Augustine corrected and surpassed the teachings of the Neoplatonists. Augustino Trape, contends that by the time Augustine writes the *City of God*, his philosophy "can no longer be described as Platonic or Neoplatonic--Augustine was as much anti-Platonic as he was Platonic--and can be described only as Christian."[19]

Thus, it may be tempting for modern thinkers to classify the orthodox opinion of impassibility as obsolete and misguided, but one must be careful not to "throw out the baby with the bathwater." The early Christian thinkers wrestled with the problem of the passibility of God, and they came to some astute conclusions that must be retrieved if we are to have a reasonable understanding of the orthodox position of the passibility of God. Kelly Clark points to both the value of the Platonic system of thought as well as the guiding restraints that the conciliar pronouncements of the church have on our thinking about the

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[17]Angelo Di Berardino, ed., *Patrology*, vol. 4, trans. Rev. Placid Solari (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, Inc., 1986), 347. Following references to this work will by cited as *Patrology*, vol. 4, with the appropriate page number.

[18]*Patrology*, vol. 4, 347.

[19]*Patrology*, vol. 4, 406.

passibility of God by stating:

> although Platonic or neoplatonic philosophy has no intrinsically binding force on subsequent thinkers, it should give contemporary thinkers pause that the Church Fathers found such philosophical systems to provide the best metaphysical underpinning of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For the Christian, furthermore, the tradition carries more weight than that we can see further by standing on the shoulders of these giants--conciliar pronouncements surely place *prima facie* constraints on theorizing.[20]

It is also true, as Paul Helm points out, that "Greek or some other philosophy might provide the conceptual tools for developing the doctrine of divine impassibility, but it does not follow that what doctrine results is derived not from Scripture but from philosophy."[21] In other words, we need to keep in mind that the philosophical system used does not necessarily dictate the content of the doctrine that is produced. It should become clear as the history of the idea of God's impassibility is recounted that the understanding of this concept is not confined to the realm of Greek philosophy, but it goes beyond this to incorporate Scriptural truths into a complex and nuanced concept. However, before the history is surveyed it will be helpful to examine the use of the terms "immutability" and "impassibility" in theological literature. These words are often used differently in modern discussions than they were used in the context of orthodox theology, and this next section will exhibit these variations and define these terms for the purposes of this dissertation.

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[20]Kelly James Clark, "Hold Not Thy Peace at My Tears: Methodological Reflections on Divine Impassibility," in *Our Knowledge of God: Essays on Natural and Philosophical Theology*, ed. Kelly James Clark (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992), 180.

[21]Paul Helm, "The Impossibility of Divine Passibility," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 135. Cf. also Gerald Hanratty, "Divine Immutability and Impassibility Revisited," in *At the Heart of the Real*, ed. F. O'Rourke (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1992), 147.

Defining Terms: Immutability and Impassibility

There is great dissatisfaction with using the term "impassibility" in modern times to describe God. There are at least two reasons for this: First, it is often assumed that it means that God must be entirely without emotions or even the capacity for personal relationships, and second, it is frequently used interchangeably with the term "immutability." Marc Steen affirms this first reason by using an example from Gregory of Thaumaturgus' treatise, *Ad Theopompum*:

> In the first systematic text treating our topic (the suffering of God) . . .we are informed that a loving God must be 'impassible.' Nowadays the reverse reasoning is in vogue: if God is love, then He must be 'passible.' A misunderstanding of this conceptual difference leads to a veritable tower of Babel. Fighting traditional theism at the present time as if it introduced the notion of an 'apathic,' that is a cool and indifferent God, often seems to be a battle like Don Quixote's. It is, in any case, necessary to recognize that the term '(im)passibility' does not always and everywhere have one and the same connotation.[22]

Many modern thinkers who assume that the God of traditional theism has exactly the same attributes as the god of Greek philosophers, suppose that God must be passible in order to be loving. Yet, Gregory Thaumaturgus presumes just the opposite. This seems to be a fundamental disagreement over the meaning of the term "impassible." Thus one must recognize that it is important to define terms carefully and to use them with discretion to make any headway on this problem.

Immutability and impassibility are integrally connected in the doctrine of God, because impassibility is understood to follow from the fact that God is immutable. However, the modern use and/or understanding of these terms is somewhat different from their use in the ancient or medieval world. The modern definition of the term "impassibility" is the "incapability of, or exemption from suffering," or an

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[22]Marc Steen, "The Theme of the 'Suffering' God: An Exploration," in *God and Human Suffering*, ed. Jan Lambrecht and Raymond F. Collins (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Press, 1990), 86-87.

"insusceptibility to injury."[23] In modern theological literature, it has also taken on the meaning of being entirely bereft of any emotions save that of bliss. That is to say, "impassibility" has to do with the capacity, or lack thereof, that a being has for emotion, suffering, or receiving harm. This is a significant part of what it means to be impassible, but in early theology there was also another sense of "impassibility" that is not included in this definition--that of being free from temptation or free from the ability to yield to sin.

"Immutability," on the other hand, is the quality of "not being subject to or susceptible to change; unchangeable, unalterable, changeless."[24] The connotation that has been derived from this kind of a definition in the modern era is that if a being is immutable, then it is also immovable or unchangeable in any way and thus, incapable of relations with others that would require a being to change. This modern understanding of this term is much the same as the Greek philosophical definition of the term but markedly different from how it has been used as an attribute of the nature of God in traditional theism. To say that God is "immutable" is not to say that He is incapable of any kind or appearance of change whatsoever; instead, it is a term that describes the constancy of God's steadfast love and faithfulness. The doctrine of immutability is an ontological affirmation of the biblical message of divine steadfastness.[25] It is important that one carefully differentiate between and among the meanings of these terms in order to understand how it is that God may be understood to be passible or impassible.

Unfortunately, this task is made more difficult by theologians and philosophers who

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[23]J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, *The Oxford English Dictionary* , vol 7 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 700.

[24]Simpson, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 693.

[25]Richard A. Muller, "Incarnation, Immutability, and the Case for Classical Theism," *Westminster Theological Journal* 45 (Spring 1983): 39.

use the terms "immutable" and "impassible" interchangeably. For example, Bertrand R. Brasnett describes the Incarnation as a definitive proof of the "impassibility" of God because it manifests the "utter inability of man to turn God from his purpose." A little later, he adds that "though there is an obvious sense in which the Incarnation is proof of the passibility of God, yet the deeper view is to see therein an impassible God moving forward to an unchanging goal."[26] In this instance, the distinction between immutability and impassibility is removed by the use of the word "impassible" to describe what is properly the "*immutability*" of God's purpose, and then the employment of the word "passible" to describe a kind of change or, possibly, a kind of suffering that affects the Person of God.

Another example comes from Richard Creel's book, *Divine Impassibility*. He defines impassibility as the "imperviousness to causal influence from external factors."[27] He then explains that there are then four possible ways in which God could be impassible. God could be impassible in "regard to his *nature*, his *will*, his *knowledge*, or his *feelings*."[28] This use of "impassible" is confusing because it deals primarily with what is commonly understood to be within the realm of "immutability," and it fails to recognize that impassibility is a type of immutability. Marcel Sarot has effectively argued that Creel's definition is unfit for use because it is one-sided (only taking into account objective or external factors and omitting any possible subjective or internal factors that would account

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[26]Bertrand R. Brasnett, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, (London: The Macmillan Co., 1928), 28-29.

[27]Richard Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 11.

[28]Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 11.

for a causal influence for a change in God) and confusing.[29] He offers a better definition that well distinguishes the terms in question. He states that "the term **impassibility** should be used in the following meaning: *immutability with regard to one's feelings, or the quality of one's inner life*."[30] This is certainly better than Creel's definition, but it still does not give us a full definition of the term "impassibility."

The word "impassibility" is a cognate of the Latin noun *impassibilitas* (*impetibilitas* and *impatibilitas* are also commonly used as synonyms) which, in turn, is the Latin translation of the Greek concept of απαθεια. This Latin word, *impassibilitas*, is defined in a modern Latin dictionary as the "incapacity for suffering,"[31] but a dictionary of Medieval Latin gives the following definition: the "state of him who is not subject to passions."[32] This medieval translation is of particular interest because of the significance of the concept of "passions" in early church history. Gregory of Nyssa, in his treatise *Against Eunomius*, understands the term "passion" in the following manner:

> Nothing is truly "passion" which does not tend to sin . . . For we give the name of "passion" only to that which is opposed to the virtuous unimpassioned state, and of this we believe that He Who granted us salvation was at all time devoid, Who "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Of that, at least, which is truly passion, which is a diseased condition of the will, He was not a partaker . . . But the peculiar attributes of our nature, which, by a kind of customary abuse of terms, are called by the same name of "passion,"--of these, we confess, the Lord did partake,--of birth, nourishment, growth, of sleep and toil, and all those natural dispositions which the soul is wont to experience with regard to bodily inconveniences,--the

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29Marcel Sarot, "Patripassionism, Theopaschitism and the Suffering of God: Some Historical and Systematic Consideration," *Religious Studies* 26 (September 1990): 363-375.

30Sarot, "Patripassionism," 368.

31Charlton T. Lewis, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1980), 897.

32J.F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976), 513.

> desire of that which is lacking, when the longing passes from the body to the soul, the sense of pain, the dread of death, and all the like save only such as, if followed, lead to sin.[33]

Here Gregory makes a distinction between a proper and improper use of the word "passion." In its correct usage, "passions" are those feelings that lead or tempt one to sin. Thus, an unimpassioned person is one who is either not tempted toward sin, or one who does not follow the temptations he or she has toward the commission of sin. The term "passion" is improperly used for the kinds of "bodily inconveniences" and desires that one experiences in the normal course of life and work such as: birth, growth, sleepiness, pain, and the dread of death.

It should be clear then that "impassibility" does not always have the connotation of being completely devoid of feeling, nor does it necessarily mean that God is incapable of suffering of some kind. In a very narrow sense, it can correctly be taken to mean that God has no passions, that is, no feelings or emotions that lead him to sin. Of course, this would allow God to have other feelings such as compassion, sadness, joy, anger, or even emotional pain and suffering. As will soon be illustrated, the majority of early Christian theologians want to express the notion that there is nothing that can force God to suffer against his own will rather than the idea that God has no capacity for suffering.

The other term, "immutability," is also often misused or misunderstood in modern parlance. It is not a term that is confined to the context of suffering or passions as impassibility is, but it may be used with respect to any kind of change whatsoever. However, it is imperative to understand that the concept of immutability does not mean that

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[33]Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius,* VI, 3, trans. William Moore and Henry Austin Wilson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Series 2, vol.5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 186.

God is the "infinite iceberg of metaphysics,"[34] devoid of all ability to relate to his creation because any change at all would be the cause of something other than perfection. This inaccurate concept of the immutability of God is very much a product of the Hellenistic assumption which was discussed above. An example of why this confusion is so prominent in modern thinking is given by Alan Torrance who is attempting to explain how early theologians appropriated Greek philosophical concepts into Christian theology as follows:

> Immutability was similarly affirmed because change implies imperfection--if one is changing in any way then one must be involved either in progression towards or retrogression from perfection and both of these alternatives involve some point where the being involved is less than perfect. Impassibility was seen to be equivalent to immutability since it suggests that God cannot suffer change or be affected by any cause or influence be it external or internal.[35]

He is incorrectly assuming that this idea of immutability was assigned to the God of the Bible by the early theologians. He is accurately describing the Greek notion of immutability as the quality of not being able to change in any aspect of His being whatsoever as one is able to see above in Socrates' dialogue with Adiemantus, but this is not a precise notion of immutability for the theologians of the early church. He also convolutes the concept of impassibility by stating that it is equivalent to immutability.

The correct understanding of "immutability" in orthodox theology takes its meaning from the fact that God is unchanging in his purpose, will, and faithfulness, and not from the idea that God has no capacity for change whatsoever. Richard Muller expresses a more accurate definition of immutability by elaborating the scholastic concept of God as the unmoved Mover. He states that

> the unmoved Mover as adapted conceptually by the medieval scholastics is a God

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[34]T. Vincent Tymms, *The Christian Idea of Atonement* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904), 312.

[35]Alan J. Torrance, "Does God Suffer? Incarnation and Impassibility," in *Christ in Our Place*, ed. T. Hart and D. Thimell, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 25 (Allison Park, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1989), 350.

> profoundly involved in holding in being the world which he has created. For the scholastic mind, creation and providence are only separable for the sake of theological discussion . . . Over against the created order, the divine immutability implies a constant, unchanging creative involvement.[36]

This is the correct understanding of immutability as it is used in orthodox theology. God is not immutable in the sense that he is uninvolved or unrelated; instead, God is immutable in the sense that he is utterly reliable.[37] One is able to count on the fact that God will not be fickle; his ultimate purposes will never change.[38] God does not change with respect to his goodness or righteousness.[39] The orthodox scholastic concept of immutability also implies that God does not change in his being. This does not, however, exclude the change of divine relations *ad extra*. Muller illustrates this point by refering to the distinctions that the scholastics make in regard to God's relation to the creation:

> The scholastics distinguish between the *principium agendi,* or effective principle in creation, which is the divine essence itself, and the *effectum productum,* or produced effect, in creation, which is the created order. In the produced effect there is clearly change or mutation. The creation is a movement from nonexistence to existence. But in the effective principle, God, there is no change or mutation since God eternally and immutably wills to produce creation. The change that occurs in creation is external to God.[40]

Thus, the immutability of God describes God's constancy and changelessness of being, but it does not rule out that God is able to have relations or affections *ad extra* that do not

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[36]Richard Muller, "Incarnation, Immutability," 29.

[37]Paul Helm, "The Impossibility of Divine Passibility," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 139.

[38]Cf. Douglas White, *Forgiveness and Suffering: A Study of Christian Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1913), 85.

[39]Rem B. Edwards, "The Pagan Dogma of the Absolute Unchangeableness of God," *Religious Studies* 14 (March-December 1978): 306.

[40]Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 148.

constitute an essential change in God's being. This is a great source of faith and consolation for believers. This is also distinct from but related to the notion that God is impassible as has been demonstrated.

In conclusion, "impassibility" has two basic meanings in traditional theology. First it is a type of unchangeableness of God with regard to suffering. God cannot be acted upon in such a way that he will be caused to suffer. This does not necessarily mean that God is incapable of suffering if he chooses to suffer, but he retains complete freedom of will to act in accordance with his nature. Second, God is impassible in the sense that he can have no passions--passions being emotions or inclinations that lead to commission of sin.

The term "immutability," when it is used to describe God in early Christian theology, does not have the connotation of "unchangeable perfection" that is present in the Greek philosophical concept of divinity. Rather, ancient theologians are attempting to express the fact that the biblical "text bears witness to an ethical, moral, intentional and volitional changelessness in God."[41] God's essential being does not change, but this does not exclude God from having divine relations *ad extra*. Now that these terms have been carefully identified, a brief history of the idea of the passibility of God will be provided in order to track the theological developments related to the question of whether the God of orthodoxy is in fact the same as the God of the Greek philosophers.

A History of the Idea of the Passibility of God

The subject of the passibility of God is much more pervasive in the history of theology than one may suppose. This is because of its close relation to the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ which is at the center of Christian theology. Many thinkers throughout history have struggled with how the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross is perhaps related to suffering in his own divine nature or how this suffering affects God the

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[41]Richard Muller, "Incarnation, Immutability," 26.

Father or the Holy Spirit. The following survey does not claim to be either comprehensive or complete, but will serve the purposes of this work by noting significant references to the passibility or impassibility of God in the history of theology. This overview will confirm the definitions of the impassibility of God stated above. It also manifests that early theologians are not as reliant upon Greek philosophy as many modern thinkers assume. In fact, many early theologians are careful to distance themselves from Greek philosophy by making distinctions within their thought that demonstrate how the God of Christianity is different from pagan deities.

Ante-Nicene Era

The earliest references to the passibility of God by early church fathers such as those given by Ignatius, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Gregory Thaumaturgus, should be considered in the complex and varied context of early Christian theology. In that time, there was neither an agreed upon canon of Scriptures nor a universal "orthodox" creed that could be relied upon to help early Christian thinkers consider a topic such as the passibility of God. Orthodoxy was being formulated as the need for statements of faith became necessary to combat heresy. The earliest creeds were rules of faith that took the shape of the Apostle's Creed most often and differed slightly from location to location. The canon of Scripture was being chosen in accordance with the criteria that were set forth by the Church, but a reliable collection was not completely formed until the third century at the earliest. This does not mean that one should dismiss these early theologians' views by any means, but one should keep in mind when reading these thinkers that the concepts needed for the articulation of the Trinity and the incarnation of Christ had not yet been introduced to theological discourse. The challenge for modern day readers, then, is to study these first theologians without inadvertently projecting any Nicene or Chalcedonian conclusions onto their thought.

Philo of Alexandria (c. 30 BC-45 AD)

This survey will begin with Philo since he has been mentioned above as an influential figure for early theologians. He was a contemporary of Jesus of Nazareth, and it is evident from his works that he is strongly committed to both Hellenistic philosophy and to the Scriptures. When he finds these two sources at odds, he attempts to reconcile them. Thus, he states that God is immutable, impassible, and without emotion, but he does not apply these attributes to God in that same way that they are understood in Greek philosophy. It is also noteworthy that he never once refers to God by using the common Greek terms απαθης or απαθεια to describe His impassibility, nor does he use the term αναλλοιωτος to indicate his immutability. Instead, he uses the alternative term ατρεπτος which has a primary translation of "unchangeable."[42]

Philo does not take "immutability" to mean that God is completely immovable or incapable of any kind of change. He gives two examples of God's immutability in his treatise, *On the Unchangeableness of God*, which is a commentary in Genesis 6:1-12. He recognizes that some believe that God is changeable because of what is said about God in Genesis 6:6-7:

> The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth--men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air--for I am grieved that I have made them."

To answer this charge that God is changeable, he gives two examples of human mutability, and he then contrasts how God is different. The first example is that of the loss of friends:

> Often when we have chosen friends, and have lived some short time with them, without having any thing to accuse them of, we then turn away from them, so as to place ourselves in the rank of enemies, or at least of strangers to them; now this conduct shows the facility and levity of ourselves, who are unable steadily to adhere to the professions which we originally made; but God is not so easily sated or

[42]Joseph Hallman, *The Descent of God*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 24.

> wearied.[43]

As human beings we can be fickle in our allegiance to other people. We may be close to someone for a while, but then part ways with them for no particular reason. In doing this, we manifest our lack of commitment to any profession of loyalty that we may have made.

The second example given is that of humans giving in to peer pressure or changing our minds to conform to the judgments of others. In contrast to this, he asserts that God is not swayed by such things.

> There are times when we determine to abide by the same judgment that we have formed; but those who join us do not equally abide by theirs so that our opinions of necessity change as well as theirs; for it is impossible for us, who are but men, to foresee all the contingencies of future events or to anticipate the opinions of others; but to God, as dwelling in pure light, all things are visible . . . There is nothing uncertain nor even future to God.[44]

Thus, in his description of the unchangeableness of God, Philo is affirming that God is not fickle. God is faithful and constant in righteousness; he is not swayed by the opinions of others.

In regard to God's ability to experience emotion or passions, he states that

> God is utterly inaccessble to any passion whatever. For it is the peculiar property of human weakness to be disquieted by any such feelings, but God has neither the irrational passions of the soul, nor are the parts and limits of the body in the least belonging to him.[45]

Statements in Scripture that refer to the emotions of God are metaphorical and pedagogical according to Philo. God has fashioned the Bible in this manner to help us understand him in our feeble minds. According to Philo, this causes those with dull minds to reverence and fear God even if they are not brilliant enough to understand the essence of God and to love

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[43]Philo, *On the Unchangeableness of God*, 27-28, in *The Works of Philo, Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 160.

[44]Philo, *Unchangeableness of God*, 28-29.

[45]Philo, *Unchangeableness of God*, 52.

him properly.

Consequently, when the Bible speaks of God's anger, jealousy, or wrath, it is a type of "deceit" that is for our own good. These biblical descriptions of God lead human beings to fear God so that they can be saved. Philo likens this to the technique of a surgeon before the era of anesthesia who would withhold information from a patient needing to have a limb amputated.

> For what man in his senses would say to a patient under his care, "My good man you shall have the knife applied to you, and cautery, and your limbs shall be amputated," even if such things were absolutely necessary to be endured? No man on earth would say so. For if he did, his patient would sink in his heart before the operations could be performed, and so receiving another disease in his soul, more grievous than that already existing in his body, he would resolutely renounce the cure; but if, on the other hand, through the deceit of the physician he is led to for a contrary expectation, he will submit to everything with a patient spirit, even though the means of his salvation may be most painful.[46]

God is said to indulge in threats and indignation, and implacable anger, and, moreover, as employing defensive arms to ward off attacks, and to chastise the wicked in order to correct the fool who needs to fear God in order to be saved.[47]

Those who think that God is like a man are those who appropriately fear God, but on a higher plane of spirituality are those who do not think of God as a man. The more spiritually mature will not fear God but love him. Philo explains:

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[46]Philo, *Unchangeableness of God*, 66. This example given by Philo is rather troubling because it is couched in the notion that God deceives us or that, at the very least, he withholds information from us that is very important. The most charitable explanation for this is that Philo believes that God uses *fear* as a tool to bring those with dull minds to salvation because he cannot reach them with love alone. The belief, on Philo's part, seems to be rather utilitarian in that the end of accomplishing salvation justifies the means of being deceitful about the true nature of God. The example is perhaps more confusing than it needs to be because Philo uses the analogy of a doctor who withholds information about a terrible procedure that he must perform to save the patient's life so that the patient will not literally be scared to death; whereas, he is trying to illuminate the fact that he believes that God portrays himself as an angry, jealous, wrathful God to scare the dull-witted into salvation so that he can show them his love. It would be clearer if he had used an example or analogy that is more parallel to the idea he is trying to illustrate.

[47]Philo, *Unchangeableness of God*, 68-69.

> To those, therefore, who do not attribute either the parts or the passions of men to the living God, but who, as becomes the majesty of God, honour him in himself, and by himself alone, to love him is most natural.[48]

To describe God as a human is a "catachrestical misapplication of terms, by which we make amends for our weakness." Philo asserts that, in reality, God is "uncreated, immortal, unchangeable, and holy, the only God, blessed for ever."[49]

However, Philo's statement about what God is like "in reality" is qualified by Philo's own use of anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms. In *The Posterity and Exile of Cain*, he speaks of the descent or "κενοσις" of God in terms of a "change of place" that is adapted to human beings. Accordingly, Philo says that God "speaks" to human beings in the following manner:

> "I will go down with you;" for change of place is adapted to you: so that no one shall go down with me, for in me there is no changing; but whatever is consistent with me, that is to say, with rest, shall stand. And with those who go down in such a manner as to change their place . . . I will go down also, not indeed changing my situation as to its actual place, inasmuch as I fill every place with myself. And this, too, I do through the pity which exists in rational nature, in order that it may be raised from the hell of the passions to the heavenly region of virtue.[50]

Thus, Philo is willing to say that God descends to us without changing his situation as to its actual place because he fills everyplace with himself. Yet, Philo describes this as a descent that is adapted to human understanding. God comes down to us in a virtuous act of pity.

In *Concerning Noah's Work as a Planter*, he indicates that God is capable of changing in his dealings with human beings as the need arises in response to their actions.

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[48]Philo, *Unchangeableness of God*, 69.

[49]Philo, *The Sacrifices of Abel and Cain*, 101, in *The Works of Philo, Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 107.

[50]Philo, *The Posterity and Exile of Cain*, 30-31, in *The Works of Philo, Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 135.

He describes God's actions as follows: "Inasmuch, therefore, as he is a ruler, he has both powers, that, namely, of doing good, and that of doing harm; regulating his conduct on the principle of requiting him who has done anything."[51] In other words, God will react to human actions. Philo will also speak of God's anger, mercy, and happiness on occasion.[52]

Thus, Joseph Hallman correctly observes that "Philo does not . . . completely absorb the Greek notion of divine immutability and impassibility."[53] Even if one would want to go so far as to say that he does not see how it is that Greek philosophy and the biblical concept of God are fundamentally different, one must agree that the biblical portrait of God is more important to him that the Greek notion.[54] Philo, then, does not simply appropriate Greek philosophical concepts and apply them directly to the God of the Bible. He carefully tries to sift through the biblical and Greek ideas to formulate his thoughts about the God of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Ignatius (ca. 110)

Ignatius is difficult to interpret on this point of passibility because, more than once, he seems to affirm that God is both passible and impassible in the same sentence. In his letter to Polycarp, he writes: "Look for Him who is beyond all time, the Eternal, the Invisible who became visible for our sake, the Impalpable, *the Impassible who suffered* for

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51Philo, *Noah's Work as a Planter*, 87, in *The Works of Philo, Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 198.

52Philo, *The Life of Moses* I.6; *On Dreams, That They are God Sent*, 2.177ff.; *On the Creation*, 156.

53Hallman, *The Descent of God*, 29.

54Hallman, *Descent of God*, 29.

our sake (τον απαθη, τον δι ημας παθητον),[55] who endured every outrage for our sake."[56] And again in his letter to the Ephesians he states: "There is one Doctor active in both body and soul, begotten and yet unbegotten, God in man, true life in death, son of Mary and Son of God, *first able to suffer and then unable to suffer* (πρωτον πανθητος και τοτε απαθης),[57] Jesus Christ, our Lord."[58] Most scholars agree with J.K. Mozley when he suggests that in order to make sense of these quotes "we must not attribute to (Ignatius) views of a suffering God outside of the sphere of the Incarnation."[59] This seems to be a reasonable conclusion given the otherwise confusing data. This interpretation allows for God to be passible in the incarnate state and impassible in the unincarnate state.

However, disagreement occurs when one tries to determine whether the dominant view depicted by Ignatius is that God is generally an impassible or a passible God. Mozley asserts that Ignatius, in his letter to Polycarp, "gives us the notion of passibility as a temporal circumstance attaching to the revelation of Christ our God in the flesh or in man,

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[55]The Greek text is taken from Jonathan Bayes' article in "Divine απαθεια in Ignatius of Antioch," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 21, E. Livingstone, ed., 27.

[56]Ignatius, "To Polycarp," 3, in *The Apostolic Fathers*, vol. 1, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1947), 125. (Emphasis mine)

[57]The Greek text is taken from Jonathan Bayes article: "Divine απαθεια in Ignatius of Antioch," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 21, E. Livingstone, ed., 27.

[58]Ignatius, "To the Ephesians," 7. (Emphasis mine)

[59]J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 7. Cf. R.M. Grant, *Gods and One God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 106; and Jonathan Bayes, "Divine απαθεια in Ignatius of Antioch," in *Studia Patristica*, vol. 21, E. Livingstone, ed., 27.

but possessing no eternal grounding in the divine nature."[60] On the other hand, Jonathan Bayes argues that "Ignatius' predication of παθος of θεος must be taken with full seriousness, and that it is at least as reasonable to read the references to divine απαθεια in the light of Ignatius' belief in a suffering God, as vice versa."[61] He explains:

> We must distinguish between two alternative possible definitions of *apatheia*, either as the inability to suffer in any circumstances at all, or as the fact of not suffering in a particular given set of circumstances. Certainly Ignatius believes that, as long as God remains in the circumstances of heaven, he does not, and indeed, cannot, suffer. However, he does not believe that God in himself cannot suffer, since it was God who suffered in the circumstances of earth during the incarnation; απαθειϭ is factually descriptive, not substantially definitive. Ignatius is not affirming divine απαθεια in the way that it would later come to be asserted as an a priori exclusion from the divine nature of the very possibility of suffering, as is represented, for example, by Novatian's rhetorical question: "*Quis enim non intelligat, quod impassibilis sit divinitas. . . ?*" There is, it is true, no passion of God outside the incarnation, but the suffering of Christ in the incarnation was most emphatically the passion of God.[62]

Bayes' main point--that the inability to suffer is descriptive of divine nature rather than substantially definitive--is an important one. He is suggesting that if it is true that God suffered in the incarnation, then impassibility can only be used to describe the divine nature in a certain set of circumstances and not to define the divine substance. This is true because if God suffered in any circumstance whatsoever (namely the incarnation), then he could not be essentially impassible in the sense that he cannot suffer at all. This thought then opens the door to the possibility that Ignatius may have believed that God is essentially passible rather than impassible.

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[60]J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 9.

[61]Bayes, "Divine απαθεια in Ignatius," 29.

[62]Bayes, "Divine απαθεια in Ignatius," 29.

Irenaeus (ca. 130-ca. 200)

Irenaeus, on the other hand, is much clearer in his convictions concerning the issue of the passibility of God. He makes a sharp distinction between the humanity and divinity of Christ and what each nature capable or incapable of enduring.

> For as He became man in order to undergo temptation, so also was He the Word that He might be glorified; the Word remaining quiescent, that He might be capable of being tempted, dishonoured, crucified, and of suffering death, but the human nature being swallowed up in it (the divine), when it conquered, and endured [without yielding], and performed acts of kindness, and rose again, and was received up [into heaven]. He therefore, the Son of God, our Lord, being the Word of the Father, and the Son of man, since He had a gemeration as to His human nature from Mary--who was descended from mankind, and who was herself a human being--was made the Son of man.[63]

He explains that it is the human nature that is capable of being tempted, dishonored, crucified, and killed, but the divine nature swallows up the human nature and endures to perform acts of kindness, to rise again, and to be received into heaven. Thus, Irenaeus divides the acts of Jesus Christ as they are depicted in the Bible into human and divine acts. The human nature of Christ is certainly passible, but he rules out the possibility that the divine nature is capable of any kind suffering.

Tatian (ca. 120-ca. 173)

Tatian, a contemporary of Irenaeus, gives a much different perspective. In his *Address to the Greeks*, he speaks of the Spirit of God as the "minister of the suffering of God (του πεπονθοντος θεου)."[64] A footnote to this phrase speculates that this is an "early specimen of the *Communicatio idiomatum*: the αντιδοσις or αντιμεταστασις of

[63]Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, III, 19.3, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers,The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 449.

[64]Tatian, *Address of Tatian to the Greeks*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Fathers of the Second Century*, vol. 2 (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 71.

the Greek theologians."[65] Whether this is truly the case or not, it is clear that Tatian believes that God has the capacity for suffering and does suffer in some way although he does not elaborate on exactly what is meant by the "Spirit of God" being a minister of the suffering of God.

Clement of Alexandria (ca. 153-ca. 217)

Clement of Alexandria appears to swing the pendulum back in the opposite direction. He describes Jesus in terms that sound quite docetic:

> For He ate, not for the sake of the body, which was kept together by a holy energy, but in order that it might not enter into the minds of those who were with Him to entertain a different opinion of Him; in like manner as certainly some afterwards supposed that He appeared in a phantasmal shape (δοκησει). But He was entirely impassible (απαθειο); inaccessible to any movement of feeling--either pleasure or pain.[66]

The force of "impassible" in this instance is the same sense in which it is often used in modern theology, a God who is entirely without feeling of any kind. Clement goes on to explain that affections produced rationally are good, but they are inadmissible in the case of a perfect man such as Jesus. A perfect man does not experience emotions because he has no reason to. He does not need courage because he does not meet anything that inspires fear, he does not need cheerfulness of mind because he does not fall into pain; he is never angry because there is nothing that could move him to anger; he never envies because he has everything he needs, and he does not experience love as common affection because he loves the Creator in the creatures. Neither does he fall into any desire or eagerness because he is

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65Tatian, *Address of Tatian to the Greeks*, 71.

66Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, VI, 9; in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Fathers of the Second Century*, vol. 2 (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 496.

close to God and blessed with an abundance of good things.[67]

It would appear that Clement is the perfect example of a Christian who took Greek philosophy over into Christian theology without any alteration. However, although the obvious Hellenistic influence is clear, this would be a hasty conclusion.[68] In *Stromata*, VII, 2, he states that the Lord "assumed flesh capable of suffering" which, at least, admits to the capability of suffering in the body. Even more directly, in his *Exhortation to the Heathen*, he makes several references to the emotion of God. For example:

> "Wherefore I (God) was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in heart, and have not known My ways. Who I sware (sic.) in my wrath they shall not enter into My rest." Look to the threatening! Look to the exhortation! Look to the punishment! Why, then, should we any longer change grace into wrath, and not receive the word with open ears, and entertain God as a guest in pure spirits?[69]

> Believe Him who is man and God; believe, O man. Believe, O man the living God, who suffered and is adored.[70]

> For we are they who bear about with us, in this living and moving image of our human nature, the likeness of God,--a likeness which dwells with us, takes counsel with us, associates with us, is a guest with us, feels with us, feels for us.[71]

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[67]Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, VI, 9.

[68]In *The Stromata* VIII, Clement makes a sharp distinction between the false philosophy given to the Greeks, which he says may act as a stepping-stone to the truth that comes from God through Christ, but it does not contain that truth: "And in general terms, we shall not err in alleging that all things necessary and profitable for life came to us from God, and that philosophy more especially was given to the Greeks, as a covenant peculiar to them--being, as it is, a stepping-stone to the philosophy which is according to Christ--although those who applied themselves to the philosophy of the Greeks shut their ears voluntarily to the truth, despising the voice of Barbarians, or also dreading the danger suspended over the believer, by the laws of the state."

[69]Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Heathen, IX,* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Fathers of the Second Century*, vol. 2 (Buffalo, NY: The Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 196.

[70]Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Heathen,* X.

[71]Clement of Alexandria, *The Exhortation to the Heathen,* IV.

Unfortunately though, he does not resolve these apparent contradictions in his thought that pertain to the passibility of God. J.K. Mozley astutely observes:

> Clement leaves us with the curious conclusion that while in Christ a place must be left for the reality of His bodily suffering, since Clement could not deny that without going over consciously and deliberately into the Docetic camp, no kind of emotional impulse is to be regarded as affecting in any way His soul. We must think of the Lord as being 'without beginning, impassible,' as assuming flesh which is by nature passible and training it to a condition of impassibility.' The religious value of Christ's sufferings is hard to preserve when the emotions are regarded as essentially hostile to the soul's apprehension of the good.[72]

Thus, Clement leaves us with a strong impression of the impassibility of God, but he does not level this with his own assertions about the emotions God experiences as he relates to his people or with the passibility of Christ.

Tertullian (ca. 160-ca. 240)

Tertullian is another early theologian who gives a mixed report of the passibility of God. He gives blatantly contradictory views in different works. Joseph Hallman suggests that Tertullian believes that God was basically mutable, but that he contradicted himself on this point mainly because he was engaged in polemical rhetoric. Hallman states:

> God was, for him, necessarily mutable. Tertullian was possibly unconscious of the difficulties inherent in the marriage between the Platonist and scriptural understandings of God, and never openly presented the conflict. This fact, along with his polemical intentions, prevented him from developing a more systematic view of God.[73]

Tertullian argues that God is impassible in his work against the alleged Patripassianist, Praxeas.[74] Praxeas taught that the divine element in Christ was the Father

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[72]J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 58-59.

[73]Joseph Hallman, "The Mutability of God: Tertullian to Lactantius," *Theological Studies* 42 (Spring 1981): 385-86.

[74]Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, I, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 597.

and that while "it is the Son indeed who suffers, the Father is only His fellow-sufferer."[75] In order to rebuke this heresy, Tertullian refused to recognize the distinction Praxeas makes between "suffering" and "fellow-suffering." He states that there is no real difference between the two types of suffering because both of them involve suffering per se, and this, he says, is impossible for God the Father or the Son in his divine nature:

> For what is the meaning of "fellow-suffering," but the endurance of suffering along with another? Now if the Father is incapable of suffering, He is incapable of suffering in company with another; otherwise, if He can suffer with another, He is of course capable of suffering. . . . You are afraid to say that He is capable of suffering whom you make to be capable of fellow-suffering. Then, again, the Father is as incapable of fellow-suffering as the Son even is of suffering under the condition of His existence as God.[76]

This would seem to be a complete denial of the suffering of the divine nature under any conditions, but a little further on in his argument, he speaks of how it is possible for the Son to suffer in the crucifixion without involving the Father in that suffering as follows:

> The Father is separate from the Son, though not from Him as God. For even if a river be soiled with mire and mud, although it flows from the fountain identical in nature with it, and is not separated from the fountain, yet the injury which affects the stream reaches not to the fountain; and although it is the water of the fountain which suffers down the stream, still, since it is not affected at the fountain, but only in the river, the fountain suffers nothing, but only the river which issues from the fountain. So likewise the Spirit of God, *whatever suffering it might be capable of in the Son*, yet inasmuch as it could not suffer in the Father, the fountain of the Godhead, but only in the Son, it evidently could not have suffered, as the Father. *But it is enough for me that the Spirit of God suffered nothing as the Spirit of God, since all that It suffered It suffered in the Son.*[77]

How is it that the Spirit of God suffers in the Son? Tertullian makes it clear that the suffering that touches the Son cannot touch the Father, just as dirty river water does not flow back to its source to contaminate the spring, but how is it that the water is able to be

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[75]Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XXIX.

[76]Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XXIX.

[77]Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XXIX. (Emphasis mine)

contaminated at all? One would assume that Tertullian would want to say that the divine nature or the Spirit of God would be incapable of suffering in any way. But if the Spirit of God suffers in the Son, then It must be capable of suffering in some way.

He goes on to describe how it is that the Spirit of God works in regard to our own human suffering on God's behalf. He explains that

> we are ourselves unable to suffer for God, unless the Spirit of God be in us, who also utters by our instrumentality whatever pertains to our own conduct and suffering; not, however, that He Himself suffers in our suffering, only He bestows on us the power and capacity of suffering.[78]

Thus, the Spirit of God does not suffer in our suffering, but only enables us to suffer. It seems that Tertullian wants to say that this is also the manner in which the Spirit suffers in the Son, but he describes the two cases differently. In the case of Christ, it is the Spirit who suffers in the Son while in our case it is the Spirit who enables us to suffer without suffering Itself.

In the next chapter, Tertullian perhaps makes clearer how he understands the suffering of Christ when he addresses the cry of the forsaken Jesus from the cross. He says that this cry is "the voice of flesh and soul, that is to say, of man--not of the Word and Spirit, that is to say, not of God; and it was uttered so as to prove the impassibility of God, who 'forsook' His Son, so far as He handed over *His human substance* to the suffering of death."[79] Hence, he also makes the distinction between the suffering of the flesh of Christ and the impassibility of the Spirit of Christ. He explains that the flesh of the Son was incapable of death until Jesus commended his spirit to the Father, and only then could the flesh undergo the full extent of death.

> In this manner He 'forsook" Him, in not sparing Him; 'forsook' Him, in delivering Him up. In all other respects the Father did not forsake the Son, for it was into His

[78]Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XXIX.

[79]Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XXX. (Emphasis mine). Cf. also XXIX.

> Father's hands that the Son commended His spirit. Indeed, after so commending it, He instantly died; and as the Spirit remained with the flesh, the flesh cannot undergo the full extent of death, i.e., in corruption and decay. For the Son, therefore, to die, amounted to His being forsaken by the Father. The Son, then, both dies and rises again according to the Scriptures.[80]

In his work, *Against Marcion*, Tertullian gives us the opposite opinion of God. The heresy of the Marcionites is that of docetism, and so Tertullian emphasizes the more immanent and "human" attributes of God--that God is mutable, passible, and emotional. Against Marcion and his followers he argues that emotions such as anger, jealousy and grief do not corrupt God:

> We who believe that God really lived on earth, and took upon Him the low estate of human form, for the purpose of man's salvation, are very far from thinking as those do who refuse to believe that God cares for anything. Whence has found its way to the heretics an argument of this kind: If God is angry, and jealous, and roused, and grieved, He must therefore be corrupted, and must therefore die. Fortunately, however, it is a part of the creed of Christians even to believe that God did die, and yet that He is alive for evermore. Superlative is their folly, who prejudge divine things from human; so that because in man's corrupt condition there are found passions of this description, therefore there must be deemed to exist in God also sensations of the same kind.[81]

Tertullian explains that God experiences emotions incorruptibly by the incorruptibility of His divine essence. Further, he asserts that it is wrong to predicate merely human emotions of God; it is to reverse what is really true. He exhorts that it is "palpably absurd of you to be placing human characteristics in God rather than divine ones in man, and clothing God in the likeness of man, instead of man in the image of God."[82] Thus, Tertullian seems to make allowances for a passible God, but God's passibility must be understood as divine passibility which is markedly different from the type of passibility observed in human

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[80]Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, XXX.

[81]Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 2, 16, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 309-10.

[82]Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 2, 16.

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The Patripassianist Controversy (Second and Third Century)

Tertullian and Hippolytus were two of the main proponents of orthodoxy in the patripassianist debate of the second and third centuries. Tertullian wrote an entire polemic, cited above, against Praxeas, a Patripassianist heretic, while Hippolytus wrote a shorter letter against the heretic, Noetus of Smyrna. Patripassianism is perhaps a misnomer for thinkers such as Praxeas and Noetus who would be more properly labeled "Modalists" or "Monarchians." The primary contention of Praxeas, at least in as much as we are able to derive it from the writings of Tertullian, is that

> Praxeas mantains that there is one only Lord, the Almighty Creator of the world, in order that out of this doctrine of the unity he may fabricate a heresy. He says that the Father Himself came down into the Virgin, was Himself born of her, Himself, suffered, indeed was Himself Jesus Christ.[83]

The major problem with Praxeas' view of the incarnation is that there is no distinction made between the Father and the Son. The name "patripassianist" comes from the logical inference that if God the Father and God the Son are the same person, then it must mean that God the Father suffered on the cross. This is, however, rather incidental to the patripassionist's position and is not their primary interest. The patripassionists are most concerned with maintaining the unity of the Godhead; their main fear was that of tritheism.[84]

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[83]Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, p. 597.

[84]This point is well illustrated in several sources: Marcel Sarot, "Patripassionism, Theopaschitism and the Suffering of God: Some Historical and Systematic Considerations," *Religious Studies* 26 (September 1990): 370, 372; Francios Varillon, *The Humility and Suffering of God*, trans. Nelly Marans (New York: Alba House, 1983), 147; T. Vincent Tymms, *The Christian Idea of Atonement* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1904), 311; David R. Mason, "Some Abstract, Yet Crucial, Thoughts about Suffering," *Dialog* 16 (Spring 1977): 93; Jung Young Lee, *God Suffers for Us: A Systematic Inquiry into a Concept of Divine Passibility* (The Hague, Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 36-37; and Peter R. Forster, "Divine Passibility and the Early

Marcel Sarot explains that the "patripassionists were accused of teaching that 'Pater passus est,' the Father Himself suffered on the cross." However, "it is not clear if the formula 'Pater passus est' has ever been used by a patripassian, and if so, by whom."[85] In fact, Sarot believes that the Patripassians would agree with their opponents that the divine nature, in itself, is impassible. He sees this to be implied in Praxeas' attempt to make a distinction between God the Father as a sufferer and God the Father as a fellow-sufferer.[86] Tertullian rejected this distinction as was explained above, but Sarot's understanding of this distinction is not necessarily nullified by Tertullian's argument. But then again, there are also passages in *Against Praxeas* which would imply that Praxeas thought that God the Father was capable of suffering such as the one cited above which claims that the "Father suffers," and the following: "In the course of time, then, the Father forsooth was born, and the Father suffered,--God Himself, the Lord Almighty, whom in their preaching they declare to be Jesus Christ."[87]

Whether or not Praxeas believed that God was passible, Tertullian's rebukes of the heretic deal almost exclusively with Praxeas' modalistic views and not with the contention that God the Father suffers. The following quote from Tertullian provides one example of this in which Tertullian also exposes some of his own subordinationist tendencies:

> Now, observe, my assertion is that the Father is one, and the Son one, and the Spirit one, and that They are distinct from Each Other. This statement is taken in a wrong sense by every uneducated as well as every perversely disposed person, as if it predicated a diversity, in such a sense as to imply a separation among the Father, and

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Christian Doctrine of God," in *The Power and the Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edingburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 49-50.

85Sarot, "Patripassianism," 369-70.

86Sarot, "Patripassianism," 369-70.

87Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 598.

> the Son, and the Spirit. I am, moreover, obliged to say this, when (extolling the *Monarchy* at the expense of the *Economy*) they contend for the identity of the Father and Son and Spirit, that it is not by way of diversity that the Son differs from the Father, but by distribution: it is not by division that He is different, but by distinction; because the Father is not the same as the Son, since they differ one from the other in the mode of their being. For the Father is the entire substance, but the Son is a derivation and portion of the whole, as he Himself acknowledges: "My Father is greater than I."[88]

In this argument, Tertullian is being careful to make divisions between the person of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In doing this, he goes further than the Nicene Creed will by making "divisions" between the three persons in God rather than the somewhat more delicate concept of "distinctions" that are made in the Nicene symbol of one substance and three hypostases. But, he is making the point that we cannot extol the Monarchy of God at the expense of the Economy of God. He is exhorting Praxeas to realize that God must be understood as a unity of three persons rather than one God who merely changes in mode or appearance in different circumstances. Thus, the Patripassianist controversy is best understood as a trinitarian controversy concerning the heresy of modalism or Sabellianism rather than as a controversy over the passibility of God.

This can also be seen in the work of Hippolytus against Noetus. It is a brief treatise in which he delineates the heresy of Noetus early on: "He alleged that Christ was the Father Himself, and that the Father Himself was born, and suffered, and died."[89] We observe Hippolytus refuting Noetus as a heretic who does not understand the trinitarian relationships rather than as one who is promoting the suffering of God:

> See, brethren, what a rash and audacious dogma they have introduced, when they say without shame, the Father is Himself Christ, Himself the Son, Himself was born, Himself suffered, Himself raised Himself. But it is not so. The Scriptures speak

[88]Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 603-04.

[89]Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of One Noetus*, 1, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951), 223.

> what is right; but Noetus is of a different mind from them. Yet, though Noetus does not understand the truth, the Scriptures are not at once to be repudiated. For who will not say that there is one God? Yet he will not on that account deny the economy (i.e., the number and disposition of persons in the Trinity).[90]

Hippolytus himself could be understood to someone who believes that God is passible, at least in the circumstances of the incarnation. His description of the way that God takes on human attributes in the incarnation implies that God is "in agony" during the time of the incarnation:

> Thus then, too, though demonstrated as God, He does not refuse the conditions proper to Him as man, since He hungers and toils and thirsts in weariness, and flees in fear, and prays in trouble. And He who as God has a sleepless nature, slumbers on a pillow. And He who for this end came into the world, begs off from the cup of suffering. And in agony He sweats, Himself strengthens those who believe on Him, and taught men to despise death by His word.[91]

Hence it should be clear that the main point of contention is not that of passibility or impassibility, but it is how the Trinity is to be understood.

Finally, it was the "Tome of Damascus" which emerged from the Council of Rome in 382 AD that condemned "patripassianism" as such by making a distinction between the two separate entities of "God Himself" and "the flesh and the soul, which Christ, the Son of God, had taken to Himself":

> If anyone says that in the passion of the cross it is God Himself who felt the pain and not the flesh and the soul which Christ, the Son of God, had taken to Himself--the form of servant which he had accepted as Scripture says (cf. Phil. 2:7)--he is mistaken.[92]

The main distinction that is being made here is that God Himself (the Father) is not the one who is going through the pain of the crucifixion. The one who is crucified and feeling pain

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[90]Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of One Noetus*, 3.

[91]Hippolytus, *Against the Heresy of One Noetus*, 18.

[92]As quoted in Alan Torrance, "Does God Suffer?" in *Christ in Our Place*, ed. T. Hart and D. Thimell, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 25 (Allison Park, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Publications, 1989), 347.

is the flesh and soul that the Son of God has taken on. It is possible that one may infer from this resolution that God is impassible, but it is not explicit, nor was it intended to be. The passibility of God is not the main issue in this controversy; the nature of the Trinity and how that relates to the incarnation is the crux of the matter. Thus, the present day question of the impassibility of God is different from this ancient controversy by virtue of the fact that the distinction between the Persons of the Trinity is not part of the present debate. Instead, the question is whether or not God is really capable of suffering in some sense.

Origen (ca. 185-ca. 253)

Origen gives us perhaps the strongest assertion of the passibility of God that we have in ancient literature if it can be taken at face value; however, he also affirms the opposite. In his sermons on Ezekiel, he states

> He came down to earth in pity for human kind, he endured our passions and sufferings before he suffered the cross, and he deigned to assume our flesh. For if he had not suffered we would not have entered into full participation in human life. He first suffered, then he came down and was manifested. What is that passion which he suffered for us? It is the passion of love. The Father himself and the God of the whole universe is "longsuffering, full of mercy and pity." Must he not then, in some sense, be exposed to suffering? So you must realize that in his dealing with men he suffers human passions. "For the Lord thy God bare thy ways, even as a man bears his own son." Thus God bears our ways, just as the son of God bears our "passions." The Father himself is not impassible. If he is besought he shows pity and compassion; he feels, in some sort, the passion of love, and is exposed to what he cannot be exposed to in respect of his greatness, and for us men he endures the passions of mankind.[93]

This passage gives one the impression of a God who is clearly passible before, during, and after the incarnation because he loves sinners and has pity on them.

However, it is not clear that we may take Origen's words literally. He tempers them in a different sermon on Numbers 23. After making the assertion that "men's sins afflict with grief even God himself," and adding several examples, he qualifies it with the

[93]Origen, *Homilies on Ezekiel*, 6:6, as quoted in Henry Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers* (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 256-57.

following retainer:

> Now all these passages where God is said to lament, or rejoice, or hate, or be glad, are to be understood as spoken by Scripture in metaphorical and human fashion. For the divine nature is remote from all affection of passion and change, remaining ever unmoved and untroubled in its own summit of bliss.[94]

Again in *De Principiis*, Origen makes a similar statement while he is attempting to demonstrate to Marcion-type dualists that the God of the Old Testament and New Testament are the same. He explains that the wrath or repentance of God must be understood figuratively:

> When we read either in the Old Testament or in the New of the anger of God, we do not take such expressions literally, but seek in them a spiritual meaning, that we may think of God as He deserves to be thought of.[95]

Also in his work, *Against Celsus*, Origen describes the wrath of God as no indication of "passion" on His part, "but something which is assumed in order to discipline by stern means those sinners who have committed many and grievous sins."[96] Thus, Origen makes a case for the genuine passibility of God, but also wants to say that the references to God in Scripture that attribute emotions such as wrath, sadness, rejoicing, or gladness must be understood figuratively or metaphorically. It is also certainly possible that one is to understand the Ezekiel 6:6 passage as an accommodation to our human understanding; however, the language in that text does not easily lead one to believe that Origen is speaking allegorically there.

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[94]Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, 23:2, as quoted in Henry Bettenson, *The Early Christian Fathers*, 257-58.

[95]Origen, *De Principiis*, II, 4.iv, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, in *Fathers of the Third Century*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 277-78.

[96]Origen, *Against Celsus*, IV, 72 in *ANF* , vol. 4.

Gregory Thaumaturgus (ca. 213-ca. 260)

One of Origen's students, Gregory Thaumaturgus (ca. 213 - 260 AD), writes the first systematic treatment of the subject of the passibility of God in a treatise entitled, *Ad Theopompum*. In this work, Gregory states that God remains impassible even in healing the wicked thoughts of humanity by taking the sin of the world upon himself.

> Suffering, then is truly suffering when God plans anything useless and of no advantage to Himself. But when the divine will is aroused with a view to the healing of the wicked thoughts of men, then we do not think of suffering as involved for God in the fact that of His supreme humility and kindness He becomes the servant of men. . . . In God those are not to be accounted as sufferings which of His own will were born by Him for the common good of the human race, with no resistance from His most blessed and impassible nature. For in His suffering He shows His impassibility. For he who suffers suffers, when the violence of suffering brings pressure to bear on him who suffers contrary to his will. But of him who while his nature remains impassible, is of his own will immersed in sufferings that he may overcome them, we do not say that he becomes subject to suffering, even though, of his own will, he has shared in sufferings.[97]

Gregory explains that God could only experience suffering if He were to have negative feelings or pain contrary to His own will, but that which God experiences according to His own will cannot be classified as suffering because He does not become subject to the suffering. Gregory makes a distinction here that has become more common in recent theology concerning the passibility of God. He states that if God chooses to suffer, then he is not subject to the suffering that he has chosen to bear. In choosing to suffer, God exercises freedom in suffering, and God takes on suffering to overcome it. Thus, God's suffering has a redemptive quality.

In fact, God conquers suffering by means of his impassibility. Just as God is the "death of death," He is also the "cause of suffering to suffering."

> For He who cannot suffer became the (cause of) suffering to the sufferings, by bringing suffering upon them through His suffering, and showing His freedom from suffering in His suffering. . . . When therefore we say that sufferings were overcome through his working, from the fact that He the Impassible became a sharer

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[97]Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Ad Theopompum*, as quoted in J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 66-67.

> in them, what else are we saying than that He was the cause of suffering to sufferings?[98]

The relation of God to suffering is thus described as a relation not of subjection but of triumph.[99]

In Gregory's discussion of impassibility it seems that the concept of impassibility is intermingled with that of immutability as I have defined the two terms above. "Impassibility," in this context, does not simply mean that which has to do with the capacity for suffering or passions, but there is a sense of changelessness that is being preserved in the notion of impassibility. Gregory gives the example of fire that remains the same and is not cut apart by a sword, even "though body passes through body" in order to illustrate that God is not changed by the suffering he experiences. So it is not the capacity for suffering which is denied, but the claim that suffering is able to affect God's nature in some way. There is also the significant point that by choosing to undergo suffering rather than having it thrust on him by any external factors, God avoids suffering--according to Gregory's definition.

Lactantius (ca. 240-ca. 320)

Gregory's fine distinctions are of no matter for both Novatian[100] (d. 258) and Arnobius[101] (d. ca. 330), who argue in a very Hellenistic vein that emotions necessarily entail corruptibility. Thus, God cannot have emotions or be passible because this is

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98Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Ad Theopompum*, as quoted in J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 66-67.

99J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 67.

100Novatian, *De Trinitate*, 4.

101Arnobius, *Adversus nationes*, I, 18.

equivalent to change and change will inevitably lead to corruptibility and death. Lactantius, a pupil of Arnobius, argues that just the opposite is true. Hallman summarizes Lactantius' thought as follows:

> Corruptibility belongs to the unfeeling being. To be absolutely at rest (*quietus*) is to be dead. God is eternally alive and never at rest in His divine governance. Therefore he is not corrupted precisely because he has emotions.[102]

Lactantius' description of God in his *Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, does not appear to be much different from one his teacher might have written :

> There is then one God, perfect, eternal, incorruptible (*incorruptibilis*), passionless (*impassibilis*), subject to no circumstance or power (*nulli rei potestative subjectus*); possessing all things, ruling all things, one whom the mind of man cannot assess nor mortal tongue describe.[103]

However, it is obvious from his writings that Lactantius does not understand *"impassibilis"* to be exclusive of emotions; hence, it is better understood as it is translated above, "passionless." God is not ruled by passions, but he is capable of having emotions. God is also engaged in constant movement and activity. The concept that dictates Lactantius' theology is the providence of God, and it is from this vantage point that he argues against the notion of απαθεια that was embraced by his teacher, Arnobius. He writes:

> Everlasting rest, therefore, belongs to death alone. But if death does not touch God, then God is never at rest. And when can the activity of God be, therefore, except the administration of the world?[104]

Lactantius' treatise, *The Wrath of God*, is devoted to showing that "loving good comes from the hatred of evil, and hatred of evil comes from loving good. The two cannot

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[102]Hallman, "The Mutability of God: Tertullian to Lactantius," 391.

[103]Lactantius, *The Epitome of the Divine Institutes*, 3. This translation comes from E. H. Blakeney (London: S.P.C.K., 1950), 63.

[104]Lactantius, *The Wrath of God*, 17, in *Lactantius: The Minor Works*, Sister Mary Francis McDonald, trans., in Roy Joseph Deferrari et al., *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1965), 99.

be separated."[105] He argues in the following manner:

> For if God is not angry with the impious and the unjust, then, to be sure, neither does He love the pious and the just. . . . For, in opposite things, it is necessary either to be moved toward each side or toward neither. Thus he who loves the good also hates the evil, and he who does not hate the evil does not love the good, because, on one hand, to love the good comes from hatred of evil, and to hate the evil rises from love of the good. There is no one who loves life without hatred of death, and no one seeks light but he who flees darkness; for those things are so connected by nature that one cannot exist without the other.[106]

In this way, Lactantius shows that it is not proper to think of God in the mode of the Greek ideal of perfection--as immobile or as impassible in the sense of not being able to experience emotion. Hallman rightly observes:

> The Christian understanding of providence and divine personhood cannot be rendered in a consistent and meaningfully religious way if one adheres strictly to the Middle Platonist or Epicurean conception of God's transcendent immutability. Lactantius saw this quite clearly, as did Tertullian.[107]

Thus, Lactantius' works acted as corrective measures for the Church by moving the perception of God from one in which the Greek philosophical aspects of deity were being emphasized and into one moderated by scriptural material.

Nicene and Post-Nicene Era

The Nicene and Post-Nicene Eras are the most doctrinally important periods in the history of the Christian Faith. The foundations of trintarian and christological thought were being hammered out in great debates at widely attended councils and were codified for the entire Christian world. The resultant decisions of God being three persons in one substance, and of Jesus Christ being one person in two natures were not gained without

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[105]Sister Mary Francis McDonald, trans., *Lactantius, The Minor Works*, in Roy Joseph Deferrari et al., *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1965), 59.

[106]Lactantius, *The Wrath of God*, 5.

[107]Hallman, "The Mutability of God: Tertullian to Lactantius," 392.

some contemplation about the subject of the passibility of God. The issue of whether God the Father is able to suffer in the crucifixion of the Son was raised by the Arians in the Trinitarian Controversy and the issue of how it was possible for Jesus Christ, the God-man, to suffer and die was a seminal one in the Christological controversy. Consequently, the same great theologians who formulated the orthodoxy of the Christian faith had to wrestle with the issue of the passibility of God.

Athanasius (ca. 296-373)

Athanasius, a prominent defender of what came to be known as orthodox trinitarian theology, attempts to describe the relationship between the impassibility of God and the suffering of Christ by first defining the term "impassibility" in terms of "passions," rather than emotions generally and then by drawing a distinct line between the divine and human natures in Christ. One may discern his understanding of impassibility from the following passage:

> Let no one then stumble at what belongs to man, but rather let a man know that in nature the Word Himself is impassible, and yet because of that flesh which He put on, these things are ascribed to Him, since they are proper to the flesh, and the body itself is proper to the Saviour. And which He Himself, being impassible in nature, remains as He is, not harmed by these affections, but rather obliterating and destroying them, men, their passions as if changed and abolished in the Impassible, henceforth become themselves also impassible and free from them for ever.[108]

Athanasius is saying that Christ has affections that belong to a man but is not harmed by them--rather he obliterates them. He claims that men may also become impassible in the same sense if their passions are abolished in the impassible. Thus, passions are at the heart of what Athanasius understands impassibility to be about. Hence, we may surmise that Athanasius' understanding of impassibility is not so concerned with the capacity for

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[108]Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, XXVI, 34, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 412.

suffering or emotion as it is with the capacity to sin or resist sin. He will readily admit that God suffered in the flesh, but he maintains the impassibility of God by virtue of the fact that God does not participate in the passions of fallen human beings. It also seems evident that he is very optimistic about the potential for human beings to become impassible in this same sense. He believes that human nature, not only in Christ but also in fallen human beings, may become impassible if one is able to abolish all passions from his or her life through Christ.

Yet, even with such a high view of the potential of human nature to become impassible, he feels compelled to make sharp distinctions in the life of Christ between those acts and feelings which should be attributed to his humanity and those that should be attributed to his deity. Christ acted, hungered, thirsted, and suffered by means of his human nature within the confines of his fleshly body, but the miracles he performed while he inhabited his human body were through his divine nature. He gives several examples in the following passages:

> He became man, and 'bodily,' as the Apostle says, the Godhead dwelt in the flesh; as much as to say, "Being God, He had His own body, and using this as an instrument, He became man for our sakes." And on account of this, the properties of the flesh are said to be His, since He was in it, such as to hunger, to thirst, to suffer, to weary, and the like, of which the flesh is capable; while on the other hand the works proper to the Word Himself, such as to raise the dead, to restore sight to the blind, and to cure the woman with an issue of blood, He did through His own body. And the Word bore the infirmities of the flesh, as His own, for His was the flesh; and the flesh ministered to the works of the Godhead, because the Godhead was in it, for the body was God's. And well has the Prophet said "carried;" and has not said "He remedied our infirmities," lest, as being external to the body, and only healing it, as He has always done, He should leave men subject still to death; but He carries our infirmities, and He Himself bears our sins, that it might be shewn that He has become man for us, and that the body which in Him bore them, was His own body.[109]

> Whence it was that, when the flesh suffered, the Word was not external to it; and therefore is the passion said to be His: and when He did divinely His Father's words, the flesh was not external to Him, but in the body itself did the Lord do them. . . . And thus when there was need to raise Peter's wife's mother, who was sick of a

[109]Athanasius, *Discourse Against the Arians III*, 31.

> fever, He stretched forth His hand humanly, but He stopped the illness divinely. And in the case of the man blind from the birth, human was the spittle which He gave forth from the flesh, but divinely did He open the eyes through the clay. And in the case of Lazarus, He gave forth a human voice, as man; but divinely, as God, did He raise Lazarus from the dead.[110]

It is very clear to Athanasius that the different acts that Christ performed while he was on this earth can be attributed to either the human or divine nature of Christ. These distinctions are also made by Athanasius in regard to the suffering of Christ on the cross in such a way that the humanity of Christ is not a body in appearance only but in truth with all the affections that are proper to a human body:[111]

> If then the body had been another's, to him too had been the affections attributed; but if the flesh is the Word's (for "the Word became flesh"), of necessity then the affections also of the flesh are ascribed to Him, whose the flesh is. And to whom the affections are ascribed, such namely as to be condemned, to be scourged, to thirst, and the cross, and death, and the other infirmities of the body, of Him too is the triumph and the grace. For this cause then, consistently and fittingly such affections are ascribed not to another, but to the Lord; that the grace also may be from Him, and that we may become, not worshippers of any other, but truly devout towards God, because we invoke no originate thing, no ordinary man, but the natural and true Son from God, who has become man, yet is not the less Lord and God and Saviour.[112]

In this way, Athanasius attempts to maintain the impassibility of God while portraying how it is that he could take on flesh and die on a cross. The bodily affections are correctly ascribed to the Lord because what is not assumed by the Lord cannot be saved, but these affections must be understood as not disturbing the divine nature of Christ. It is Christ who truly suffers, but he received "no hurt Himself by 'bearing our sins in His body on the tree.'"[113] The Son of God has truly become man, and emotions and affections are rightly

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[110]Athanasius, *Discourse Against the Arians III*, 32.

[111]Athanasius, *Discourse Against the Arians III*, 32.

[112]Athanasius, *Discourse Against the Arians III*, 32.

[113]Athanasius, *Discourse Against the Arians III*, 31.

ascribed to him, but he is not less than God and Savior. Athanasius wants to assign human emotions and affections to Christ, but wants to protect the divinity of Christ from suffering.

Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315-367)

Hilary of Poitiers takes a similar position to that of Athanasius in regard to the suffering of Christ. In his work, *On the Trinity*, he explains the singular nature of the body that belonged to Jesus.

> So the Man Jesus Christ, Only-begotten God, as flesh and as Word at the same time Son of Man and Son of God, without ceasing to be Himself, that is, God, took true humanity after the likenss of our humanity. But when, in this humanity, He was struck with blows, or smitten with wounds, or bound with ropes, or lifted on high, He felt the force of suffering, but without its pain. . . . So our Lord Jesus Christ suffered blows, hanging, crucifixion and death: but the suffering which attacked the body of the Lord, without ceasing to be suffering, had not the natural effect of suffering. It exercised its function of punishment with all its violence; but the body of Christ by its virtue suffered the violence of punishment, without its consciousness.[114]

Hilary states that God had a body that actually suffered, but his nature prevented him from feeling pain.[115] He also explains the fact that Jesus' manifestation of weeping, and his taking food and drink were not necessary for him, but it was a concession to our own habits:

> His weeping was not for Himself; His thirst needed no water to quench it; His hunger no food to stay it. It is never said that the Lord ate or drank or wept when He was hungry, or thirsty, or sorrowful. He conformed to the habits of the body to prove the reality of His own body, to satisfy the custom of human bodies by doing as our nature does.[116]

Hilary echoes much of what Clement of Alexandria had stated in regard to the necessity of

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[114]Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, X, 23, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *St. Hilary of Poitiers Select Works*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 87-88.

[115]Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, X, 23.

[116]Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity*, X, 24.

nourishment for the body of Christ. He also argues from an *a priori* position that because Jesus was able to heal infirmities that he would not be able to feel pain.[117] He states that the divinity of Christ is able to feel the force of suffering without feeling the pain of it. Hilary's line of thinking leans very far toward docetism.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389)

Gregory of Nazianzus, one of the three Cappadocian Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa and Basil the Great being the other two), makes a clear distinction between the divine and human natures of Christ, asserting that the flesh is capable of suffering, but that the spirit or soul of Christ is not capable of receiving any harm. He affirms this doctrine in response to the Arian threat. The Arians had no problem saying that Christ was capable of suffering in his divine nature because, for them, he was the Son of God, preexistent but not eternal, who had taken flesh to himself and was thus not essentially divine. And if he was not essentially divine, then he was not essentially impassible either.[118] In a letter to Cledonius, Gregory writes:

> For we do not sever the Man from the Godhead, but we lay down as a dogma the Unity and Identity of Person, Who of old was not Man but God, and the Only Son before all ages, unmingled with body or anything corporeal; but Who in these last days has assumed Manhood also for our salvation; passible in His Flesh, impassible in His Godhead; circumscript in the body, uncircumscript in the Spirit; at once earthly and heavenly, tangible and intangible, comprehensible and incomprehensible; that by One and the Same Person, Who was perfect Man and also God the entire humanity fallen through sin might be created anew.[119]

Gregory uses the term "unmingled" in his description of the human and divine natures of

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[117]J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 103.

[118]J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 87.

[119]Gregory Nazianzus, *Letters of Saint Gregory Nazianzen*, Ep. CI., in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory of Nazianzen: Orations, Letters, Sermons*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 439.

Christ that would later be approved by the Church in the Chalcedonian Creed of 451AD. He wants to presume the impassibility of the divine nature, but he emphasized the unity of the two natures of Christ in the one person. He gives us one of the first explanations as to why it is that the human nature may be capable of suffering while the divine nature is not when he asserts that the two natures must be unmingled or unmixed in the incarnation of Christ.

Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-ca. 395)

Gregory of Nyssa, a second Cappadocian Father, also makes the delineation between the humanity and deity of Christ. He recognizes that one cannot attribute the salvation of humanity to a mere man, but neither can one admit that the Divine Nature is corruptible, capable of suffering and mortality. However, it is clear that the Scriptures describe the Word as being God in the beginning and also as one who took on flesh and came to earth to dwell with human beings.[120] To deal with this dilemma, Gregory makes distinctions very similar to those made by Athanasius. He states that

> the teaching of the Gospel concerning our Lord is mingled, partly of lofty and Divine ideas, partly of those which are lowly and human, we assign every particular phrase accordingly to one or other of these Natures which we conceive in the mystery, that which is human to the Humanity, that which is lofty to the Godhead, and say that, as God, the Son is certainly impassible and incapable of corruption: and whatever suffering is asserted concerning Him in the Gospel, He assuredly wrought by means of His Human Nature which admitted of such suffering. For verily the Godhead works the salvation of the world by means of that body which encompassed It, in such wise that the suffering was of the body, but the operation was of God.[121]

Thus, it is the body which is crucified through weakness, dies unto sin, and is made sin for us, while the Divine Nature is that in Christ which lives by power, that which lives unto God,

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[120]Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, VI, 1.

[121]Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, VI, 1.

and that which does not admit the suffering of death.[122]

Gregory explains that the Human nature is glorified by the Son's assumption of it and the Divine is not polluted by its condescension,[123] but there is a commixture of the human and divine elements that results in the God-man who is Jesus Christ.

> He Who knew not sin becomes sin, that He may take away the sin of the World, so on the other hand the flesh which received the Lord becomes Christ and Lord, being transformed by the commixture into that which it was not by nature: whereby we learn that neither would God have been manifested in the flesh, had not the Word been made flesh, nor would the human flesh that compassed Him about have been transformed to what is Divine, had not that which was apparent to the senses become Christ and Lord.[124]

Thus, for Gregory, the Divine Nature cannot suffer, but the human nature of Christ can suffer. Again there is a protection of the divine nature against corruption or suffering, but also a sense in which the flesh and divine nature cannot be separated. The body of Christ is flesh that is transformed by the the Divine Nature.

Augustine of Hippo (354-430)

Augustine deals with the impassibility of God on the level of the divine nature rather than relating it primarily to the suffering of Christ on the cross. He wants to affirm both that "no one can hurt the nature of God"[125] and that it is possible to ascribe certain ethical attitudes and outgoings of will to God which are properly describable as anger, repentance,

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[122]Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, VI, 1.

[123]Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, VI, 2.

[124]Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, VI, 4.

[125]Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of the Good, Against the Manichees*, I, 40, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Writings in Connection with the Manichaean Controversy*, vol. 4, trans. Richard Stothert and Albert H. Newman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 359.

pity, and so on.[126] Augustine always begins with the assumption that God is impassible and moves from this presupposition to statements about the emotional capacities of God.

For Augustine, the concept of passibility does not mainly concern the capacity to have emotions, but it has to do with "a commotion of the mind contrary to reason."[127] Hence, Augustine concludes that passibility and a state of blessedness are contrary to one another. He argues much in the same line as Tertullian had that the emotions of God cannot be understood in the same way that human emotions are understood. He explains this in his treatise, *On Patience*, as follows:

> So, although in God there can be no suffering, and "patience" hath its name *a patiendo*, from suffering, yet a patient God we not only faithfully believe, but also wholesomely confess. But the patience of God, of what kind and how great it is, His, whom we say to be impassible, yet not impatient, nay even most patient, in words to unfold this who can be able? Ineffable is therefore that patience, as is His jealousy, as His wrath, and whatever there is like to these. For if we conceive of these as they be in us, in Him are there none. We, namely, can feel none of these without molestation: but be it far from us to surmise that the impassible nature of God is liable to any molestation. But like as He is jealous without any darkening of spirit, wroth without any perturbation, pitiful without any pain, repenteth Him without any wrongness in Him to be set right; so is He patient without aught of passion.[128]

Thus, Augustine leaves us with the understanding that God is not able to suffer, but that he is able to have emotions like jealousy, pity, and wrath. However, God experiences these emotions without any kind of perturbation or molestation of his being. Emotions are ascribed to God metaphorically. Emotions are not able to control God; God is not swayed or changed by emotion, but only by His own perfect plan.

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[126]J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 109.

[127]Augustine, *The City of God*, VIII, 17, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *St. Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, vol. 2, trans. Marcus Dods (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 156.

[128]Augustine, *On Patience*, I, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *St. Augustine: On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises*, vol. 3, trans. H. Brown (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 527.

In regard to repentance, Augustine explains that God does not suffer the pain of repentance as human beings do. It is called repentance in the Bible, but it is not quite the same as that of a human. Humans repent because they have erred, when God repents he frees or avenges. Augustine states:

> When therefore He changeth His works through His immutable counsel, He is said to repent on account of this very change, not of His counsel, but of His work. But He promised this so as not to change it.[129]

So then, God is able to repent without regret or remorse. Repentance does not change God's plan, but his works are changed. Humans repent to change themselves, God repents to change the lives of human beings. For Augustine, God is able to have emotions and repent, but he is not passible in the sense that passions are able to influence the person of God to be overwhelmed or to act out of emotion rather than out of his plan. Augustine does not pretend that we are able to grasp how it is that God experiences emotions; that, he says, is ineffable. We are left with the assurance from Augustine that God does have them, but that they are different from our experience. He tells us that all that God is, he is as God[130] and leaves it at that. He allows emotions to be ascribed to God that the Greek conception of God would not allow,but he denies that they have any real feeling is appropriate to the divine immutable essence.

The feelings of God that are portrayed in the Bible are problematic for Augustine. Hallman suggests that Augustine can see the limitations of Platonism when he is discussing the incarnation. "Augustine has grasped precisely that the core of Christian faith is an

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[129]Augustine, *On the Psalms*, CXXXII, 11, in *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms By Saint Augustine*, vol. 8, A. Cleveland Coxe, ed., trans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 619.

[130]Augustine, *Cont. adv. leg. et prophet.*, I, 40, as quoted in J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 107.

acceptance of the divine kenosis in Jesus of Nazareth."[131] He plainly sees that the God of Platonism is only partially identified with the God the Christian faith, but in regard to the emotions of God, he is completely content to side with a philosophical interpretation of God's affections.[132] Thus, if he had realized the limitations of Platonism in regard to emotions, he may have been more comfortable assigning them to God.

Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444)

Cyril gives us a more Christologically centered view of passibility again. His letter on the Creed of the Fathers at Nicea explains that the impassible Son suffers.[133]

> Accordingly, following in the footsteps of the confession of the Fathers without deviation we say that the very Word of God the Father, begotten as the only begotten Son, was incarnate, and was made man, suffered, died, and rose from the dead on the third day. The Word of God is impassible confessedly as far as pertains to his own nature as the Word of God. No one is so thunderstruck as to think that the nature which is over all things is able to be receptive of suffering. But because he became man by having made his own the flesh from the Holy Virgin, for this reason we stoutly maintain, following the plans of the Incarnation that he who is God was beyond suffering, suffered in his own flesh as a human being. If he became man, being God, in no way did he cease being God. If he became creation, he also remained above creation.[134]

It is clear that Cyril is making a distinction between the human and divine natures of Christ to deal with the passibility problem. God, who is beyond suffering, suffered in his own flesh. He suffers in the flesh that he takes on through the incarnation, but his divine nature is not receptive to suffering. In this way, the Son suffers impassibly.

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[131]Hallman, *The Descent of God,* 107.

[132]Halllman, *The Desent of God*, 108.

[133]Cyril of Alexandria, *Letters*, 64.3, in *St. Cyril of Alexandria, Letters 51-110*, trans. John I. McEnerney, in Thomas P. Halton et. al., ed., *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press), 53.

[134]Cyril of Alexandria, *Letters*, 55.33,

The Theopaschite Controversy (Sixth Century)

The term "theopaschitism" is frequently misunderstood in modern theology. It is often confused with the heretical doctrine of monophysitism, that is, that God *simpliciter* or God in his divine nature suffered. It is believed to have been condemned, which is true--theopaschitism was condemned several times, but it was ultimately accepted as orthodoxy.[135] Theopaschitism "should be used only to denote the theological position according to which the incarnate Logos suffered."[136]

The Theopaschite Controversy formally begins in the court in Constantinople in 518 AD when a Scythian Monk named John Maxentius proposed a solution to a controversy that the monks were having with Paternus, bishop of Tomi. This solution included what came to be known as the theopaschite formula: "one of the Trinity was crucified. . .". This formula was immediately denounced in the Constantinopolitan court. In 519 AD, John Maxentius and other monks went to Rome to plead their case, but they were unsuccessful there also and were expelled after a fourteen month stay.[137] A similar formula had been used by Peter Fuller in Antioch as early as 470 AD, and this same formula was later introduced into the Trisagion[138] at Constantinople in 511 by the Monophysites, but it was

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135Sarot, "Patripassianism," 373-74.

136Sarot, "Patripassianism," 375.

137Patrick T. R. Gray, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East (451-533)*, vol. XX , in Heiko A. Oberman et. al. ed., *Studies In the History of Christian Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 48-49.

138The doxological chant "Holy God, holy and mighty, holy and immortal, have mercy upon us," was introduced into the Greek liturgy by Proclus of Constantinople (d. 446), and it made its way eventually into the Roman liturgy for Good Friday. Joseph F. Kelly, *The Concise Dictionary of Early Christianity* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 177.

not well received in either case and was rejected and ultimately not allowed to be incorporated into the Trisagion.

However, there was a crucial difference between the earlier attempts of Peter Fuller and the Monophysites and that of John Maxentius to use the theopaschite formula. The earlier usages of this formula were anti-Chalcedonian while Maxentius and his friends wanted to use the formula in defense of Chalcedon. In the view of Maxentius and the Scythian Monks, "Chalcedon had been wrongly defended, wrongly expounded, so that it did not clearly stand against Nestorianism."[139] They thought that their use of the theopaschite formula would help expound the Chalcedonian Creed in a more anti-Nestorian way and bring out its teaching about the unity of the person of Christ.

In 533, Justinian declared that the formula proposed by the Scythian Monks was a necessary part of the the Chalcedonian and orthodox faith. Violent opposition was immediately posed by the Acoimetae, a group of monks who defended the Chalcedonian Creed against Monophysitism, but Justinian knew that he could count on support from Pope John II in Rome. He got this support in the form of a letter that recognized Justinian's orthodoxy and condemned the Acoimetae for their Nestorianism.

This controversy was finally settled in 553 at the Council of Constantinople where the theopaschite formula was accepted. In accepting this formula, the Church was accepting the "idea that Christ, who is truly God, has been crucified 'in the flesh.'" However, this was not equivalent to claiming that Christ in his divine nature was passible.[140] In this council, the statements of Cyril and many others are codified as orthodox Christian belief: Christ suffered in his human nature, but he remained impassible in his divine nature.

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[139]Gray, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East*, 49.

[140]Marc Steen, "The Theme of the 'Suffering' God," in Jan Lambrecht and Raymond F. Collins, ed., *God and Human Suffering* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Press, 1990), 70.

Sarot points out that the theopaschite formula is both a christological and a theological formula.

> It does not say that God simpliciter "*passus est*" or that the Divinity "*passus est*"; the formula is about the incarnate Second Person of the Trinity, who suffered "carne" or "secundum carnem." The formula allows us to say that the human nature of Jesus suffered, that the Second Person of the Trinity suffered, that the Logos incarnate suffered, but *not* that the divine nature of Jesus suffered.[141]

The theopaschite formula then allows one to assert that the flesh of the Logos incarnate is able to suffer, but the divinity of Christ is impassible. This is done in the context of the Chalcedonian Creed which affirms that Christ is one person with two natures, truly God and truly man.

The emphasis in this formula is clearly on the physical nature of the suffering of Christ or the kind of suffering that is related to the flesh. And it seems true enough to say that the divine nature of Christ cannot suffer physical pain. However, it is contradictory, confusing, and even Nestorian to try to separate the suffering of the flesh from the suffering of the divinity of Christ, if Christ is, in fact, one person. The statements that the "Logos incarnate suffered" and that the "second person of the Trinity suffered" imply that Christ suffered, and that when he suffered, he was both human and divine. A divine nature, which is defined as a set of attributes, cannot logically be said to suffer anything; but, the incarnate Son of God, who is defined as one person with two natures, had the capacity to suffer and did suffer according to Scripture.

John of Damascus (ca. 675-ca. 749)

In his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith,* John of Damascus writes about the impassibility of the divine nature in general, and he affirms the theopaschite decision in his explanation of how it is that the Son is capable of suffering. In regard to the general

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[141]Sarot, "Patripassianism," 373.

impassibility of God, he relates that "God is subject neither to envy nor passion."[142] He says that God's impassibility is a result of God's incorporeality and simplicity.[143] He defines passion broadly as "an animal affection which is succeeded by pleasure and pain." With reference to the body, passions allude to wounds or diseases; in regard to the soul, passion means anger or desire.[144] Thus, for John of Damascus, "impassibility" explicitly refers to an absence of "passions" in God.

In Book III, he explains how Christ is capable of suffering. He states:

> The Word of God then itself endured all in the flesh, while His divine nature which alone was passionless remained void of passion. For since the one Christ, Who is a compound of divinity and humanity, and exists in divinity and humanity, truly suffered, that part which is capable of passion suffered as it was natural it should, but that part which was void of passion did not share in the suffering. For the soul, indeed, since it is capable of passion shares in the pain and suffering of a bodily cut, though it is not cut itself but only the body: but the divine part which is void of passion does not share in the suffering of the body.[145]

He affirms the aforementioned theopaschite decision by explaining that one is rightly able to say that "God suffered in the flesh" and that the soul is capable of passion and shares in the pain but not that "His divinity suffered in the flesh, or that God suffered through the flesh."[146] He offers an analogy of a tree that is in the sunshine. If the tree is cleaved by an axe, the sun is not harmed by this. "Much more" he says, "will the passionless divinity of the Word, united in subsistence to the flesh, remain void of passion when the body

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142John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, I, 1, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *St. Hilary of Poitiers, John of Damascus*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1955), 1.

143John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, I, 4 and 8.

144John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, I, 22.

145John of Damascus, *Expositon of the Orthodox Faith*, III, 26.

146John of Damascus, *Expositon of the Orthodox Faith*, III, 26.

undergoes passion." He submits a second analogy of flaming steel that is drenched by water. The steel remains unharmed though the flame is extinguished. "Much more, then, when the flesh suffered did His only passionless divinity escape all passion although abiding inseparable from it."[147] Christ suffered in the flesh, but not in his divine nature as the sun is not harmed by the felling of a tree in the sun and steel remains unharmed though the flame or heat in it is extinguished. In this way, John of Damascus explains how one is able to speak of the suffering of Christ while holding to the decision made at the Council of Constantinople in 553 AD.

Christian Scholasticism

Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury (1033-1109)

Anselm does not leave as much room for any kind of passibility in God as John of Damascus had. He dedicates a short section of the *Proslogion* to this problem in which he explains how it is that God may be both compassionate and impassible. He recognizes that to be compassionate is by definition to experience, through sympathy, the wretchedness of someone else's heart in your own. But God cannot do this because he is incapable of suffering with others if he is truly impassible. Yet, the wretched are consoled. How can they experience consolation and peace, if God is not the one consoling them? He answers that God is compassionate in such a way that human beings are consoled, but God is not affected in himself by the wretchedness of humanity. He explains:

> Yes, thou art compassionate according to our sense, but not according to thine. For when thou lookest upon us, wretched as we are, we feel the effect of thy compassion, but thou dost not feel emotion. So, then, thou art compassionate, because thou savest the wretched and sparest those who sin against thee, and yet thou art not

[147] John of Damascus, *Expositon of the Orthodox Faith*, III, 26.

compassionate, because thou art not affected by any share in our wretchedness.[148] Sarot says that Anselm's is the classic solution to the problem of how to solve God's "impassible compassion."

> The compassion of God thus is situated not in God's inner life, but in our experience of His perfect benevolence. . . . Therefore, it is by no means surprising that we experience Him as compassionate when He in fact is not.[149]

Kenneth Surin thinks that Anselm's idea of God's compassion is fundamentally flawed. He asserts that if God cannot experience compassion, then he cannot experience the joy that comes from the transforming use of this compassion either. He thinks that Anselm has fallen into a misconception of God's compassion because of his reliance on Greek philosophy. He states:

> The source of this misconception is fairly clear: it lies in the neo-Platonic doctrine that if God is a Perfect Being then he cannot respond to imperfect beings like human wretches. For if he did, then the plenitude of his being would be diminished by the non-being of these wretches. Impassibility is therefore required by the perfection and omnipotence of deity. At an intuitive level, this view is not very plausible. For the more powerful one is, or the more being one has, the more responsive one is.[150]

But on the contrary, it is not clear that Anselm believes that God would be diminished by a response to wretches when he is also willing to save and spare them because it would seem that saving wretches and sparing sinners would require some kind of response or action toward non-perfect beings on God's part. Neither is it clear that a response from God to an imperfect being would require any change in God's being. It could be that Anselm is trying

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[148]Anselm, *Proslogion*, 8, in Eugene R. Fairweather, ed. and trans., *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, vol. 10, in John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen, eds., *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 78.

[149]Marcel Sarot, "Auschwitz, Morality and the Suffering of God (Divine Passibility Needed but Not Proven)," *Modern Theology* 7 (January 1991): 147.

[150]Kenneth Surin, "The Impassibility of God and the Problem of Evil," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 35 (1982): 113.

to retain God's sovereignty by not allowing Him to be influenced at all by outside causes rather than that he is being unduly influenced by neo-Platonism.

In *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm speaks of the immutability of God in relation to the incarnation of Christ. He also makes the common division between the human and divine natures in Christ in order to explain the suffering of Christ:

> For we affirm without any doubt that the divine nature is impassible, and that it can in no sense be brought down from its loftines or toil in what it wills to do. But we say that the Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true man, one person in two natures and two natures in one person. Thus, when we say that God bears humiliation or weakness, we do not apply this to the sublimity of the impassible nature, but to the weakness of the human substance which he bore, and so we know no reason that opposes our faith. For we do not ascribe any debasement to the divine substance, but we show that there is one person, God and man. Therefore, in the incarnation of God we do not suppose that he undergoes any debasement, but we believe that the nature of man is exalted.[151]

Divine substance cannot be debased, but there is one person, God and man. It is not clear how Anselm sees the final sentence of the quoted section following from the former comments. Anselm then, it would seem, holds that impassibility rules out the possibility of God being able to experience emotions or any kind of supposed weakness. He seems to follow with those who make a strong distinction between what the human and divine natures can do. We may experience God as having emotions such as compassion, but in God himself, there is no such thing taking place that would be similar to our experience of emotions. In taking this position, Anselm moves as far toward the Greek ideal of deity as any other theologian to this point.

Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274)

Thomas Aquinas follows Anselm's line of thinking. He says that God cannot be subject to suffering because suffering is always due to some kind of deficiency. In God,

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[151]Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, I, 8, in Eugene R. Fairweather, ed. and trans., *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, vol. 10, in John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen, eds., *The Library of Christian Classics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 110.

there can be no defect; thus, he must be impassible. Aquinas attributes mercy to God above all, but mercy is to be understood in its effect and not in the affect of feeling.[152] So then, Aquinas, like Anselm, believes that God's mercy is felt by us creatures as mercy, but it is not something that God "feels" as a human being would feel an emotion.

Mercy, according to Aquinas, is feeling sad about another's misery; it is an empathic response to the woes of another person. He states that one "identifies himself (or herself) with the other, and springs to the rescue; this is the effect of mercy."[153] But God cannot experience another's misery because misery is considered to be a kind of defect by Aquinas. Instead, it is the nature of God to drive misery out. Defects, says Aquinas, are done away with by an achievement of goodness and God is the first source of goodness; thus, He must drive out all defects. Aquinas concludes this section by noting then how it is that God fills all things out to their perfection through His goodness, justice, generosity, and mercy:

> Note, however, that filling out things to their perfection is the work of God's goodness, and justice, and generosity, and mercy, yet under different aspects. Purely and simply, other considerations apart, it is of his goodness that he communicates perfections, as we have shown. That he gives them to things in proportion to the worth of the recipient, this comes from justice, as also was shown above. That they are not granted for his own advantage, this springs from his generosity. That they cast out every defect, this belongs to his mercy.[154]

This explains how God can drive misery out without experiencing any kind of defect. The presence of God drives out defects. Gerald Hanratty rightly observes that for Aquinas, "God is merciful and loving, not because he sympathetically identifies himself with the suffering of creatures, but rather because he can overcome the afflictions of creatures

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152Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, Ia. 21, 3, trans. Thomas Gilby (New York: Blackfriars in conjunction with McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963), 81.

153Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, Ia. 21, 3.

154Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, Ia. 21, 3.

through his infinite love and mercy."[155] So, God's mercy is primarily a way in which He fills things out to their perfection by casting out every defect. Mercy, empathy, and sadness are not feelings or emotions in God that coincide with emotions human beings would have.

God is both perfect and immutable according to Aquinas, and so he is incapable of suffering. Hanratty notes that Aquinas recognizes that suffering is frequently associated with the positive human virtues of love, mercy, and compassion; nevertheless, he asserts that it is not desirable in and of itself. Instead, suffering always represents a lack of something good and is therefore evil.[156] Aquinas states that "a being suffers in so far as it is deficient and imperfect."[157] In his commentary on Job, Aquinas states:

> Now no one of sound mind entertains any doubt whether God works anything out of malice, for there cannot be any evil in the supreme good. But it can happen that something which pertains to divine goodness is evil in man, as, for instance, not to show mercy according as mercy cries out against suffering, which divine goodness nevertheless requires in keeping with its own perfection, is indeed vituperated in man.[158]

God is complete and lacking in nothing; thus, he cannot show mercy or compassion by suffering with another. However, if a human being does not show mercy in a situation where another is suffering, then he or she is not acting in a morally responsible way.

Because Aquinas proposes that God is "pure act," it is impossible for anything outside of God to cause God to suffer. God is always fully actualized. This means that

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[155]Gerald Hanratty, "Divine Immutability and Impassibility Revisited," in *At the Heart of the Real,* ed. F. O'Rourke (Dublin, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 1992), 160.

[156]Gerald Hanratty, "Divine Immutability and Impassibility Revisited," 158.

[157]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, I, 25, 1. Aquinas's original: "*Patitur autem unumquodque secundum quod est deficiens et imperfectum*."

[158]Thomas Aquinas, *The Literal Exposition on Job, A Scriptural Commentary Concerning Providence*, 10:1-4, trans. Anthony Damico (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 185.

God is always the fulfillment of his own being and is never acted upon.[159] Hence, God cannot be moved or changed by any external force. There is nothing that can cause any perturbation in the perfect peace and bliss of the divine nature.

Thomas explains that God is able to love, enjoy, and delight, but without passion.[160] Whereas anger and sadness imply the presence of some imperfection, and so can only be attributed to God metaphorically, there is no such imperfection included in love and joy; therefore, these can properly be predicated of God without passion.[161] God's love does not require sympathy or suffering. The nature of God is to cast out anything that would cause sadness or suffering.

However, Aquinas allows that our sufferings are part of Christ's own suffering. He says that there is a sense in which Christ suffers in us. Michael Dodds gleans this observation from Aquinas' commentaries on Ephesians and Colossians:

> Because we are one body with Christ, Christ loves us "as something of himself (sicut aliquid sui)." In this union of love, our sufferings are in some way Christ's own. It is in this sense, as Thomas explains, that Christ suffers in us: "I make up those things which are lacking from the suffering of Christ" that is, [from the suffering] of the whole Church whose head is Christ. . . . For this was lacking, that as Christ suffered in his own body, so he would suffer in Paul, his member, and similarly in others."[162]

Because we are part of the Body of Christ, our sufferings are a part of the sufferings that Christ went through on this earth.

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[159]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, I, 25, 1.

[160]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, I, 20, 1.

[161]J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 115. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, 90, trans. Anton C. Pegis (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1955; reprint, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1975), 275-77.

[162]Michael J. Dodds, "Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering, and the Unchanging God of Love," *Theological Studies* 52 (June 1991): 341. Cf. Aquinas, *Super ad Ephesios* 5, lect. 9 [line 105c]; and *Super ad Colossenses* 1, lect. 6 [line 56 c].

Aquinas makes distinctions in the suffering of the soul of Christ that are more complex than those made by Anselm or the Council at Constantinople in 553. In regard to the question of whether the whole soul of Christ suffered, Aquinas answers by making a distinction between the "essence" of the soul and powers. Jesus suffered in all of the essence of his soul, but not in all of his powers.

> We must then say that if "whole soul" is taken to mean the soul in its essence, it is evident that the whole soul of Christ suffered, for the complete essence of the soul is so joined to the body the the whole soul is in the whole body, and whole in any part of that body. Hence when Christ's body suffered and was on the point of separation from the soul, his whole soul suffered.
>
> If however "whole soul" be taken to refer to all his powers, then, speaking of the sufferings proper to those powers, Christ suffered in all his lower powers; in each of the soul's lower powers, which have temporal things for their object, there was reason for Christ's pain . . . Christ's superior reason, however, did not suffer from its object, which is God, who for him is the cause not of grief but of delight and joy. Still, all the powers of Christ's soul suffered in so far as any power suffers with its subject. All the power of the soul are rooted in its essence, and it suffered when the body, whose act it is, suffered.[163]

Thus, Christ suffered in his "whole soul," but he also rejoiced in his "whole soul" in its essence "inasmuch as the whole soul is the subject of that superior part of the soul which finds joy in the divinity."[164]

Dodds mistakenly infers that according to Aquinas we must affirm that the suffering of Christ is the suffering of divinity: "Since Jesus himself is God, the eternal Son of the Father, we must say that in him 'the impassible God suffers and dies' (impassibilis Deus patiatur et moraitur)."[165] Aquinas makes a distinction that eliminates this possibility in the *Summa*, while expounding on the passion of Christ. He distinguishes between the passible human and impassible divine natures of Christ. Aquinas does not hold that divinity suffers

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[163]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, 3a. 46, 7.

[164]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, 3a. 46, 8.

[165]Dodds, "Aquinas and Human Suffering," 334. Cf. Aquinas, *Super 1 ad Corinthios*, c. 15, lect. 1, (line 174c).

in the suffering of Christ, but that Christ suffers in his incarnate state. The suffering that takes place in the incarnation is a result of the assumed human nature and cannot be attributed to the divine nature.

> The union of the divine and human natures took place in the person and in the hypostasis and in the supposit, but the natures remained distinct; the same person and hypostasis serves for both the divine and the human nature, and each nature retains what is proper to it. Hence, as was pointed out above, the passion is to be attributed to the divine person, not by reason of Christ's divine nature which is impassible, but by reason of his human nature. . . . The passion of Christ therefore pertains to the divine person by reason of the assumed human nature, but not by reason of the impassible divine nature.[166]

The passion of Christ belongs to the divine person by reason of the assumed human nature, but not by reason of the impassible divine nature. It is true for Aquinas that the "impassible God suffers and dies," but it is true only in regard to the human nature of the incarnate Christ and not for the divine nature which remains impassible.

Reformation and Post-Reformation Era

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Martin Luther effectively blurs the line between the human and divine natures of Christ to a much greater degree than the scholastics were willing to consider. He wants to affirm the distinction between the divine and human natures of Christ, but he also strongly emphasizes the theological truth that these two natures make up one person. This concentration of Luther's is rooted in his belief that Christ must be the "true, natural God, begotten of the Father from eternity and Creator of all things."[167] Luther states that we would be hopelessly lost if Christ were not God. He explains:

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[166]Aquinas, *Summa Theologiæ*, 3a. 46, 12.

[167]Martin Luther, *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 46, 554, Weimar edition (Austria: Akademischen Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, Graz, 1909; reprint, Austria: Hermann Böhlaus, 1964). Translation taken from Ewald M. Plass comp., *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, vol. 1 (Saint Louis, Missouri: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 165.

> For what good would the suffering and death of the Lord Christ do me if He were merely a man such as you and I are? Then He would not have been able to overcome the devil, death, and sin. He would have been far too weak for them and should not have helped us. Therefore we must have a Savior who is true God and a Lord over sin, death, devil, and hell. If we let the devil overthrow this foundation, that Christ is true God, then His suffering, dying, and resurrection will do us no good, and we have no hope of obtaining eternal life and salvation. . . . If faith is torn and injured in the least, we are done for; and if Christ is robbed of His divinity, there is no help or refuge against the wrath and judgment of God. For our sin, plight, and misery are too great. If these are to be remedied . . . God's Son must become man and suffer and shed His blood for them.[168]

Statements such as this lead some to accuse Luther of mixing the two natures of Christ without a careful distinction especially in regard to his theology of the Lord's Supper. But Luther denies this and defines his position against Zwingli's stance. Zwingli argued for the doctrine of *alloeosis* which means that the natures of Christ substituted for one another. "Thus, according to Zwingli, one nature of Christ, or its attributes, can be used in speaking of the other nature."[169] Luther rebukes this notion, but affirms that the one Person who is Christ must take part in suffering in both natures:

> They denounce us and cry out that we mingle the two natures into one essence. This is not true. We do not say that divinity is humanity or that the divine nature is the human nature, which would be mixing the two natures into one essence. But we do merge the two distinct natures into one Person and say: God is man, and man is God. We, however, denounce them for dissolving the Person of Christ, as though it were two persons. For if the *alloeosis* is to stand as Zwingli teaches it, Christ will have to be two persons, a divine one and a human one; for he applies all passages treating of suffering to the human nature alone and disassociates them in all respects from Christ's divinity. For if the works are parted and separated, then also the Person must be parted, because all works or sufferings are ascribed, not to natures, but to persons. For it is the Person which does and suffers everything, now according to this nature, then according to that nature. All this the learned well know. Therefore we hold our Lord Christ to be God and man in one person in such a way *non confundendo naturas nec dividendo personam*, that we do not mix the

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[168]Luther, *Werke*, 46, 554f. Translation from Plass, *What Luther Says*, vol. 1, 165-66.

[169]Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 30.

natures or separate the Person.[170]

Luther, then, does not want to say that Christ suffers in the human nature alone; all works or sufferings are applied to persons not to natures. Instead, he affirms that the suffering of Christ cannot be confined to just one of his natures without also separating the Person of the Son.

Luther says that in following Scripture, we must recognize the special union of the humanity and divinity in Christ. It is such that everything ascribed the the divinity must also be ascribed to the humanity of Christ and vice versa.[171] He offers the doctrine of *communicationem idiomatum* (communication of attributes) to explain how it is that Scripture expresses the work of Christ as embracing the entire Person. He gives the following examples:

> Thus one may say: The man Christ is God's eternal Son, through whom all creatures were created, and Lord of heaven and earth. On the other hand, this, too, may be said: Christ, God's Son (that is, the Person who is true God), was conceived and born by the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, and died. Again, God's Son sits at the table with publicans and sinners, washes the feet of His disciples. This He does not do according to the divine nature; but because the same Person does this, we correctly say that God's Son does it. Thus St. Paul says: "Had they known it they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory" (1 Cor. 2:8); and Christ Himself says: "What and if ye shall see the Son of Man ascend up where He was before?" John 6:62. This is properly said of the divine nature, which was with the Father from eternity; and yet it is also said of the Person who is true man.[172]

Even more strikingly Luther states:

> God's Son, the one true God with the Father and the Holy Ghost, became man for us, a Servant, a Sinner, a Worm; that God died, God bears our sin in His own body on the cross, God has redeemed us through His own blood. For God and man are one Person. Whatever this man does, suffers, and speaks; and whatever God does and speaks, the man does and speaks who is both God and Mary's Son in one

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170Luther, *Werke*, 26, 324. Translation from Plass, *What Luther Says*, vol. 1, 170.

171Luther, *Werke*, 26, 319.

172Luther, *Werke*, 45, 557. Translation from Plass, *What Luther Says*, vol. 1, 174.

> inseparable Person and two distinct natures.[173]

It is notable that in this last description of the communication of the attributes, Luther says that the man communicates "doing, suffering, and speaking" to God, but the divine nature only communicates "doing and speaking" to the human nature. Thus, it would appear that Luther does not attribute suffering to God outside of the incarnation but that the incarnate divine nature is subject to the suffering that the human nature endures. The identification of the divine nature with suffering is more emphatically stated in Luther than it is in the Scholastics or the other Reformers. He makes it clear, however, that it is only in the special circumstances of the union of the person of Christ in the incarnation that this is a possible occurrence.

John Calvin (1509-1564)

John Calvin does not directly address the impassibility of God in his *Institutes*; however, we may infer his position on this matter from his thoughts on the repentance of God. His main emphasis is that one must understand that "our weakness does not attain to his exalted state" and so "the description of Him that is given to us must be accommodated to our capacity so that we may understand it."[174] The Scriptures resort to speaking of God in human terms because our weak minds have no other way to grasp what God is like. Calvin explains the anger of God in the following manner:

> Although he is beyond all disturbance of mind, yet he testifies that he is angry toward sinners. Therefore whenever we hear that God is angered, we ought not to imagine any emotion in him, but rather to consider that this expression has been taken from our own human experience; because God, whenever he is exercising

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[173]Luther, *Werke*, 54, 92. Translation from Plass, *What Luther Says*, vol. 1, 175.

[174]John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics, eds. John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen,vol. 20 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), I, 17, 13.

> judgment, exhibits the appearance of one kindled and angered.[175]

Thus, it is clear that Calvin does not believe that God can be disturbed or affected by external factors. In fact, emotions such as anger, do not even exist for God. Rather, these kinds of emotions are expressions that have been acquired from our own human emotional experience to help us understand and relate to God. Calvin also describes God as merciful or compassionate.[176] But it would probably be safe to assume that he does not intend these characterizations of God to be understood in a different way than emotions like anger are contemplated. That is, mercy is no more a feeling in God than anger is, but it has been taken from our own experience; because God, whenever he is exercising forgiveness, exhibits the appearance of one who is merciful. This is much like the conceptions of Anselm and Aquinas in regard to how we experience God's emotion in a certain way, but there is not actual emotion in God that we may correctly attribute to him.

Stephen Charnock (1628-1680)

Stephen Charnock argues that the immutability of God entails the impassibility of God. Much like Calvin, he says that God is accommodating himself to our weak condition when we see emotions being attributed to Him in the Scriptures. He states that

> because he is said to have anger and repentance, we must not conclude him to have passions like us. When we cannot fully comprehend him as he is, he clothes himself with our nature in his expressions that we may apprehend him as we are able, and by inspection into ourselves, learn something of the nature of God; yet those human ways of speaking ought to be understood in a manner agreeable to the infinite excellency and majesty of God, and are only designed to mark out something in God which has a resemblance with something in us; as we cannot speak to God as gods, but as men, so we cannot understand him speaking to us as a God, unless he condescend to speak to us like a man. God therefore frames his language to our dullness, not to his own state, and informs us by our own phrases, what he would have us learn of his nature, as nurses talk broken language to young

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[175]Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I, 17, 13.

[176]Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, 8, 21.

children.[177]

He also returns to the strict distinctions of the scholastics in his division of the human and divine natures in Christ. The divine and human natures of the Son were neither changed or mixed, but each one preserved its peculiar properties. Charnock explains it in this way:

> He took the "form of a servant," but he lost not the form of God; he despoiled not himself of the perfections of the Deity. He was indeed emptied "and became of no reputation" (Phil. ii. 7); but he did not cease to be God, though he was reputed to be only a man, and a very mean one too. The glory of his divinity was not extinguished nor diminshed, though it was obscured and darkened, under the veil of our infirmities; but there was no more change in the hiding of it, than there is in the body of the sun when it is shadowed by the interposition of a cloud. His blood while it was pouring out from his veins was the "blood of God" (Acts xx. 28); and, therefore, when he was bowing the head of his humanity upon the cross, he had the nature and perfections of God; for had he ceased to be God, he had been a mere creature, and his sufferings would have been of as little value and satisfaction as the sufferings of a creature. He could not have been a sufficient mediator, had he ceased to be God: and he had ceased to be God, had he lost any one perfection proper to the divine nature; and losing none, he lost not this of unchangeableness, which is none of the meanest belonging to the Deity.[178]

If he had ceased to be God, he would not have been able to save us. He would have been an insufficient mediator. But, because he did not cease to be God, he also did not cease to be unchangeable. Charnock places great importance on the true union of the natures of Christ. He does this because he believes that without this union there can be no satisfaction for our sins--no effective salvation. But there is in Charnock as well great emphasis on the belief that the divine nature is not touched by the infirmities of the flesh.

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[177]Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, vol. 1 (Robert Carter and Brothers,1853; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 341.

[178]Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, vol. 1, 339-40.

Modern Era

Charles Hodge (1797-1878)

In Charles Hodge's writings one may observe the recent distinction that is being made between philosophical and biblical notions of the nature of God. In his discussion of the attribute of love, he refutes the idea held by the "schoolmen" and "philosophical theologians" that "there is no feeling in God."[179] He uses Bruch[180] and Schleiermacher[181] as examples of such thinkers who give such an account of God. They advocate that God's love is "that attribute of God which secures the development of the rational universe" or, in the words of Schleiermacher, "It is that attribute in virtue of which God communicates Himself."[182]

In opposition to this view, Hodge states

> If love in God is only a name for that which accounts for the rational universe; if God is love, simply because He develops himself in thinking and conscious beings, then the word has for us no definite meaning; it reveals nothing concerning the real nature of God. Here again we have to choose between a mere philosophical speculation and the clear testimony of the Bible, and of our own moral and religious nature.[183]

Hodge denies that the "philosophical" understanding of the love of God has any validity or any real meaning according to the Bible. One may notice a strong spirit of Scottish Realism in Hodge's interpretation of Scripture, and in large part, this is the reason for his rejection

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179Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1871), 428.

180Johann Friedrich Bruch, *Die Lehre von den göttlichen Eigenschaften* (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1842), 240.

181Schleiermacher, *Christliche Glaube*, §166.

182C. Hodge, *Theology*, 428.

183C. Hodge, *Theology*, 428.

of the assumption that "passivity" must be omitted in the idea of the love of God.

Hodge goes on to explain his understanding of the love of God:

> He ceases to be God in the sense of the Bible, and in the sense in which we need a God, unless He can love as well as know and act. . . . We must adhere to the truth in its Scriptural form, or we lose it altogether. We must believe that God is love in the sense in which that word comes home to every human heart.[184]

He believes that God loves in much the same way that human beings are able to love. According to Hodge, God's infinity, eternity, and immutability can be consistent with the understanding that God has a personality. He states that the Bible teaches that God is infinite "not in the sense that no limit can be assigned to his being or perfections, other than that which arises out of his own perfection itself."[185] Hodge does not speak to the actual suffering of God, but he does obviously hold that God is capable of feeling and emotion.

Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823-1886)

Charles' son, A. A. Hodge, agrees with him that "the attributes of intelligence, feeling, and will" belong to God as Spirit. However, he qualifies these attributes as being "active properties."[186] He opposes the idea of active principles to those of the properties of matter. He denies that we may attribute any bodily parts or passions to God.[187] J. Ligon Duncan notes that the younger Hodge "seems to intend to restrict the idea of 'passions' to '*material* passions' by his subtle alteration of the phrase *'body, bodily parts,*

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[184]C. Hodge, *Theology*, 429.

[185]C. Hodge, *Theology*, 392.

[186]A. A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith: A Handbook of Christian Doctrine Expounding The Westminster Confession* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1961), 48.

[187]A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 49. Cf. Also A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1878), 140.

or passions' . . . (but) he certainly does not think that this sort of impassibility rules out divine affections."[188]

As for the parts of Scripture that describe emotions in God that are analogous to human emotions, Hodge says that these are "in condescension to our weakness."[189] When the Bible speaks of God's repenting, being grieved, jealous, it is using metaphorical language "while teaching us that he acts toward us as a man would when agitated by such passions."[190] Thus, he takes a line of thinking that is very similar to Calvin on the texts of Scripture that speak of the suffering of God.

In regard to the suffering of Christ on the cross, he asserts the Chalcedonian distinction that states that the natures of Christ cannot be mingled or mixed in any way, but he is also careful to emphasize the oneness of the Person of Christ. Christ "possessed all the essential properties of humanity," but he also "was no less very God" so that "this man and this God is one single person."[191] Hodge says that the incarnate Christ suffered, but he does not make the theopaschite distinction that asserts the impassibility of the divine nature and the passibility of the human nature. He does, however, affirm the communication of the attributes of Christ according to the orthodox understanding by stating that "it is affirmed in the *concrete* in respect to the person, but denied in the *abstract* in respect to the natures; it is affirmed *utrius naturæ ad personam*, but denied *utrius naturæ ad*

188J. Ligon Duncan III, "Divine Passibility and Impassibility in Nineteenth-century American Confessional Presbyterian Theologians," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 8 (Spring 1990): 7.

189A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 49.

190A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 49.

191A.A. Hodge, *The Confession of Faith*, 139-40.

naturam."[192]

He presents the analogy of the union between the mind or spirit and body of the human person. These two parts comprise but one person, and yet, people possess and exercise the attributes of both natures. He states that

> in virtue of the union the unextended spirit is present virtually wherever the extended body is, and the inert insensible matter of the nerve tissues thrill with feeling and throb with will as organs of the feeling and willing soul.[193]

It is presumed that from this analogy, we are able to make an inference to the relation between the human and divine natures of Christ and how they are connected. But it is not very clear whether one may assume that the divine nature of Christ was capable of experiencing suffering. In fact, from his explanation of the communication of attributes given above, it is probably safe to assume that we may not make that assumption.

Robert Lewis Dabney (1820-1898)

Robert Lewis Dabney is more forceful in his affirmation of passible or complacent effects in God than either Hodge was willing to be. In his explanation of the mercy of God, he exegetes Luke 19:41-42 in which we are told that Christ wept over the very people that he subsequently doomed to eternal reprobation. The question is then raised: Why did He not save them by exerting his omnipotence for their effectual calling if he was upset by this? Dabney answers in this way:

> And their (the extremist's) best answer seems to be, that here it was not the divine nature in Jesus that wept, but the humanity only. Now, it will readily be conceded that the divine nature was incapable of the pain of sympathetic passion and of the agitation of grief; but we are loath to believe that this precious incident is no manifestation of the passionless, unchangeable, yet infintely benevolent pity of the divine nature. . . . It is our happiness to believe that when we see Jesus weeping over lost Jerusalem, we "have seen the Father," we have received an insight into the divine benevolence and pity. And therefore this wondrous incident has been so clear

[192]A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 383.

[193]A.A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 383-84.

> to the hearts of God's people in all ages.[194]

He admits that God must experience grief in some way although He does not experience it in pain or agitation of grief. However, we do see the divine benevolence and pity in this act of Christ weeping over Jerusalem. In observing the Son in this instance, we "have seen the Father."

God is willing to and does experience suffering in some sense in the incarnation because He wills to do so. Dabney denies Monothelitism, but asserts that "it is, indeed, in this harmony of the will that the hypostatic union most essentially effectuates itself, 'yet without conversion, composition or confusion.'"[195] He says that it is in the will that the unity of a being consummates itself. "The divine and human will was, so to speak, the very meeting-place at which the personal unity of the two complete natures was effected in the God-man."[196] Thus, Dabney wants to say that the divine nature may participate in passion and grief in the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures of Christ.

Dabney nuances his understanding of the emotions of God in some of his other writings. In his *Lectures in Systematic Theology*, he, like A. A. Hodge, uses the concept of "active principles" and explains how it is that they are different from emotions.

> Our Confession says, that God hath neither parts nor passions. That He has something analagous to what are called in man active principles, is manifest, for He wills and acts; therefore He must feel. But these active principles must not be conceived of as emotions, in the sense of ebbing and glowing accesses of feeling. In other words, they lack that agitation and rush, that change from cold to hot, and hot to cold, which constitute the characteristics of passion in us. They are, in God, an ineffable, fixed, peaceful, unchangeable calm, although the springs of volition. That such principles may be, although incomprehensible to us, we may learn from

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[194]Robert Lewis Dabney, *Discussions: Evangelical and Theological*, vol. 1 (Great Britain: Billing and Sons Limited, 1890; reprint, London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 308-09.

[195]Dabney, *Discussions*, 309.

[196]Dabney, *Discussions*, 309.

> this fact: that in the wisest and most sanctified creatures, the active principles have least of passion and agitation, and yet they by no means become inefficacious as springs of action--e.g., moral indignation in the holy and wise parent or ruler.[197]

God does not have parts or passions, but does have active principles. However, these are not emotions in the sense of ebbing and flowing feelings that changes from hot to cold. These active principles are peaceful, unchangeable, and calm, and from these active principles spring the will of God. The point is that emotions do not rule God or distress him in any way. Dabney, then, makes the same assertion that many have before him, that God's "active principles" or "emotions" are not able to exert any kind of influence on God or change him in any way. Rather, in God, there is nothing but peace and calm.

In regard to the mention of God's emotions in Scripture, Dabney does not hesitate to call these anthropopathisms:

> When, therefore, the Scriptures speak of God becoming wroth, as repenting, as indulging His fury against His adversaries, in connection with some particular event occurring in time, we must understand them anthropathically. What is meant is, that the outward manifestations of His active principles were as though these feelings then arose.[198]

But neither does he want to disregard these so-called emotions of God as insignificant:

> However anthropopathic may be the statements made concerning God's repentings, wrath, pity, pleasure, love, jealousy, hatred, in the Scriptures, we should do violence to them if we denied that he here meant to ascribe to himself active affections in some mode suitable to his nature.[199]

He echoes the Hodges in their statement that God is without parts or passions, and reiterates that God acts, but is acted on by no one. Dabney thinks it is important to ascribe active affections to God that are suitable to his nature in some way. "He is the source, but not the

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[197]Robert Lewis Dabney, *Lectures in Systematic Theology* (First published in 1878; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 153.

[198]Dabney, *Lectures*, 153.

[199]Dabney, *Discussions*, 291.

recipient of effects."[200] One may say that God has these "active principles" which may also be described as "affections of his will," but one may not infer too much about the emotional life of God from this.[201]

Conclusions Concerning the Historical Understanding of the Passibility of God

One objective of this historical review is to illustrate the ways in which the terms "passibility," "impassibility," and "immutability" have been used in regard to the subject of divine suffering. It should be clear that to say that God is "impassible" is not necessarily equivalent to stating that "God has no emotions whatsoever." The impassibility of God, more often than not, refers to the notion that God is without "parts or passions." Gregory of Nyssa makes this clear in his treatise *Against Eunomius* by stating that

> Nothing is truly "passion" which does not tend to sin . . . For we give the name of "passion" only to that which is opposed to the virtuous unimpassioned state, and of this we believe that He Who granted us salvation was at all time devoid . . ."[202]

Hence, it is a logical impossibility for God to be passible in the sense that he has some kind of corporeality or that he may be tempted to sin. This does not rule out the possibility that God may have emotions or that God is capable of suffering in some sense of the word. Gregory of Thaumaturgus reinforces this understanding of "impassibility" in his treatise, *Ad Theopompum*. In this treatise he states that it is "in His suffering (that) He shows His impassibility."[203] If Gregory thought that impassibility meant that God could not suffer,

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200Dabney, *Discussions*, 291.

201Dabney, *Discussions*, 291.

202Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius,* VI, 3.

203Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Ad Theopompum*, as quoted in J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 66-67.

then he would be making a nonsensical statement here. But, if he is of the opinion that impassibility means that God is without passions, then his statement would make sense. Hence, we may remain within the realm of orthodoxy and say that God is "impassible" in regard to passions that lead to sin. In other words, God cannot be tempted to sin, nor can he desire to sin. But, God is passible in regard to his emotions and to suffering as long as the emotions and suffering of God are understood within proper boundaries.

Second, this survey of thinkers throughout the ages of Christian thought serves to illustrate the fact that the passibililty of God is a topic that has concerned many theologians. It is a topic that is entwined with what is perhaps the most central event of Christian belief and practice: the crucifixion of Christ and the way in which this event offers efficacious atonement of sin. It was a significant consideration in the debates that led to the formulation the most seminal creeds of the Church: those that put an end to the Trinitarian and Christological Controversies. Thus, it is an important topic for study and thought.

Finally, this brief history of the concept of the passibility of God has been an attempt to demonstrate the historical development of the main issues that have to do with God's ability or inability to suffer. The issue it has addressed is the issue of the "Greek Assumption" as I have coined it. It should be clear from the evidence that has been presented in this historical survey that Christian theologians did not apply Greek philosophy to Christian theology without some significant alterations. Many of the Greek ideals for divinity are useful to describe the transcendence of God, but the Christian thinkers did not use these ideals without some regard for the immanence of God. Theologians such as Irenaeus, Origen, Tertullian, and Luther are clear examples of Christian thinkers whose theologies do not fit in the Hellenistic mode. To pejoratively assume that the tradition has monolithically handed down an understanding of God that is equivalent to the Greek ideals of an immobile, entirely immutable, and impassible deity is wrong-headed. Richard Muller describes well the true situation:

> The ontology of classical theism does not hypothesize a static, immobile God, but a God active in his relation to the world and active in himself: if this draws on Greek ontology, it draws on a connection made prior to the writing of the New Testament and, in the eyes of the tradition of the Church, imbedded in the New Testament.[204]

The philosophical conception of God is rightly condemned but it is wrongly attributed to many of the early theologians or at least it is wrongly attributed to the orthodox tradition as a whole. Greek philosophy was appropriated and used to create Christian theology, but it was not, for the most part, utilized without discretion or without precedent. To stereotype classical or orthodox theology as a system of thought that is shaped primarily by Greek philosophy rather than biblical considerations is to make a hasty generalization that is not founded on the evidence left behind by many great thinkers.

This is not to say that there are not Christian thinkers whose theologies portray God in a way that is similar to the Greek ideals of divinity. Anselm, Aquinas, Augustine, and Calvin are all guilty of emphasizing the transcendence of God to the detriment of his immanence. However, these thinkers do not altogether omit the immanent qualities of God in their descriptions of his nature, nor would they argue for a God that is immobile or incapable of relationships. The "Greek Assumption" has set up a false understanding of God which has served as a rallying point for modern theologians who are opposed to God's impassibility. But too often, these modern thinkers are imprecise with their use of the terms involved in the impassibility debate, and they make false assumptions about the understanding of God that has been inherited from the orthodox tradition of Christianity.

Now that the historical dimensions of the problem have been surveyed, this study will continue with an examination of the biblical material that gives rise to the question of the passibility of God and the various hermeneutic methods that have been endorsed by various thinkers. Some of these ideas have already been previewed in this historical section, but the next chapter will lay them out more systematically while addressing the various

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[204]Muller, "Incarnation, Immutability, and the Case for Classical Theism," 37.

passages in the Bible that seem to affirm or deny the passibility of God.

CHAPTER 3
THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE PASSIBILITY OF GOD

The Problem of Interpretation

The answer to whether or not God may be considered to be passible, in some way, must ultimately rest on the authority of scriptural evidence. A scriptural basis is necessary for any theological doctrine that may be called Christian. Yet, as it turns out, this is not really as great a limitation as one might think since the divergence of the interpretations of the verses in the Bible that deal with the passibility of God is often vast. There are at least four factors that contribute to these differences in textual interpretation. The first and most influential of these elements is that of the presuppositions that one brings to any particular text. A second reason for variations in interpretation is the inability of human and finite language to describe a supernatural and infinite God. The third element is the existential situation of the interpreter. The final element is one of personal bias; inevitably there are a few texts that are given prominence over other texts in any particular person's interpretation of the Bible. Despite the many differences in the interpretation of Scripture concerning the passibility of God, this much may be affirmed: God's steadfast faithfulness and his purposes do not change, but the Bible often analogically portrays God as passible, especially when God is responding to the sins of his people, the grief of his people, or to the resistance of people to believe the truth and be faithful to him.

The theologian who seeks to determine the passibility or impassibility of God from the evidence presented in Scripture must make several decisions about how he or she will treat the many texts which allude to the passibility of God. Much of what someone will glean from the Bible in regard to the topic of passibility will depend on his or her

presuppositions about what God is like. Our presuppositions can be very powerful in shaping our interpretation. A glaring example of this can be observed with respect to the presuppositions that a person has about the morality of homosexuality when reading the Bible.

The morality of homosexuality is a hotly contested issue in several mainline churches at present. One of the biblical passages that is often used to argue against homosexual behavior is the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19. In this story, two angels come to visit Lot in Sodom. He invites them into his house to stay the night. He prepares a meal for them and they eat together, and then

> Before they had gone to bed, all the men form every part of the city of Sodom--both young and old--surrounded the house. They called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us so that we can have sex with them.[1]

Lot offers his virgin daugters to the crowd instead. When they refuse and begin to close in on Lot, the angels pull Lot back into the house and strike the men blind so that they are unable to find Lot's door. At dawn, Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed in a hail of burning sulfur. Thus, say its opponents, homosexuality brings with it the swift judgment of God.[2]

Some of those who argue for the acceptance of homosexuality as a valid and sinless sexual orientation state the following about this passage of Scripture:

> It should be noted that some Bible scholars do not believe that the intent of the men of Sodom was sexual. The have pointed out that the Hebrew word translated "know" (or "intercourse" . . .) can mean simply communication--in this case, a desire to examine the strangers' credentials. Whether the intent was sexual or not, however, the strangers were treated abominably and the sin of inhospitality was committed--one more instance of the city's wickedness that called forth God's

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[1]Genesis 19:4-5

[2]Letha Scanzoni and Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor? Another Christian View* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1978), 54.

righteous judgment.[3]

So then, is this passage of scripture about the condemnation of homosexual behavior or examining credentials? It is very possible that it is not directly about either of these. It certainly does not seem to be plausible to believe that all the men of Sodom who were outside Lot's house that night were homosexuals or that what they had in mind was something that they would consider to be a homosexual act. Nor does it seem likely that God is destroying Sodom with burning sulfur for this one incident, but rather because this is the abominable kind of behavior that was common in the city of Sodom.

If it is not explicitly about homosexuality, then could this passage of Scripture be about some men who wanted to examine the credentials of these two strangers who had shown up in their town? The tone of this passage and the fact that Lot offers his daughters to them instead makes this interpretation seem very unlikely. Perhaps this passage is exhibiting the typical behavior of the men of Sodom who had so little regard for the dignity of other human beings that they were interested in humiliating these two strangers by raping them. At the very least, this is a monumental act of disrespect and inhospitality toward these strangers.

Again, the point here is that our presuppositions affect our reading of the text. There may not be the vast differences that are cited in this example above, but our previous leanings on a subject are going to cloud our vision to some extent. At the very least, they will determine the perspective with which we will approach biblical material.

Of course, it would be ideal if we could let the Biblical texts speak for themselves without any projected ideology or presuppositional framework to cloud the "pure truth" of the text. The text can provide some limit for interpretation, but it rarely is the case that it

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[3]Scanzoni, *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?*, 55. Cf. D. Sherwin Bailey, *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1955), 1-28.

does so for an individual who holds an opposing view. However, we must also recognize that it is impossible to gain any understanding about the passibility of God (or any other attribute of God for that matter) from a text unless we bring some prior conceptions of who God is, what kind of limitations there are on His powers, and what constitutes passibility. Thus, it is possible for anyone to derive from a particular text that which he or she believes will be in it, or, in the opposite case, find a way to work around a contrary statement in a particular text to preserve one's own position. It is important to understand that we bring presuppositions to a text, and it is imperative that we are able to recognize our own biases if we will be able to discern whether our own interpretation of a text is better or more true than a different one.

Some examples of presuppositions that might lead us to conclude that God must be *impassible* are: 1) a strong belief in the transcendence of God, 2) a conviction that the life of God is a blessed life, and, as such, happy with the perfection of happiness, and 3) a dread of the use of anthropomorphisms, or, more precisely, anthropopathisms, and an insistence on their figurative use. Assumptions that would steer us toward the conclusion that God must be *passible* are: 1) God's outgoing love is the expression of His innermost nature, and he must suffer when he is confronted with a world such as ours. 2) If God is really the ground of the world's being, the world being what it is, He must be a suffering God. And finally, 3) what the Cross revealed in time--the Father giving the Son to redeem the world by suffering for it--was eternally true of God's nature.[4] Our preconceived notions about what God is or must be like have a profound influence on the way that we understand verses that portray God as being passible or impassible.

Language is the second great obstacle to interpretation of the text. It is the only medium by which one may describe God, but it is not up to the task. Abraham Heschel

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4J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 137-38.

well says that any pretension we may have to adequacy in our use of language about God is "specious and a delusion."[5] Theologians fumble and search for words adequate to describe the Creator and Redeemer of the universe. One uses words to describe the love of God or the fatherhood of God or the essence of God, but the words do not quite fit because they do not apply to God in the same sense in which they apply to human beings. The words have to be redefined and new boundaries must be drawn for their meanings. Human language must use anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms to describe that which is pure Spirit so that God is decipherable to human experience. One must be content with oblique analogies and metaphors that beg for interpretation, and differences in interpretation abound.

Lester J. Kuyper explains that there are two main perils that beset one who would interpret the descriptions of God we have in the Bible: to *under*-interpret or to *over*-interpret. "In the first case he would deny God any 'humaneness'; and in the second case he would reduce God to human frailty and absurdity."[6] The Bible is full of verses that speak of the eyes, ears, mouth, nose, face, arms, hands, and back parts of God.[7] It also portrays God as a jilted lover[8] and a forlorn parent who sorrows over the rebellion of his beloved child.[9] The Scriptures say that God is grieved that he created the world, that he is

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[5]Heschel, *The Prophets*, 276.

[6]L.J. Kuyper, "The Suffering and Repentance of God," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 22 (September 1969): 258.

[7]Cf. Adrio König, *Here Am I* (Muckleneuk, Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1978), 93ff. The author insists on a literal reading of such passages.

[8]Cf. Ezekiel 16:14-15.

[9]Cf. Hosea 11:8-9

afflicted in the afflictions of his people, and that he is grieved in his Holy Spirit.[10] How we choose to understand these descriptions of God and his emotional state will determine how we understand the passibility of God.

Often, in order to sort this problem out, there is a distinction drawn between God as he really is in his essence, and God as he reveals himself. The transcendent God is God in reality while the anthropomorphized God is God in relation to others. Kuyper describes anthropomorphism as an "accommodation device to bring God within man's comprehension."[11] The "real God" is not discerned in the anthropomorphic example given in a text, but in His transcendent being. Kuyper believes that this was especially true of the early Church fathers who, he asserts, were controlled by presuppositions based on Platonic theology. Thus, in the early Church,

> the properly enlightened interpreter . . . would detect within the Scripture the accommodation or adaptation passages which have no significance for understanding God as he actually is. The accommodation principle became the prevailing means for keeping the data of the Bible within the framework of a preconceived theology.[12]

Accurate interpretation, then, was dependent on being able to ferret out the biblical passages that have anthropomorphisms in them and to set them aside as useless for a true understanding what God is like. A great deal of biblical interpretation has followed this pattern even to the present day. Interpreters of the Bible often divest anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms of any real importance in the quest to understand what God is like.

Third, the existential situation in which one finds him or herself will often significantly affect how he or she chooses to interpret the verses concerning the suffering of God. It is interesting to observe that many of the theologians who argue that God is

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[10]Genesis 6:6, Isaiah 63:9, 15.

[11]Kuyper, "The Suffering and Repentance of God," 259.

[12]Kuyper, "The Suffering and Repentance of God," 259.

passible have themselves lived through terrible traumas and tragedy. For example, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who describes a suffering God in his *Letters and Papers from Prison*, was a prisoner and martyr in a Nazi concentration camp; Jürgen Moltmann, author of *The Crucified God*, was a prisoner of war in England during World War II; and the Japanese theologian Kazoh Kitamori wrote his book, *Theology of the Pain of God*, shortly after atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Contrary to what many contemporary theologians would have you believe, it is not exclusively a modern or post-modern development that theologians speak of God as one who sorrows. The Midrashic sages, after the destruction of the first temple (c. 586 B.C.), attributed passibility to God as they commented on Lamentations 1:16 which reads as follows:

> This is why I weep and my eyes overflow with tears.
> No one is near to comfort me, no one to restore my spirit.
> My children are destitute because the enemy has prevailed.

Melvin Glatt comments that although "there is no doubt . . . that the speaker of this sentence was a human eye-witness to Israel's misfortunes"; the Jewish interpreters of the Bible in this period make God Himself to be the speaker of the sentence. "It is *He* who weeps and it is *His* eyes that brim over with tears."[13] God is depicted as one who mourns with the people of Israel over the destruction of the temple. Glatt explains:

> The aggadic genre which depicts God as mourner describes more than His weeping and shedding tears over calamitous events in His people's history. Through the use of artistic hyperbole, daring anthropomorphisms, and malleable Biblical texts, this special Midrashic modality portrays a God who has taken on many a behavioral pattern characteristic of a person in deep grief. God is traumatized by His people's sufferings and He desires that His own behavior reflect various mourning practices, rites, and symbolic acts.[14]

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[13]Melvin Glatt, "God the Mourner--Israel's Companion in Tragedy," *Judaism* 28 (Winter 1979): 73.

[14]Glatt, "God the Mourner," 74.

Glatt suggests that these classic sages were providing a kind of grief therapy for the traumatized Jews of the era by making God a companion who could "overtly or symbolically cry with the person in distress"[15] so that they could move toward healing. The existential situation of the suffering that people are experiencing becomes the guiding principle for biblical interpretation.

Finally, the prominence given to certain passages of Scripture or one's interpretation of certain passages of Scripture may determine how other passages of the Bible are understood. For example Numbers 23:19, 1 Samuel 15:29, and James 1:17 all clearly declare the God is unchangeable and that he does not repent. On the other hand, with equal clarity, Exodus 32:14, Psalm 106:45, and Jonah 3:10 declare that God is changeable and that he does repent. In light of this dilemma, one must either believe that one of these groups of verses holds an overriding truth by which the other group may be explained, or that there is some alternative rationalization by which both groups of Scripture may be understood to be saying opposite things about God without being contradictory. One must make a choice about which verses of Scripture will be the most influential. There are theologians who support their claims by appealing strongly to a particular verse of Scripture or to a small group of verses. One prominent example of this is Kazoh Kitamori's work on the pain of God, which is predominantly based on his interpretation of Jeremiah 31:20 and Isaiah 63:15.

So then, recognizing the obstacles of having biased presuppositions, an inadequate language, the influence of one's existential situation, and prominence given to certain passages of Scripture over others, it is obvious that the approach to a reasonable and acceptable hermeneutic to understand the passibility of God must be carefully worked out. In the end, any hermeneutic chosen by a particular individual will still be a biased method of

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[15]Glatt, "God the Mourner," 78.

interpretation. However, this chapter will attempt to establish a reasonable method of interpretation for passages of Scripture dealing with the passibility or impassibility of God. Before moving to specific passages of Scripture, we will briefly address the concepts of anthropomorphism and anthropopathism.

Anthropomorphism and Accommodation

Augustine states in *The City of God* that

> Scripture is concerned for man, and it uses . . . language to terrify the proud, to arouse the careless, to exercise the inquirer, and to nourish the intelligent; and it would not have this effect if it did not first bend down and, as we may say, descend to the level of these on the ground.[16]

Unfortunately, it is often the case that the most difficult point of interpretation is how we deal with the descensions made by Scripture in the form of anthropomorphisms. L.J. Kuyper concurs:

> Hermeneutics find its greatest challenge in working with anthropomorphisms, the description of God in human forms and feelings (anthropopathisms). The anthropomorphism attempts to explain the unknown in terms of the known, which in this case describes God in terms of our daily experience. The eyes of God, therefore, tell us that God sees, and in seeing is aware of the world of action and movement. Similarly other bodily parts such as mouth, face, hand, or finger portray God as a Person who observes people and actually lives in fellowship with them. Much like the parables of Jesus the anthropomorphisms picture the God-man relationship in terms of our common life.[17]

There is no question that the Spirit-inspired authors of the Bible relied upon anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms to help readers understand God using terms from their common life. However, a true challenge often arises when one tries to determine the extent to which a particular anthropomorphism or anthropopathism illuminates what God is essentially like, or how he relates to human beings. It is obvious that the anthropomorphisms that attribute physical properties to God such as a mouth, eyes, ears,

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[16]Augustine, *The City of God,* XV, 25.

[17]Kuyper, "The Suffering and Repentance of God", 257.

hands, and feet cannot be taken literally if God is an incorporeal Spirit. However, the human emotions ascribed to God, anthropopathisms, such as anger, sorrow, remorse, joy, satisfaction, and pleasure are more difficult to dismiss as mere accommodations that cannot be taken at face value. Some theologians seemingly want to go so far as to equate these emotions of God to rudimentary human emotions. They want to say that if the Bible says that God is grieved or angry or joyful, then we can understand these emotional qualities of God to be the same as our own human emotional qualities. But there are many who object to this kind of transfer of emotional qualities from human to divine.

Anthropomorphisms are often objected to for several reasons. Edward Schoen remarks that the three most venerable objections to an anthropomorphic conception of the divine are traceable to Xenophanes and his critique of the early Greek gods. They are as follows:

> 1) Anthropomorphic conceptions lead to unseemly characterizations.
> 2) Anthropomorphisms tend to confuse the fact that divine beings are radically different from human beings.
> 3) Anthropomorphic descriptions of divine beings vary from culture to culture and are often indicative of a deep egocentrism.[18]

The first of these objections is certainly true. One of the most often cited objections to the anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms is that if they are taken literally, they reduce God to an immanent, ignorant, powerless God--a God that is essentially devoid of transcendence or sovereignty. God becomes a sniveling, suffering God who is not much more than a super-human entity. This is certainly a danger of using anthropomorphisms to describe a purely spiritual being.

However, it does not have to be the case that every anthropomorphism must lead to an "unseemly characterization." The potential is also there to lend a much clearer better understanding of the deity in question. Ronald Bond remarks that "the biblical depictions

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[18]Edward L. Schoen, "Anthropomorphic Concepts of God," *Religious Studies* 26 (March 1990): 123.

of God as teacher, father and physician cater to our shallow capacity to understand the spiritual realities which these divine vocations represent synecdochially."[19] Anthropomorphisms are accommodations to our capacities as creatures to help us understand that which is beyond our common experience by drawing on analogies and metaphors that are familiar to us. Thus, there is always the possibility that we will misinterpret or misunderstand the analogy being used, but there is also a good possibility that we may learn more about what God is like.

Xenophanes' second observation that the divine is radically different from human beings is also true, but it would seem that this is an argument that could be used in favor of anthropomorphisms rather than against it. What other way is there to convey what God is like, if one is not able to use analogies that are common to our experience to explain that which is different from what we can experience? How would one explain what the color red is like to someone who was born blind except by using analogies from other sensory experiences or mental images to help the blind person understand the color red? The fact that there is a great difference between the divine and the human makes it imperative that we use some kind of analogy in order to be able to convey to human understanding what the divine is like. Our capacity is not such that we are able to understand the divine in and of itself; therefore, we need God to "talk down" to us in this manner.

Our study of anthropomorphism and anthropopathism would seem to be protected from the last criticism of Xenophanes because the anthropomorphisms that are being used for the God of Christianity are contained in a single source, the Bible. Using the biblical anthropomorphisms exclusively to guide our understanding will protect us from the egocentricity that would be possible with different persons describing different gods. In the

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[19]Ronald B. Bond, "God's 'Back Parts': Silence and the Accommodating Word," in *Silence the Word and the Sacred*, ed. E. Blodgett and H. Coward (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989), 175.

case of the God of Christianity, the descriptions of God are limited to those we find in the book that Christians believe is inspired by God himself. Thus, the anthropomorphisms found in Scripture are essentially his own representations of himself rather than something that is fashioned completely by human beings. We will not need to consider this problem in our study of biblical material.

In conclusion, Xenophanes' objections, or others like them, do not prove that anthropomorphisms should not be used to convey the reality of the divine to human beings. They give us caution by helping us to see how anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms may be misused and misunderstood, but there is no good reason to believe that they should not be used at all to communicate truths about divine beings. The prophets of the Bible do not complain that the pagan gods of the neighboring peoples are too anthropomorphic, but that they are not persons at all. They are blocks of wood or pieces of metal or stone. There is nothing there to worship at all. Edward Cherbonnier points out that

> The difference between Yahweh and Zeus is not logical or formal, but factual and "existential." The prophets do not charge the pagan deities with being anthropomorphic, but with being insufficiently anthropomorphic. At their best, they are counterfeit persons. At their worst, they are frankly impersonal.[20]

It is through anthropomorphisms that we are able to have a relationship with God and understand what kind of a being God is.

Anthropomorphisms provide a necessary bridge for our human understanding. The truth that we are allowed to understand about God comes through the analogical material given in the Bible. Marc Steen states:

> Whoever speaks about an impassible or passible God cannot pass over the fact that the transcendent Reality can never be directly profiled. It is possible to speak about God but always with reservation. With anthropomorphic terms, we build a bridge from 'similarity' to the 'Other,' well aware that He ultimately goes beyond all of our

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[20]Edward La B. Cherbonnier, "The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism (Biblical God Not the God of Mystical Theosophy)," *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (July 1962): 187.

affirmations.[21]

Anthropomorphic and anthropopathic examples from the Bible constitute the "rhetoric" which must be used to communicate the reality of the divine beings to human understanding. Ford Lewis Battles comments:

> As in human rhetoric there is a gulf between the highly educated and the comparatively unlearned, between the convinced and the unconvinced, a gulf which it is the task of rhetoric to bridge so that through simple, appropriate language the deeps of human thought yield up their treasure, or at least the views of the speaker are persuasively communicated--analogously in divine rhetoric the infinitely greater gulf between God and man, through divine condescension, in word and deed, is bridged. And the divinely appointed human authors and expositors of Scripture express and expound the divine rhetoric under the Spirit's guidance for the benefit of all.[22]

The gulf between the divine and the human begs for the rhetorical invention of analogy to accommodate our human capacity. John Calvin said that "God represents Himself to us not as He is in Himself, but as He seems to us, to accommodate to our weak capacity His description of Himself."[23] There is a "dumbing down" of God, so to speak, in the Bible so that we may comprehend what God is like.

However, this accommodation does not lead us away from truth, but rather toward it. As Battles describes it,

> In the divine rhetoric accommodation as practiced by the Holy Spirit so empowers the physical, verbal vehicle that it leads us to, not away from, the very truth. Thus accommodating language and the truth to which it points are really a unity.[24]

Anthropomorphic language expresses truths about God that could not reasonably be

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[21]Marc Steen, "The Theme of the 'Suffering' God: An Exploration," in Jan Lambrecht and Raymond F. Collins, ed. *God and Human Suffering* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Press, 1990), 89.

[22]Ford L. Battles, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity," *Interpretation* 31 (January 1977): 20.

[23]Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.17.12.

[24]Battles, "God Was Accommodating Himself," 37.

expressed in any other way. Cherbonnier rightly suggests that anthropomorphisms also achieve the preservation of the mystery of God without jettisoning the rationality of human beings.[25] Divine truth about the person of God may be expressed in terms that are intelligible rather than in esoteric enigmas and paradoxes.

In this dissertation the particular anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms which are most important for our subject are those that have to do with the emotions given to God by the biblical writers and what they tell us about God's personality or personhood. The biblical writers are selective in which emotions they attribute to God. For example, the biblical God does not eat, sleep, fear, doubt, or die, but he is roused to anger, he desires and feels compassion, he hides his face and shows strength with his arm, just as much as he knows and wills.[26] The range of emotions ascribed to God must, for the Christian, be derived inductively from Scripture.[27] This is not to propose, however, that the emotions God is said to have are equivalent to human emotions, and yet, "to acknowledge that his feelings are not *human* is not to deny that they are *real*."[28] The anthropopathisms used in the Bible should be taken seriously, but not understood literally as if they were human emotions.

Some thinkers, such as Charles Ohlrich, take the position that the emotions of God expressed in the Old Testament are to be taken at "face value." He states:

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[25]Cherbonnier, "The Logic of Biblical Anthropomorphism," 197

[26]Richard Bauckham, "In Defence of the Crucified God," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 117.

[27]Paul Helm, "The Impossibility of Divine Passibility," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 127.

[28]John R. W. Stott, "God on the Gallows: How Could I Worship A God Immune to Pain?" *Christianity Today* 31 (January 16, 1987): 28.

> We cannot write off these expressions of God's deep emotion and many others like them elsewhere in the Old Testament as mere attributions of human emotion to God. Since we are made in the image of God and he describes himself as suffering, we have little, if any, reason not to take these expressions at face value. If God is indeed like us, as we are like him, what reason, apart from some prior philosophical commitment, have we to think that God does not suffer? So long as we do not imagine that God is tossed to and fro by emotional upheavals or that he alters his purposes in response to such yearnings, we gain more from learning that God is able to understand and enter into our struggle than from holding that he is remote and unaffected by it.[29]

The manifestations of God's emotions are certainly more than mere attributions of human emotion to God, they are accommodations of divine truth to us so that we may gain an understanding of the God that we worship and serve. However, Ohlrich comes dangerously close to giving the impression that there is no real difference between divine and human emotion simply because human beings are made in the image of God and are like God as he is like us. He qualifies his statement by saying that we must understand that God is "not tossed to and fro by emotional upheavals" and that his purposes are not altered in response to his feelings. It is perhaps clearer language to say that the emotions attributed to God in the Bible are done so analogously rather than saying that we may take the anthropopathisms given at "face value." Consequently, the next section of this chapter will deal with the concept of analogy as it may be applied to the emotions of God.

Anthropopathism as Analogy

An analogy is simply the "resemblance in some particulars between things otherwise unlike."[30] God, in the Scriptures, "borrows" images from human experience that have some particulars in common with his own person in order to communicate in a way that we can comprehend, but those images point to an even stronger reality that lies

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[29]Charles Ohlrich, *The Suffering God: Hope and Comfort for Those Who Hurt* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 52.

[30]Philip Babcock Gove, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged* (Springfield, Massachusetts: Merriam-Webster Inc., Publishers, 1986), 77.

behind them.[31] These particulars that God has in common with human experience are the basis for analogies and thus the foundation of our knowledge about God. Roderick MacKenzie rightly states:

> Our knowledge of God is fundamentally and essentially analogical, and analogy combines similarity and dissimilarity, the latter being as essentially part of it as the former. The natural desire to minimize this dissimilarity, to "purify" our concepts, to come as close as possible to forming a "proper" idea of the divinity, leads either to ever-increasing abstraction, so that the terms used become more and more "essential" and convey correspondingly less to our intelligence; or, by the *via negationis*, to definition by negatives, which has the same result. And however far the refinement is carried, anthropomorphism can never be entirely escaped, for it is inherent in the human faculty of knowing, *in statu viae*.[32]

Hence, while an analogy brings us closer to the truth about the being of God, we are never able to overcome the factor of the dissimilarity in the analogy to come to a "pure" concept of God. However, the closer we come to this pure concept of God, the less intelligible that concept becomes to us. There may be no greater danger to those of us who write, talk, or even think about God than to depict him in terms of mere abstractions. In fact, because God is a relational and personal God, a completely abstract representation of him may constitute more of an insult to him than the truth it portrays about his essential being.[33]

In order to speak about God in meaningful ways, we must use analogies. "Even though the nature of divine suffering is a mystery to us, we are led to believe that there is a possibility of discerning an analogous knowledge of it."[34] Analogies do not give us perfect

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[31]Philip Yancey, "God, the Jilted Lover," *Christianity Today* 30 (May 16, 1986): 72.

[32]Roderick A. F. MacKenzie, "Divine Soliloquies in Genesis," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 17 (April 1955): 277-78.

[33]Philip Yancey, "God, the Jilted Lover," *Christianity Today* 30 (May 16, 1986): 72.

[34]Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 20.

or complete knowledge of the object we are trying to study, but in some cases, they are the best that we can do. Mozley comments that even Augustine admits that the scriptural imputation of emotions to God is "the best manner of speech possible, in view of the necessary limitations of language when any attempt is made to describe the life of God."[35]

The use of analogy also reminds us, as Francois Varillon says, "that we cannot touch a thunderbolt without dying, and that the mystery can only be perceived through the shadows of analogy."[36] The otherness and transcendence of God is preserved through the use of analogies too. They allow us to talk about God in ways that provide information without being able to express the unsearchable self-consciousness of God. There is much about God that will always be in the category of mystery. Thus, "analogy is the inevitable choice of theological epistemology."[37]

The use of analogical language to define God has a double effect on the vocabulary that serves this purpose. First, it helps us to understand God in terms that are common to us. God is, in a sense, brought down to our level so that we are able to see what he is like in the nomenclature of our world. Second, the words that are used to describe God must be redefined as they apply to God because he is greater and more perfect than anything that appears to us in our experience. One often used example of this is the analogy of God as Father. On one level we understand God in the frame of reference of the male figure who rears us from infancy to adulthood. But on a higher plane, we conceive of God being a more faithful, more trustworthy, omnipotent authority figure that all human males who are the parents of children should strive to emulate. In this way, we are able to see God in the

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[35]Mozley, *Impassibility of God,* 105.

[36]Varillon, *Humility and Suffering of God,* 172.

[37]Lee, *God Suffers for Us,* 91.

particulars of the analogies given to us, but God also broadens and sharpens the definitions of the vocabulary used to help us understand his being. Abraham Heschel expresses this idea as follows:

The Bible speaks in the language of man. It deals with the problems of man, and its terms are borrowed from the vocabulary of the people. It has not coined many words, but it has given new meaning to borrowed words. The prophets had to use anthropomorphic language in order to convey His nonanthropomorphic being.[38]

One of the great dangers of the interpretation of these analogies is to disregard the fact that an analogy must, by the nature of what it is, consist of two parts: the similar and the dissimilar. Both of these parts are important to convey the truth of the analogy, but in some cases one part of the analogy will be emphasized and the other will be eliminated. With respect to God and human experience, it is true that we are made in the image of God and are thus similar to God in some essential way, but it is also true that there is a great, deep abyss that separates the divine and the human. Both of these aspects of reality are important in the knowledge that is to be gained from an analogy which constitutes an anthropomorphism or anthropopathism. Terence Fretheim, using the language of metaphor[39] instead of analogy, eloquently states how this kind of mistake is made. He states:

> The metaphors used to speak of God are realistic, having cognitive value. The metaphors do reveal an essential continuity with the reality which is God; they do in fact contain information about God. At the same time, they disclose that which is discontinuous with the divine reality. Each metaphor speaks both a "yes" and a "no" (an "is" and "is not") with respect to God. In the history of interpretation the temptation has been to fall off this horse on one side or the other, either interpreting the metaphors literally in every respect or (more commonly today) denying any essential

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[38]Heschel, *The Prophets*, 276.

[39]A metaphor being essentially a figure of speech in which a word or phrase denoting one kind of object or action is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them. Gove, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 1420.

relationship between the metaphor and God.[40]

Paul Helm, it seems, moves toward a denial of the essential relationship between the metaphor and God when he takes a hard line on the side of the dissimilarity in analogies about God. He attests that

> The metaphysical or ontological or strictly literal data must control the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic data, and not *vice-versa*. The alternative is quite unacceptable, namely, a theological reductionism in which God is distilled to human proportions. But worse than that. For anyone who says that such a reduction is correct immediately has another decision to make. Not only is there an abundance of anthropomorphic and anthropopathic data about God in Scripture, there is data which ascribes to him the properties of animals and physical objects; he is a rock, a tower, he roars like a lion, and so on. So either the reduction must continue until it includes such concepts, or it ought never to have been started in the first place.[41]

It is agreeable to assert that the metaphysical or ontological data about God needs to guide our understanding of the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic data if we are to avoid reductionism, but it is not evident that one must fall down the slippery slope of reductionism if he or she is willing to see how the particulars that God has in common with a rock, a tower, or a roaring lion lend new insights to their thoughts about God. In our interpretation of the analogies given in the anthropopathisms of the Bible, we must be careful to recognize the similarities, but also the differences involved in the essential truths that are given to describe the personality of God.

In conclusion, we must understand the anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms of Scripture to be analogies that contain truths about both the similarities and differences of the two things that are being compared. The challenge of interpreting these analogies lies in being able to glean the heart of what the analogy is trying to convey without falling into theological reductionism on the one hand or unintelligible abstraction on the other.

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[40]Terence E. Fretheim, "The Repentance of God: A Key to Evaluating Old Testament God-talk," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 10 (June 1988): 51.

[41]Paul Helm, "The Impossibility of Divine Passibility," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 129.

Biblical Evidence for the Passibility and Impassibility of God

As was mentioned earlier, scriptural evidence provides the best indication of whether one should understand God to be passible or impassible in some sense. Armed with the knowledge that we have of purpose and usefulness of anthropomorphisms, anthropopathisms, and analogies as they are used in biblical writings, we will now examine several important Scriptural texts to decide how we may best understand them. This will then provide a basis for how we may think about how it is possible for God to suffer or not.

To do this we will use the following method. We will first examine the analogy used in the passage of Scripture and determine the aspects of the analogy that are more similar and more dissimilar to God. We will then analyze the anthropomorphisms or anthropopathisms used by the biblical writer to see how we can avoid falling into any of the pitfalls that Xenophanes cites as being a problem. Finally, we will ask and answer what it is that we can reasonably surmise from this text concerning the passibility or impassibility of God.

Most of the verses that are cited to support the impassibility of God have to do with the fact that God does not change (e.g. Psalm 102:26-27, Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8).[42] However, the assertion that God does not change is compatible with the affirmation of the passibility of God if one is willing to concede that the immutability of God is understood to manifest the fact that God does not change in regard to his faithfulness or his promises and that impassibility has to do with the fact that God has no passions--that is, God cannot be tempted to commit sin.

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[42]Ps. 102:26-27 - "They will pass away. But you will remain. They will all wear out like a piece of clothing. You will make them like clothes that are taken off and thrown away. But you remain the same. Your years will never end." Malachi 3:6 - "I am the Lord. I do not change. That is why I have not destroyed you members of Jacob's family." James 1:17 - "Every good and perfect gift is from God. It comes down from the Father. He created the heavenly lights. He does not change like shadows that move."

As was seen in chapter two, to agree with this position is certainly to have an orthodox understanding of the immutability of God, and several of the theologians cited in that survey would agree: first, that the immutability of God does not preclude God's passibility if immutability is referring to God's steadfastness and faithfulness rather than the Greek philosophical idea that God is immutable in regard to perfection and cannot change in any way without forfeiting that perfection; and second, that impassibility means that God is free from passions which lead to sin, but not devoid of emotional qualities or the ability to suffer if he would choose to do so.

It does not seem that any of the theologians cited above would want to argue, as modern thinkers say they do, that God is immobile, inactive, or without the ability to change in any way whatsoever. For Aquinas, one of the theologians who comes closest to siding with Greek philosophy in his theology, God is "pure act." God is constantly acting and at work in the world. Thus, God is immutable in his state of activity. Augustine's emphasis on the divine kenosis permeates his work. In his entire corpus, he cites part or all of Philippians 2:6-8 422 times and alludes to it 563 times.[43] This means that he had this passage in mind nearly a thousand times as he wrote his theology. Hallman states that this passage helps Augustine to specify the exact relationship between philosophy and the Christian faith. "The God of Platonism is only partially identified with the God of Christian faith as Augustine sees it."[44] The immutability of God is extremely important to Augustine's theology, but it is an immutability that incorporates the possibility of divine kenosis through the incarnation. Calvin believes that God constantly upholds all things in the world by means of his will so that they do not fall back into chaos. Thus, the immutability of the God of Christian theology is significantly different from the Greek

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43Hallman, *The Descent of God,* 107.

44Hallman, *The Descent of God,* 107-08.

concept of immutability with regard to perfection.

With regard to impassibility, there are several theologians such as Gregory Thaumaturgus, Gregory of Nyssa, and Luther to name a few who would affirm that God is impassible in regard to having passions that lead toward sin, but God's impassibility in this regard would not preclude God from having emotions or from experiencing suffering in some manner. Other theologians, such as Calvin, Aquinas, and Anselm would probably argue that God is impassible with regard to emotions and suffering as well as passions. For these theologians, the emotions of God that are cited in the Bible are to be understood in the same manner that physical appendages are with reference to God. They are there to give us a mental picture or understanding of God, but they are not actually a part of God's nature or being. These theologians have retained a Hellenistic notion of what God is like with regard to suffering and emotion.

Nevertheless, it is both plausible and within the tradition of orthodox theology to interpret God's immutability as meaning that God is steadfast in love, faithful to his promises, and constantly acting and willing to uphold his creation. It is also part of the tradition to understand the impassibility of God to mean that God is not susceptible to passions or being tempted to sin but that he is capable of having emotions and even capable of suffering if he chooses to do so. These will be the working assumptions concerning the meaning of these terms as we look at the biblical passages below. In this way, we can say that God is impassible with regard to the passions that lead to sin, but that he is passible in regard to suffering. This definition of passibility also recognizes that the type of suffering that God would be involved in would be much different from human suffering. He would participate in divine suffering.

There are several passages in the Bible that depict God as one who suffers. The following section will address only a few of them, assuming that other similar passages could be interpreted in a like manner. We will begin with a passage from Genesis and then

look at passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah. We will also examine a few New Testament passages from Matthew, John, and Hebrews.

Old Testament

Genesis 6:5-8

> The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the Lord said, "I will wipe mankind from the face of the earth--men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air--for I am grieved that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. (NIV)

This passage of Scripture is often cited in literature concerning the suffering of God. It is full of rich anthropomorphic and anthropopathic tropes that describe the disappointment of God with the human beings that he had created to inhabit the earth. There are several vibrant parallels of imagery used in these verses to enhance the analogies that are being made and to manifest the deep remorse of God: God *sees* the wickedness of man, but Noah finds favor in God's *eyes*; the *heart* of man is full of only evil, and thus, God's *heart* is filled with pain. Twice, we are told that God is grieved that he has made man, and God's solution for the problem is to wipe mankind and all living things from the face of the earth.

Let us first examine the similarity and dissimilarity in the analogy of the grief of God in this passage. John Calvin's commentary on Genesis is a good initial assessment of how one should go about interpreting the anthropomorphisms that are being used in this passage. He states that the repentance and grief ascribed to God here do "not properly belong to him, but has reference to our understanding of him."[45] Since we cannot comprehend God as he is, he needs to transform himself for our sake. For Calvin, it is easily understood that repentance cannot take place in God because "nothing happens

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[45]John Calvin, *Commentary of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), chapter VI, verse 6, page 248.

which is by him unexpected or unforeseen."[46] The same reasoning, he says, suffices for the remark that God was affected by grief. He writes, "Certainly God is not sorrowful or sad; but remains for ever like himself in his celestial and happy repose: yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God's hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity."[47] Further, Calvin understands this accommodation of God to be a large measure of paternal goodness and tenderness in order to lessen our love of sin "since God, in order more effectually to pierce our hearts, clothes himself with our affections."[48]

It is readily evident that Calvin recognizes the dissimilarity between God's condition and our own, but it is not so manifest that he also recognizes the particulars that are being shared between God and human beings in this instance. Calvin reasons that God cannot be sorrowful or sad because he is able to foresee all that will happen in the future. He assumes that God remains for ever in a celestial repose. So that we can be made aware of God's hatred for sin, sadness is attributed to God. However, Calvin's reasoning does not seem to be entirely foolproof in regard to the fact that God cannot experience sadness or sorrow. First, there does not seem to be a clear logical connection between the fact that God foresees all that will happen and that he cannot be sorrowful or sad. It would seem that God could know full well that something would occur, and, yet, he could still experience sadness

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[46]Calvin, *Commentary of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 249.

[47]Calvin, *Commentary of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 249. Latin original: Certe non moeret Deus vel tristatur, quin in coelesti et beata sua quiete perpetuo sui similis manet: sed quia aliter percipi non potest quantum sit odium peccati in Deo, et quanta detestatio, ideo se spiritus ad captum nostrum format. G. Baum et al. ed. *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae Supersunt Omnia (*Brunsvigae: C.A. Schwetschke et filium, 1863-1900), 24: 118.

[48]Calvin, *Commentary of the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, 249.

concerning a particular event. Second, why assume that God's existence is always in celestial repose and that the attribution of sadness to God is the only way in which God's hatred of sin may be illustrated to us? There is very little biblical evidence for the statement that God is continually in a state of blissful repose, nor is it clear that the attribution of sadness to God is the only sure way to convince human beings that God's hatred of sin is real.

The fact that the expressed grief of God in this instance is an anthropopathism does not rule out the possibility that the sadness of God is very real in some sense. It is certain that this sadness of God is not identical to human sadness or human grief, but the fact that it is not equivalent to human sadness does not mean that it is not similar to human grief in some respects. The tension here between the transcendent and immanent aspects of God's nature creates a dilemma for accurate interpretation of the Genesis account of God's reasoning for the flood. Nahum Sarna comments on this problem saying:

> On the one hand, (God) is conceived to be wholly outside of nature, omniscient and omnipotent, sovereign over time and space, and not subject to change. On the other hand, He is also immanent in the world, not withdrawn from it, a personal God who is actively involved in the lives of His creatures, approachable by them, and responsive to their needs. God's transcendence requires formulation in abstract, philosophical language that poses the danger of depriving Him of personality and relevance. God's immanence must unavoidably be expressed in concrete, imaginative terms that entail the risk of compromising His invariability. The biblical writers frequently took that risk for the sake of emphasizing God's vital presence and personality; otherwise, the God idea would have lost all meaning for them.[49]

One must be able to glean the vital presence and personality of God from the texts that are concerned with the sorrow of God, without reducing the sense of the transcendence of God.

Victor Hamilton, in his commentary on Genesis, tries to resolve this difficulty in the following manner:

> (Yahweh's) pain finds its source in the depth of the regret he experiences over fallen humanity, and in the fact that he must judge such fallenness. It is easy, of course, to

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[49]Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary, Genesis* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 47.

> dismiss such allusions as anthropopathisms, and to feel that they can tell us nothing about the essential nature of God. But verses like this remind us that the God of the OT is not beyond the capability of feeling pain, chagrin, and remorse. To call him the Impassible Absolute is but part of the truth.[50]

Hamilton wants to leave open the possibility that these anthropopathisms do tell us something important about the essence of God. We must understand God's capacity for suffering as well as his nature to be beyond the sway of suffering's pain.

G. Ch. Aalders explains that the sole purpose of using anthropomorphisms in this case is to make the intent of God clear to our understanding. He observes:

> We certainly cannot conceive of God actually being grieved about something He Himself had done. Nor can we speak of God having regrets, as human beings have, about His own actions. . . . But Scripture frequently uses expressions that are human in their scope and concept and then ascribes these to God. This is done only in order that the intent may become clear to our limited human understanding. Here we have a clear instance of the use of such an anthropomorphism. The intent is to express the serious breach that had taken place in the relationship of God to man as the devastating consequence of man's sin and rebellion.[51]

God cannot be grieved by something that is ultimately attributed to him, nor can he be said to have any regrets about his own actions. The intent of these anthropopathic images is to give human beings the distinct understanding that there has been a serious breach in the relationship between God and his creatures. Aalders' account does not allow that there is any description of the essence of God here, but only that these anthropopathisms communicate the seriousness of the rift in God's relationship to human beings.

The similarities that are found in this passage between the human and divine conditions are the feelings of grief and of having a heart filled with pain in the event that something that you have started has gone terribly wrong. We are told twice that God is grieved. We are told that he his heart is filled with pain because the heart of man is only evil

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[50]Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 274.

[51]G. Ch. Aalders, *Bible Student's Commentary, Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 158.

all the time. These are feelings that we know from our experience in the world. Grief and heartbreak are common components of human experience. They are psychological pains that can be experienced with or without a corporeal body. The extent to which God is like a grieving person or like a person whose heart is filled with pain, may be much the same as the extent to which he is like a rock or a roaring lion, which is very limited, but it gives us an understanding of the attributes that God might have in regard to his compassion. God is like a grieving and heartbroken person in this kind of a situation.

How do these experiences differ? We cannot say with great certainty what God's experience of grief must be like, but there is some consensus that we may assume that God is not affected by grief or heartache as a human would be. For a human being these kinds of pains are all-consuming. They take over our lives so that we lose the ability to function in normal capacities. But, God must have the ability to be unperturbed by grief and heartache in respect to his governance of creation. This does not mean that he must be completely unaffected. Another difference is God's ability to act in a decisive manner to destroy all that he had created. Human beings have no such prerogative.

Does our consideration of this passage and its anthropomorphisms fall into any of the categories that Xenophanes warns against? Does this anthropomorphism lead to unseemly characterizations of God? There certainly would be some theologians who would object to God being characterized as one who is grieved. They would want to dismiss this depiction of God as a mere accommodation to our understanding that has no real bearing on the way God is. However, according to the definition of impassibility that we have agreed to use, God would be able to grieve without any conflict in our understanding of God. It seems right that if God truly loves those whom he has created, then he should be grieved if they turn away from what is right in order to pursue evil.

Is the divine being understood to be radically different from human beings? In our interpretation, we have recognized that God's grief is very different from human grief in that

it does not control or incapacitate God in any way to act or to uphold his creation. This does not mean that God must be completely unaffected by grief. God is also radically different from human beings in his prerogative to wipe out all of creation. Thus, our interpretation of this passage adequately meets this requirement also.

What may we surmise from Genesis 6:6-8 about God? It seems reasonable to believe that we may determine from this passage that God may participate in feeling grief if he so chooses. We must agree that God's emotional suffering or grief is divine suffering and not equivalent to human suffering, but this does not eliminate the possibility that there may be some similarity between what the anthropopathism represents for human beings and what it represents for God.

Isaiah 63:9-10

> 9In all their (the Israelites') distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. 10Yet they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit. So he turned and became their enemy and he himself fought against them.

The translation of verse 9a of Isaiah 63 is somewhat controversial as to whether it should be translated similarly to the above translation in the New International Version--the King James, and Revised Standard Version both translate the Hebrew in this manner--or as it is interpreted in the New Revised Standard Version, Revised English Version, New American Bible, and New Jerusalem Bible: "In all their troubles, it was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them" (NJB). The translation is dependent on whether the Hebrew *l'* is read as *lw* or not. The Masora indicate that this is one of fifteen passages in which *lw* is to be read for *l'*.[52] This is not a debate in which we need to become

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52A. Alt, et al. *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1977), 773. Also cf. Franz Delitzsch, ed., *Biblical Commentary on The Prophecies of Isaiah, vol. 2*, trans. Rev. James Martin, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 453.

involved because it is not essential to the discussion of the passibility of God. Persuasive arguments given by Franz Delitzsch and John Calvin recommend the translation found in the New International Version ("in all their distress he too was distressed").[53] If one follows this line of thinking and translates the Hebrew in terms of God being afflicted in the afflictions of the Israelites, such a translation portrays God as suffering with his people in their pain and sorrows. Both Delitzsch and Calvin think that we may understand God to be like this.[54] Nevertheless, verse 10a, which is much more straightforward in its translation, serves to illustrate a similar point.

Verse 10a relates that God's Holy Spirit was grieved or vexed by the Israelites who continually put him off and rejected him. In response to the rebellion of Israel, God is portrayed as being emotionally disturbed and sorrowful. However, this does not prevent God in his holiness from becoming the very opposite of what he wished to be for the

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[53]Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on Isaiah, vol. 2*, 452-453; John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans Rev. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 346-347.

[54]Delitzsch states: "There is nothing to surprise us in the fact that God should be said to feel the sufferings of His people as His own sufferings; for the question whether God can feel pain is answered by the Scriptures in the affirmative. He can as surely as everything originates in Him with the exception of sin, which is a free act and only originates in Him so far as the possibility is concerned, but not in its actuality. Just as a man can feel pain, and yet in his personality keep himself superior to it, so God feels pain without His own happiness being thereby destroyed. And so did He suffer with His people; their affliction was reflected in His own life in Himself, and shared Him inwardly" (453).

Calvin asserts: "He (Isaiah) enlarges on the goodness of God toward his people, and shews that he was kind to the fathers, so long as they permitted themselves to be governed by him, and was so careful about them that he himself bore their distresses and afflictions. By speaking in this manner, he declares the incomparable love which God bears toward his people. In order to move us more powerfully and draw us to himself, the Lord accommodates himself to the manner of men, by attributing to himself all the affection, love, and . . . Compassion which a father can have. And yet in human affairs it is impossible to conceive of any sort of kindness or benevolence which he does not immeasurably surpass. . . . In this sense the Prophet testifies that God, in order to alleviate the distresses and afflictions of his people, himself bore their burdens; not that he can in any way endure anguish, but, by a very customary figure of speech, he assumes and applies to himself human passions" (346-347).

Israelites, their enemy. The grieving or vexing of the Spirit of God does not alter God's position in regard to his holiness and the subsequent action he takes in regard to the Israelites. Thus, these verses effectively illustrate that it is possible for God to have the attribute of passibility and yet remain immutable in regard to his holiness and purpose.

What are the differences and similarities between the divine and the human condition in this analogy? We can resonate with the feelings of compassion that elicit distress when someone we love is in distress, as anyone knows who has had to hold a young child while the youngster is getting stitches. We also know or can imagine what it feels like to be grieved at the rebellion of someone that we have cared for and carried for a long time. Again the extent to which God may be similar to a person who is distressed over another's distress, or who is feeling grief after one that they have cared for has rebelled may be minimal. But the kind of feelings that those people must have give us some idea of what we may assume God feels. We also see God exercising his prerogative to turn against those who have rebelled against him. His compassion is limited by his justice and righteous judgment.

Do these anthropomorphisms lead to any unseemly characterizations? As we have agreed to define impassibility they do not. God may be grieved and may feel compassion, and yet he is able to remain impassible in the sense described above. And in response to Xenophanes' second caution about the divine being radically different from the human, we may say that our interpretation of this passage recognizes the vast difference that there is between divine grief and feelings of compassion and similar human feelings. God is not affected by these emotions in the same manner that a human being would be affected. God's experiences divine emotion, not human emotion.

From this passage of Scripture, we can reasonably surmise that God feels grief over the rebellion of Israel. His Spirit is grieved because they have spurned his love and care. The grief that God feels, however, must be thought of as very different from the grief that a

human being experiences. It does not cause him to act rashly. Rather, he turns against the Israelites in righteous judgment, not out of retaliation for their action.

Jeremiah 31:20

[20]Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? Though I often speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him," declares the Lord.

It was this verse more than any other factor that led Kazoh Kitamori to pursue the idea of the pain of God. The New International Version uses the euphemistic term "heart" for the Hebrew term *me'eh*, which is more properly translated as "internal organs" or "bowels." In this case, it is a figurative expression that refers to the seat of God's emotions or compassion for Ephraim.[55] C.F. Keil comments that this expression is "strongly anthropopathic, and denotes the most heartfelt sympathy."[56] This is one of several instances in the prophetic literature when Israel as a whole or a portion of God's chosen people is personified as the child of God whom God rears.[57] God is depicted as a parent who has declared punishment for the misdeeds of his child, but he cares so deeply for his child that he has great compassion on him.

This passage of Scripture implies rather than explicitly expresses the passibility of God. The heavy anthropomorphism of the passage renders a God whose pathos is aroused for Israel as the compassion of a father or mother is stirred for a wayward son or daughter who is loved in spite of continued rebellion. God is portrayed as a parent who is yearning for the return of his child to the right path. God is again depicted as one who is broken-

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[55]Francis Brown, et al., *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979), 589.

[56]C.F. Keil, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah, vol. 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 27.

[57]Other examples of this are in Hosea 7:15-16,11:8-9; Isaiah 1:2-5, 49:15.

hearted over the rebellion of his people.

The similarities of the analogy of a parent are clear. We can sympathize with the parent whose son or daughter has rebelled and gone against the teaching of his or her parents. Even though a child may be wayward and rebellious, a parent can quickly forgive and find delight in the child. The extent to which God is like a parent who is concerned for his or her child seems more fitting than either of the previous two examples. Perhaps this is because, in the New Testament, Jesus bids us to call God "Father." There are many ways that God is like a parent who guides us and brings us to maturity in our Christian faith. God teaches and disciplines us. He loves us as only a parent can love us. The book of Romans tells us that God has adopted us as his own, and, as Christians, we are referred to as the "children of God."

The dissimilarities are still great. We must recognize the great difference that exists between our human parents and our heavenly parent. God is much more perfect in his judgment, justice, and love than any earthly parent could be. The parenthood modeled by God is the perfect parenthood that all earthly parents should seek to emulate. He knows and wants what is best for us. He never makes mistakes in his discipline and care of us. He never tries to live vicariously through our endeavors, and he does not push us into a role that is not the best for us. God loves us more than we can imagine and always has our best interest at heart.

Xenophanes' concern that anthropomorphism will lead to an unseemly characterization seems to be avoided in this case. Portraying God as a parent who is concerned about a rebellious child and willing to have great compassion on that child is not a characterization that is objectionable. It is an anthropomorphism that is widely used and accepted in theological discourse.

Xenophanes' second concern--that this will promote an understanding of God that does not radically differentiate the divine being from the human being--seems as if it has the

potential to be a problem. We need to carefully discern the differences that exist between God and a human parent. The gap between human and divine beings in this instance could be narrowed conceptually, if we do not keep in mind that there are vast differences between God as a divine parent and human parents. The ability to clearly differentiate between the human and divine in this instance is complicated by the fact that the experience we have with our own parents often will color the way that we understand God to be. The way that a father treats a child is especially formative in the child's understanding of what God is like and may persist to adulthood for many people. Thus, it is important to be able to recognize this tendency so that we do not lose the sense of God's otherness. We do not want to reduce our understanding of the transcendence of God.

From this verse, we may surmise that God is compassionate and that he yearns for his chosen people even when they are rebellious. This understanding of God's compassion does not conflict with the definition of impassibility that we are using for this project. Thus, we may recognize that God feels a sense of compassion and yearning in his heart for those he loves even when they are rebellious. This is not a feeling that overtakes God or that controls him, but we may understand that there is a real sense in which God yearns for those whom he loves and has compassion.

These three Old Testament texts illustrate to us the suffering of God through analogies. The analogies used here are those of a person who is grieved by the rebellion of his creation or his people. God's love for his people remains constant, but he suffers and is heartbroken by their rebellion. It is important to keep the concept of the suffering of God within its proper boundaries--God's grief is not something that overtakes him as it might overwhelm a human being.

In the next section we will be looking at a few of the verses in the New Testament that illustrate the suffering of God.

New Testament

Working with texts in the New Testament is more difficult that working with those in the Old Testament because of the advent of Jesus Christ. In working with New Testament texts, we must be mindful that Jesus is the final revelation of God to humankind. This is complicated by the words of Jesus to his disciple Philip: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). We have to struggle with the extent to which we may take these words literally. As was seen in the historical chapter, many theologians dealt with this problem by attributing certain acts of Jesus to his divinity and other acts to his humanity. This easily leads to Nestorianism. The challenge is to recognize the two natures in Christ without undoing the unity of his person.

A second problem that has to be dealt with is how his suffering is related to the suffering of the other persons of the Trinity. It is clear that Jesus of Nazareth suffered in many different ways while he was on this earth. But how did his suffering as the incarnate second person of the Trinity affect the Father and the Spirit? Is it safe to say that all three persons are affected negatively when one of the persons of the Trinity suffers? How is the experience of the Son also the experience of the Father and the Holy Spirit? These questions take us beyond the scope of this dissertation, but they are questions that must be considered when we are trying to discern the passibility of God as it is related to the suffering of Jesus Christ. For this project, we will assume that the emotions and suffering that we see in the experience of Jesus Christ as the incarnate Son of God are a revelation to us indicative of the attitude of God toward suffering and humanity.

Ephesians 4:30

> And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

The apostle Paul mentions this verse in his litany of how Christians should act if

they are living as children of light. It is assumed that this is the same "Holy Spirit of God" who was grieved by the rebellion of the Israelites in Isaiah 63:10 above. In this verse, the anthropomorphism is very slight if there is any at all. It does not seem out of the realm of possibility for the Holy Spirit of God to be grieved without having to take on any human characteristics. If we assume the Holy Spirit of God to be essentially an entity that possesses a mind and a will, then it would seem rather typical for an entity with a mind and a will to be able to grieve.

It is also assumed that the kinds of things that we could do as human beings to grieve the Holy Spirit of God would be the kinds of thing that are mentioned in the surrounding verses: letting unwholesome talk come out of our mouths, tearing others down, harboring bitterness, rage, anger etc. Participating in these kinds of activities would grieve God's Holy Spirit by virtue of disrespecting God and other people who are created in God's image.

Is talking of the Holy Spirit of God being grieved what we would consider to be an analogy? It would be considered an analogy only if we believed that the Holy Spirit of God could not, in reality, be truly grieved in any way. But as it is, grief seems to be a plausible thing to expect from an entity that has a mind and a will. The sense in which we could say that the grief of the Holy Spirit would be different from human grief would be in the way it affects them. The Holy Spirit of God would experience grief as divine grief and not as human grief. This means that it would not be controlling or overwhelming for the the Holy Spirit. However, this does not rule out the possibility that it would affect the Spirit of God in a way that would be similar to how it would affect a human being who has been treated poorly.

The considerations of anthropomorphisms do not seem to be of much concern here since there is very little here that could be considered to be anthropomorphic. So then, we may surmise from a study of this verse that it is possible to grieve the Holy Spirit of God

by acting in ways that are unkind or disrespectful of others. This grief is not anything that would render God unable to function or act in accord with his nature, but it is nonetheless grief and suffering for God.

John 11:32-35

> When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. "Where have you laid him?" he asked.
> "Come and see, Lord," they replied.
> Jesus wept.

There are several interesting and notable events in the story of the resurrection of Lazarus found in John 11. The first is that it is abundantly clear that Jesus knew that Lazarus was going to die and that he would raise him from the dead. In verse four of chapter eleven after Jesus has heard that Lazarus is sick, he says "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." In verse eleven Jesus tells his disciples that "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." When it is clear that the disciples don't understand that Lazarus has died, but thought that he was merely sleeping, Jesus tells them plainly, "Lazarus is dead" (11:14).

When Jesus meets Martha outside of Bethany, he tells her, "Your brother will rise again" (11:23). This manifests Jesus' knowledge that Lazarus would die and that he would raise him from the dead even before he came into Bethany to raise Lazarus from the dead. Many opponents of God's passibility maintain that God does not suffer because he knows what will happen in the future. Thus, the tragedies that we experience in the time sequence do not affect God because he can see how they will turn out for our good. In this story of Lazarus, we have just that scenario: Jesus knows both the tragedy that will occur and that the outcome of this tragedy will be the glorification of the Son, and yet he is troubled greatly in his spirit, and he weeps.

The second interesting aspect of this story is why Jesus weeps. He does not weep because he knows that Lazarus is dead even though Lazarus is described as a good friend. One may speculate that this is because he knows that he will raise Lazarus from the dead. If he is fully aware of this, then what reason would there be for Jesus to be upset about the loss of a friend that he knows will return to him? Jesus is not "deeply moved and troubled in spirit" (11:33) until Mary, the sister of Lazarus, falls at his feet weeping and distraught. Jesus also sees the Jews who came along with her who were also weeping. The affliction of these people and Mary's distress, moves Jesus deeply. He asks where Lazarus has been laid and then weeps openly (11:35). When he approaches the tomb, he is "once more deeply moved" (11:38).

The Jews who were standing nearby comment that Jesus must have loved Lazarus greatly to cry like he does (11:36). Others are skeptical and wonder why a miracle worker like Jesus could not have saved Lazarus from dying (11:37). However, neither of these speculations seem to explain Jesus' tears. It is much more plausible to believe that Jesus was weeping out of compassion and concern for those who were experiencing pain over the loss of Lazarus. Jesus wept with these people because he was moved by their pain even though he knew that the outcome would set everything right. He had compassion on them and was deeply moved by their expression of sorrow and loss.

We have to alter our questions a bit when we deal with passages that portray the suffering or compassion of Christ. We must ask ourselves, "How is this depiction of Jesus similar to or dissimilar from how we understand the God the Father to be?" What does this story about Jesus reveal to us about the nature of God? We are no longer dealing with an analogy, but with God incarnate. The life of Jesus Christ gives us the most perfect and complete revelation of the nature of God. The acts of the incarnate Son of God are the acts of God himself; we cannot avoid this fact. Thus, we must consider these acts of Christ--his being deeply moved in spirit and his weeping--to be indicative of the way that God

must feel toward those he loves who are distressed or upset.

Do these acts of Christ make him seem less perfect or less powerful? Neither seems to be the case. In fact, they make him seem more loving and compassionate. If he had remained stoic and unmoved by the great sadness of the situation, he might seem less perfect than he did in his weeping. The fact that he wept and was moved deeply in his spirit does not make him any less powerful; he still raises the dead. Why would we be hesitant to say that God is passible in an instance like this if we can say that Christ is passible in this situation? It does not seem to make sense to be able to say this of the incarnate Son, but not be able to say it about the Father. We must still be careful to keep divine suffering in perspective. It is not something that overwhelms God or that controls him; nevertheless, the example that we have here in Christ leads us to believe God may be capable of suffering in very real ways if he chooses to suffer.

Mark 15:33-34

> At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, *"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"*--which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

The cry of dereliction, as it is referred to by Moltmann, is the event in history that defines God and the Trinity. He says that all theology must be measured by this cry of Jesus from the cross. The forsakenness of Christ is the point at which we see the greatest stress in the life of the Trinity. It is at this point that the Son is suffering the forsakenness of the cross and the Father is suffering the loss of the Son. "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Corinthians 5:21). In that Jesus became sin, he was forsaken by the Father.

The cry of Jesus is the first line of Psalm 22. There are some commentators who want to say that this cry is a reference to the Psalm in order to recall the entire Psalm to

mind.[58] This Psalm ends positively with the Lord remembering his servant who is calling out to him in a destitute voice. Verse twenty-four asserts: "For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help." The last verses of the Psalm look forward with eschatological hope to the day when the poor will eat and be satisfied, the Lord will have dominion and rule over the nations, and his righteousness will be proclaimed by the people who are yet unborn. This puts a rather positive spin on this cry of dereliction; it looks beyond the hopelessness and darkness, both literal and figurative, of the present situation to the resurrection and the glory of God's reign.

However, there are those who disagree with this perspective on Jesus' cry. They believe that this kind of thinking blunts the edge of the seriousness of the cry from the cross in forsakeness. William Lane expresses this thought like this:

> Various expedients have been adopted to cushion the offense of this passionate outburst. It has been argued that, in accordance with Jewish practice, the citation of the first verse implies the entire psalm, which ends on a note of triumph and serenity, and that Jesus' words are an affirmation of faith that looks beyond the despair and tragedy of the cross. Alternatively, it is urged that Jesus felt forsaken, but in actuality he was not. Such explanations bear the marks of special pleading and are unsatisfactory. The sharp edge of this word must not be blunted. Jesus' cry of dereliction is the inevitable sequel to the horror which he experienced in the Garden of Gethsemane . . . It must be understood in the perspective of the holy wrath of God and the character of sin, which cuts the sinner off from God (cf. Isa.59:2). In responding to the call to the wilderness and identifying himself completely with sinners, Jesus offered himself to bear the judgment of God upon human rebellion . . . Now on the cross he who had lived wholly for the Father experienced the full alienation from God which the judgment he had assumed entailed. His cry expresses the profound horror of separation from God.[59]

Vincent Taylor also agrees that "the interpretation which sees in the Cry [sic.] a final

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[58]Paul Achtemeier, *Invitation to Mark* (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1978), 222. William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), 662.

[59]William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* , The New International Commentary on the New Testatment, ed. F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 572-73.

utterance of faith, in the light of Psa. xxii as a whole . . . is a reaction from the traditional view which fails to take the saying seriously."[60] This view would deny that the cry of Jesus and the forsakeness of Christ is not taken seriously unless there is no sense of hope or relation to God at this point.

But why must we think that the horror of the cry of Christ is blunted if we see it in the purveiw of the hope that is related in Psalm 22? The parallels of the Psalm with the situation of Jesus on the cross are too great to be brushed aside so easily.[61] There does not need to be any softening of the cry to associate it with the Psalm 22. There is no reason why one cannot take the cry seriously and realize the depth of the separation that takes place on the cross, and yet still look forward to the resurrection. The separation of God the Father from God the Son in this instance is the separation of death. The cry exhibits the completion of the separation and the totality of the abandonment of the Son. There is no mistaking that.

Without the resurrection, the death is not significant; it is merely the death of a good man. It is the resurrection that makes the death of Jesus and the complete separation from God momentous. It is the promise of the resurrection that gives such great power and meaning to the cross, and it is the total separation and the solemn reality of the death of

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[60]Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark,* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 594.

[61]O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer, by night, and am not silent (22:2). But I am a worm and not a man scorned by men and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him" (22:6-8). Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help. Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men had encircled me, they have pierced by hands and my feet. I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me. They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing (22:11-18).

Christ that makes the resurrection profound. If there is no real death there can be no real resurrection. If Christ does not become sin to be forsaken by God the Father, then there is no atonement. The death and resurrection of Christ are inextricable. The meaning of one is lost without the veracity of the other.

The suffering of Christ is manifested at several levels in this event of the cross. There is the physical agony of the crucifixion, and there is the mental and spiritual torment of being separated from God. The physical agony is only able to be felt by the human nature of Christ, but it would also undoubtedly cause a good deal of mental stress as well. The separation from the Father occurs as Jesus takes on the sin of the world on the cross and is thus forsaken. This separation from God is the experience of hell. The Son of God experiences both physical death in the flesh and spiritual death in the separation from the Father. For us and for our salvation, God has emptied himself of his glory and has subjected himself to death on the cross to propitiate our sins. God himself has become the sacrificial lamb in the person of Jesus Christ.

What may we surmise from this passage of Scripture? We see in this text, the suffering of the incarnate Christ. We cannot deny that the God-man, Jesus Christ, suffers death of the body and also the spiritual death of separation from the Father. The suffering depicted here is straightforward. There is little room for analogical interpretation. The suffering experienced by Christ in his divine nature is not such that it prevents him from carrying out what he had come to do--to conquer suffering through suffering and to end death by dying as a ransom form many. Thus, there is great power even in the suffering and death of Christ--even in that which we might consider to be the point of greatest weakness.

<u>1 Corinthians 1:18-24</u>

> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written:
> I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;
> the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.
> Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

This text is not overtly about the suffering of God, but it conveys an important truth about the passibility of God that must be grasped in order to understand why God's suffering does not put him in a position of weakness, but one of strength and power. The suffering of God is not that which is thrust upon him or something to which God is subjected. Rather, God chooses to suffer so that through his suffering he may provide redemption and wholeness for his own people. God suffers from a position of strength, not weakness. That which appears weak to the world is really a great source of power for God's plan of redemption for his creation.

The cross, for the Apostle Paul, is a case in point. The cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God. This is why suffering is not a deficiency or an imperfection that weakens the transcendent nature of God. The paradoxical truth is that it is in the situation of suffering, a situation of apparent weakness, that he exercises his greatest power. It not through an exhibition of power that God overcomes the sin of the world, but through the weakness and humility of the cross. The very time at which God's power to overcome sin is at it zenith, is the very point at which he seems most weak, vulnerable, and defeated. It is the nature of God to reveal power in weakness.

Conclusion

The spectrum of interpretation of Scripture concerning the passibility of God ranges from those who find Scripture forbidding the possibility of God being passible to those who want to make a direct correlation between divine emotions and human emotions. These interpretations are influenced by four factors: presuppositions, limitations of language, existential situation, and personal bias.

In this chapter we discerned the extent to which we may consider God to be passible or impassible by looking at passages of Scripture that have to do with the suffering of God in the Old and New Testaments and those that are concerned with the suffering of the incarnate Son of God. These texts have led us to believe that the Bible often portrays God and Jesus as being affected by deep emotion and suffering. The manner in which we may understand this suffering to apply to God must be carefully weighed by the limits that are intrinsic to the anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms used in the Bible. In the cases where analogies are used to portray God as a sufferer, we must be prudent in observing the ways in which the analogies exhibit resemblances in particulars of things that are otherwise unlike. For example, we must note the similarities and dissimilarities between God and a parent of a rebellious child. There are many things that we may learn about God by understanding the similarities of this analogy given in the Bible, but we must also be mindful of the great dissimilarities between the two things that are being compared, namely God and a human parent.

These conclusions reaffirm the distinction made in the last chapter concerning the difference between impassibility and immutability. In Scripture, we see a God who is immutable in his faithfulness and at the same time also portrayed as passible. How we are to understand this analogical portrayal of passibility is at the heart of biblical interpretation with regard to the suffering of God.

The suffering of Christ presents considerations that must be handled in much the

same way. The suffering that we observe in Christ must be kept within the perspective of the work of Christ and the redeeming power of his suffering. In the life of Christ, we have the most perfect revelation of the attitude of God toward us in terms of his great compassion and love. In Christ's suffering, we also witness the great power that God exercises from a position that appears to be weak; but we discern that the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength and that his foolishness is wiser than man's wisdom. What appears to be weakness and foolishness to those who are perishing is, in fact, the power of God to deliver salvation to the human race.

The next chapter will deal with the work of Jürgen Moltmann and his attempt to base a Christian theology on the suffering of God. The examination of Moltmann's theology will also require an analysis of the christological issues associated with the passibility of God.

CHAPTER 4
JÜRGEN MOLTMANN'S SUFFERING GOD

Introduction

Jürgen Moltmann's theology is important for anyone who looks at the possibility of a passible God. He has created a theology that has its basis in the concept of a suffering God. For Moltmann, there is no other way to understand what God is like than to perceive God as a fellow-sufferer who suffers with us because he loves us. This chapter is specifically interested in Moltmann's understanding of God's suffering and the basic role that the passibility of God plays in the formulation of Christian theology. He asserts that Jesus' experience of God on the cross is the foundation for all of our ideas about God.[1] Further, Moltmann states that "All Christian theology and all Christian life is basically an answer to the question which Jesus asked as he died" (*CG*, 4). For Moltmann, the center of Christian theology is the tragedy of the cross of Jesus Christ.[2] Moltmann's case for a passible God is most comprehensively displayed in two works: *The Crucified God* (1974) and *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (1981).[3] Though Moltmann argues passionately and persuasively, there are several problems with his theology. His theology produces a God who is neither free nor sovereign, and worse, a God who is an event rather than a personal

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[1]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), x. All subsequent references to this work will be cited in parentheses following the quotation in the text as follows: (*CG*, page #).

[2]"The cross is the test of everything that deserves to be called Christian" (*CG*, 7).

[3]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). All subsequent references to this work will be cited in paretheses following the quotation in the text as follows: (*TK*, page #).

entity; further, he shifts the primary meaning of the cross from redemption from sin to redemption from suffering.

Background and Influences

Jürgen Moltmann was born in 1926, and served as a professor of systematic theology at Tübingen from 1967 to 1994. His work has had a considerable influence on theological thinking and debate in the West over the last three and a half decades. He has been a proponent of the Liberation Theology movement in Central America and has championed the cause of ecumenism. His most important contribution to theological discourse has been his dialectical interpretation of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Moltmann, all Christian theology, from the creation of the world to the coming of the eschaton, must be derived from the event of the cross. More specifically, it is Jesus' dying cry of dereliction on the cross that gives theology its impetus and its reason to exist. It is from this event that Moltmann derives his theology of a God who must suffer.

Moltmann has commented that his first experience with the reality of God was in a prison camp when he was a prisoner of war in the period from 1945-1948. For him, this imprisonment produced an experiential knowledge of God in two ways: (1) He realized that God is the power of hope, and (2) that God is present in suffering, not just as a bystander, but as one who also suffers. These two themes became the primary source for Moltmann's theological works in the 1960's and 1970's. He saw these two concepts as complementary sides of a single theology which was produced in written form in *The Theology of Hope* (1967) and *The Crucified God* (1974).[4]

After the war, Moltmann went to school at Göttingen where he studied the theology of Karl Barth. He saw the need to move beyond Barth's theology only after doing theology

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[4]Richard Bauckham, "Jürgen Moltmann," in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century, 2nd ed.*, ed. David Ford (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, Inc., 1997), 209.

on his own for some time, and even then, Barth's influence is still readily apparent. There were many others who influenced Moltmann's thought in Göttingen. Otto Weber introduced him to the Dutch "apostolate theology" of A. A. Van Ruler and J. C. Hoekendijk from whom he gained his eschatological perspective of the church's mission toward the coming kingdom of God. Hans Joachim Iwand introduced Moltmann to Hegelian dialectical philosophy. Both Iwand and Hegel had a profound effect on Moltmann's dialectical method of thinking about the cross and resurrection of Christ. Ernst Wolf and the writings of the then recently deceased Dietrich Bonhoeffer helped develop Moltmann's interest in social ethics and the church's involvement in secular society. Finally, Gerhard von Rad and Ernst Käsemann grounded Moltmann's theology in the current thinking about biblical theology.[5] There are obviously many influences in Moltmann's life and study that have contributed to his original theological perspective. In the next few sections, we will survey the ways in which his view is uncommon.

Theological Perspective

There are some unique aspects of Moltmann's thinking that have comprehensive ramifications for all of his work in theology. It is important for the reader to have a sense of these features of his thought because, while they may not be mentioned directly in the following discussion of Moltmann's depiction of a suffering deity, they are, nonetheless, very integral to the thought that goes into his theology. Therefore, in order to have an informed understanding of any particular aspect of Moltmann's theology, one must first know that these broader theological categories are influencing his method and the formulation of his theological ideas and doctrines.

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[5]Bauckham, "Jürgen Moltmann," 209.

Panentheism

Moltmann is a panentheist. He believes that Acts 17:28 ("For in him we live and move and have our being") demands that we must speak of God in panentheistic terms. This means that all that exists--all of creation with its imperfections, evils, sorrows, griefs, and atrocities--is in God. Perhaps a crude physical analogy of this concept would be to say that the world is in God like a stomach or a colon is in a human being. The world is a part of God, it constitutes part of God's being. Thus, any "outward" act of God toward creation is also an "inward" act of God upon himself. This makes God and the creation order integrally and necessarily connected. God cannot act toward any part of His creation without also acting upon himself.

This view governs how communion with God is understood and how it is that there can be a negative element in God. Moltmann explains:

> In communion with Christ it can truly be said that men live *in God* and *from God*, "that they live, move and have their being in him" (Acts 17:28). Understood in pantheistic terms, that would be a dream which would have to ignore the negative element in the world. But a trinitarian theology of the cross perceives God in the negative element and therefore the negative element in God, and in this dialectical way is panentheistic. God in the hidden mode of humiliation to the point of the cross, all being and all that annihilates has already been taken up in God and God begins to become "all in all." To recognize God in the cross of Christ, conversely, means to recognize the cross, inextricable suffering, death and hopeless rejection in God (*CG*, 277).

To opt for understanding God pantheisitically would have to leave out any negative aspect, but panentheism is able to take the negative element of the cross and all of the negative or evil aspects of the world and human suffering into himself. As God takes the negative elements into himself He is able to overcome them and deliver himself from suffering.

For Moltmann, panentheistic thought also allows a more relational view of God because it is an "ecological" perspective of God. This view of God encompasses Moltmann's doctrine of creation and how integrally connected human beings are to God and to the world. This "ecological" perspective of God includes thinking of the world as

being part of God or in God, and thus, our relationship to the world, in some way, is part of our relationship to God.

The world exists by virtue of the fact that God first made space within himself for the world to exist. The outward act of God in creating the world is also an inward act of God (*TK*, 109) because God is creating within himself. Moltmann refers to Isaac Luria's doctrine of *zimsum* which Luria formulated to explain the retraction within God to make space for the world. Moltmann explains the concept in the following way:

> The "existence of the universe was made possible through a shrinkage process in God." That is his answer to the question: since God is "all in all," how can anything else that is not God exist at this specific point? How can God create out of "nothing" when there cannot be such a thing as nothing, since his essence is everything and interpenetrates everything? Luria's answer is that God has released a certain sector of his being, from which he has withdrawn--"a kind of primal, mystical space"; and into this, accordingly, he can issue from himself in his creation and his revelation. The very first act of the infinite Being was therefore not a step "outwards" but a step "inwards," a "self-withdrawal of God from himself into himself" (*TK*, 109-10).

Every outward act of God, such as creation, is preceded by an inward act of God to make the outward act possible. This is a continuous process, and it is an action that is grounded in the passion of God. This act of creation in chaos and out of nothing is an act of power, but also an act of self-humiliation on God's part. It is self-humiliating because God is lowering himself into his own impotence. Creation is an act of God upon himself (*TK*, 110). Moltmann believes that the *zimsum* doctrine allows him to think panentheistically of the world being *in God* without falling victim to pantheism.

The act of creation is a continuous act because it is part of how God expresses his love. "Creation," says Moltmann, "is the fruit of God's longing for 'his Other' and for that Other's free response to the divine love" (*TK*, 106). He says that this is why the idea of the world is inherent in God from eternity. God must be a creative God because to conceive of a non-creative God is imperfect as compared to a creative God. Further, if God is love, then "the divine love is also more blessed in giving than receiving" (*TK*, 106).

Thus, it is inevitable that God must create because it is God's nature to be creative and to give of himself. Moltmann states:

> God emptied himself by virtue of his love, out of the necessity of his being, going out to 'his Other,' the world, and only came fully to himself by virtue of that other's response to his love. But this is to identify the idea of the world with the Son of God. The process of creating the world is then identified with the inner-trinitarian life of God, and vice versa: the world process is the eternal life of God himself. God's love for his Other is then in actual fact nothing else than the extended love of God for the one like himself. The deification of the world and humanity is the necessary conclusion: anyone who knows that he is eternally loved by God becomes God's eternal Son. So God is as dependent on him as he is on God (TK, 106-07).

There is a compulsion in God that necessitates the creation of the world for a few different reasons. The first reason is that it is the nature of love to give of oneself and be creative. The second is that the world is part of the realization of God's self. The process of creating is identified with the inner-trinitarian life of God and a part of the eternal life of God. The third reason for the necessity of creation is God's dependence on creation. God is dependent on the creation process to make himself complete. Now that Moltmann's panentheism has been explained, we will briefly examine how dialectical Hegelianism has influenced his thought.

Dialectical Hegelianism

A second aspect of Moltmann's theology is his use of dialectical Hegelian thinking in order to reach theological truth. Moltmann explains that the analogical principle of knowledge is one-sided if it is not supplemented by the dialectic principle of knowledge. He applies Schelling's maxim to theological knowledge that says:

> 'Every being can be revealed only in its opposite. Love only in hatred, unity only in conflict.' Applied to Christian theology, this means that God is only revealed as 'God' in his opposite: godlessness and abandonment by God. In concrete terms, God is revealed in the cross of Christ who was abandoned by God. His grace is revealed in sinners. His righteousness is revealed in the unrighteous and in those without rights, and his gracious election in the damned. The epistemological principle of the theology of the cross can only be this dialectic principle: The deity

of God is revealed in the paradox of the cross (*CG*, 27).[6]

Therefore, for Moltmann there is no true knowledge that does not arise from a dialectical perspective. We learn what God is like from the "revelation in the opposite." According to Moltmann, it is this principle of "revelation in the opposite" that makes the analogical principle of "like being known by like" possible. There is very little in Moltmann's theology that is not touched by this dialectical principle of thought. God's presence is made available by his absence and "God with us" is made clear by the figure and experience of Christ on the cross crying "God, why have you forsaken me?" Having briefly discussed these two aspects of Moltmann's thought, we will examine His theology in regard to the passibility of God and the formulation of Christian theology.

Three Reasons for a Passible God

Moltmann proclaims that Christian theology is required to speak of a God who suffers for three reasons: (1) the problem of human suffering, (2) the nature of love, and (3) the passion of Christ.[7] First, God must be passible because God is bound to human beings and is in the process of delivering them and Himself up from his sufferings (TK, 60). Moltmann recounts the story of a hanging from Elie Wiesel's book, *Night*, which narrates the life that Wiesel experienced while a prisoner in Auschwitz. In the story, two men and a boy are hanged by the SS troops in front of the whole camp. The two men died quickly, but the death throes of the youth last for half an hour. Wiesel writes that he heard a man behind him call out, "Where is God now?" A voice from within himself answered, "Where is he?

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[6]Cf. Also Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967), 223.

[7]Richard Bauckham, "In Defence of *The Crucified God*," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 93-96.

He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows . . ."[8] Of this reply, Moltmann states:

> Any other answer would be blasphemy. There cannot be any other Christian answer to the question of this torment. To speak here of a God who could not suffer would make God a demon. To speak here of an absolute God would make God an annihilating nothingness. To speak here of an indifferent God would condemn men to indifference (*CG*, 274)

For Moltmann, the only other choice available to those who do not understand God to be suffering with his creatures is to envision a God who is a demon or an annihilating nothingness.

Second, God suffers because it is the nature of love to suffer, and God is love. Moltmann states that

> A God who cannot suffer cannot love either. A God who cannot love is a dead God. He is poorer than any man or woman. (*TK*, 38).

He asserts that the love of God is creative love and that "Creative love is ultimately suffering love because it is only through suffering that it acts creatively and redemptively for the freedom of the beloved" (*TK*, 60). Thus, for Moltmann, suffering is truly the "best" or most important component of the love of God.

Finally, the passion of Christ creates a need in God to suffer because it is in the crucifixion and forsakenness of Christ that God the Father experiences the loss of a son. In the crucifixion, God the Son suffers the forsakenness of the cross, and God the Father suffers the grief of loss. Paradoxically, this experience of despair within the Trinity, the point at which there is the greatest separation between the Father and the Son, is also the moment at which the will of the Father and the Son is most unified.

Moltmann forcefully and passionately argues that God is passible and adds much to the modern debate concerning the passibility of God. However, despite the fact that Moltmann has many helpful insights and has many valuable ideas to contribute to theological discussion about the passibility of God, his route to the theology of a passible

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[8]Elie Wiesel, *Night*, trans. Stella Rodway (New York: Avon Books, 1969), 75f.

deity is unsatisfactory for several reasons. First, he accepts the modern "Greek assumption" that traditional theology's emphasis on the impassibility and immutability have created a likeness of God in the image of the ideology of Greek philosophers rather than grounding their ideas in what is relevant to Christian experience. He wants to create a more "biblical" idea of a suffering God using the narratives of the crucifixion as a foundation for every Christian theological concept. However, in order to accomplish this he does not draw heavily on the Bible, but rather he draws on a number of questionable sources such as: mystical Judaism's "kabbalistic doctrine of the Shekinah, an Anglican theology of 'the sacrifice of eternal love,' a Spanish mysticism of 'the pain of God,' and a Russian-Orthodox philosophy of religion, 'the divine tragedy'" (*TK*, 25). He assumes that the God of traditional orthodox theology is equivalent to the Greek philosophical concept of God.

Secondly, he uses human experience to drive his theological conclusions. His understanding of God and God's suffering is governed by his own experiences of God and suffering. He is constructing a theology of the nature of God based on human experience of God. He is doing theology from below--using his experience of his relationship with God to define what God is like rather than looking to the traditional concept of God to help him understand his personal experience. He believes that the God of the tradition is a flawed concept that relies on philosophical concepts rather than biblical ideas.

Thirdly, his narrow focus on the cross as the only event that truly reveals God to us leads to a limited perspective on theological truths and perhaps even excludes some.[9] Some theological doctrines must be creatively derived from this event of the cross rather than seen in the Old Testament, or from events in the life of Jesus, or from the later epistles. It is true that the cross is a focal point for Christian theology, but this is neither the beginning nor the

[9]Cf. Roland Zimany, "Moltmann's Crucified God," *Dialog* 16 (Winter 1977): 57.

end of the Christian narrative. God reveals himself fully in Christ, but it is in the totality of the birth, death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus that we are shown what God's nature is like, not just in one aspect.[10]

Fourthly, Moltmann's derivation of the doctrine of the Trinity from the event of the cross leads him to the conclusion that there is no difference between the economic and immanent Trinity. In fact, Richard Bauckham states, that "one possible interpretation of Moltmann's concept of the cross in *The Crucified God* might be that it is in the Christ event that God *becomes* Trinity."[11] Whether this is actually what Moltmann himself would say or not, the conglomeration of the immanent and economic Trinities leads to the jettisoning of several ideas that are foundational to Christian orthodox theology, namely that God is self-sufficient with no need for any "other," that God is free to create, and that God is free to save sinners by grace.

Finally, because Moltmann assumes that the idea of the immutability of God is necessarily incompatible with the love of God and ultimately with the suffering of God, he has dispensed with many of the traditional beliefs about God and called for a complete rethinking of Christian theology with a center that rests on the despair of Jesus. This is especially unfortunate because, as has been shown above, the so-called neo-Platonic construct of traditional theism finds immutability and love to be compatible. In fact, orthodox theology would say that God is most immutable in the steadfast love of his creation. It is even possible to find immutability and passibility compatible within the orthodox tradition as was seen in chapter two. However, Moltmann's Hegelian

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[10]David E. Cook, "Weak Church, Weak God: The Charge of Anthropomorphism," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 79-80.

[11]Richard Bauckham, "Jürgen Moltmann (His Doctrine of the Trinity)," in *One God in Trinity*, ed. Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), 121.

reconstruction of theism makes them incompatible.[12] In the end, using the cross as a basis for the full revelation of God leads Moltmann to describe a deity who is characterized by mutability and suffering, a God who is evolving in a process with the world and humanity.

The remainder of this chapter will summarize the theology of Jürgen Moltmann as it pertains to the suffering of God and will examine the extent to which one may equate the suffering of Christ to the suffering of God.

The Problem of Human Suffering

Theology from Below

In the final analysis, it is Moltmann's own suffering and the suffering that he sees and has seen in others' lives that drive him to write his theology and draw his conclusions. Suffering is the impetus for questions about God. Moltmann states that

> incomprehensible suffering calls the God of men and women into question. The suffering of a single innocent child is an irrefutable rebuttal of the notion of the almighty and kindly God in heaven. For a God who lets the innocent suffer and who permits senseless death is not worthy to be called God at all. Wherever the suffering of the living in all its manifold forms pierces our consciousness with its pain, we lose our childish primal confidence and our trust in God (*TK*, 47).

The problem of evil and the cries of protest atheism provide the experiential platform from which to begin talking about God because it is here that the need for God is brought into sharpest focus. Moltmann masterfully exhibits how the very protest of the atheist against suffering and pain is also the admission of the existence of God. He explains:

> If it were not for their desire for life, the living would not suffer. If there were no love of justice, there would be no rebellion against innocent suffering. If there were no "longing for Wholly Other," we should come to terms with the here and now, and accept the absence of what does no exist. If there were no God, the world as it is would be all right. *It is only the desire, the passion, the thirst for God which turns suffering into conscious pain and turns the consciousness of pain into a*

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[12]Cf. Henry Jansen, "Moltmann's View of God's (Im)mutability," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 36 (1994): 301.

protest against suffering (TK, 48).[13]

It is the recognition of the fact that things should be other than they are that illustrates the desire for God which is the real reason for a person's protest against suffering. Without the underlying conviction that things should be different, there would be no protest, but only a grim acceptance of the brutality of the universe and the reality of an impending death.

Moltmann seizes on the question of theodicy, which he calls "the open wound of life," and makes it the task of faith and theology "to make it possible for us to survive, to go on living, with this open wound" (*TK*, 49). It is his conviction that God must be able to meet human beings at the level of their suffering and pain that convinces him that the despair of Jesus is the benchmark for the truth and resilience of the Christian faith in the face of evil and pain. Thus, Moltmann's starting point for his theology is "from below"; he begins by observing the human experience of God in suffering and moves toward his conclusions about what God must be like. The primary revelation of God that we have is the despair and suffering of Christ in his crucifixion.

This method of doing theology treats the human experience of suffering as the primary lens through which we may see God. Our experience of God is a more important revelation about what God is like than what may be gleaned from other sources such as the Bible or traditional theology. It is different from the traditional approach of doing theology "from above," which would assume certain truths about the nature of God and then interpret human experience in light of those truths, not vice-versa. Moltmann sees theology from below as being more biblical than philosophical. He reasons in his doctrine of the Trinity that it is "biblical testimony" to begin from the three Persons in the history of Christ whereas "philosophical logic" would lead one to begin from the concept of One God and move to the threeness of the Trinity. He explains that his method of doing

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[13]The italics appears in the original text.

theology provides us with a more accurate picture of who God is--a God of love rather than a God of power and lordship. He states:

> God as almighty power and lordship--this notion of God is mediated and enforced from "above to below." But God as love is experienced in the community of brothers and sisters through mutual acceptance and participation (*TK*, 158).

For Moltmann, to do theology from above is to create a false abstract God rather than a real relational God. He says that "anyone who owes his salvation to the delivering up of the Son to death on the cross can never think of God in the abstract, apart from the cross of Christ" (*TK*, 159).

Doing theology from below has its advantages for Moltmann, but it will ultimately lead to conclusions that are unacceptable. The transcendence and sovereignty of God are crippled by this method of theology because it relies so heavily on the horizontal aspects of a relationship with God and omits or severely truncates any of the vertical aspects of this relationship. Holiness is translated into that which is "Wholly Other," but the essence of separateness, sinlessness, and righteousness of God is lost because that which is "Wholly Other" is, for Moltmann, merely different from us and not that which is transcendent. God is not sovereignly guiding history toward its appointed end; rather, God is waiting with us for that day when He will be that which is "all in all."

Human suffering is not all that leads Moltmann to believe that God must suffer. He also thinks that suffering is inherent in the nature of love, and because "God is love," then he also must suffer.

The Nature of Love

God is Love

It is possible to construe the statement, "God is Love," in many different ways. Moltmann does not limit himself to any one understanding, but instead expresses what it means for God to be love in varied manners. He comes very close in *The Crucified God* to

making it into a straightforward identity statement:

> God does not just love as he is angry, chooses or rejects. He *is* love, that is, he exists in love. He constitutes his existence in the event of his love. He exists as love in the event of the cross (*CG*, 244).

It is in the event of the cross that God manifests himself most clearly to us, and it is here that we see God's love in the crucifixion of the Son. We see God's love here because we see God's suffering here.

Moltmann asserts that there is a direct relationship between how much we love and how much we suffer. Our capacity for love dictates our capacity for experiencing the triumphs and tragedies of life:

> The more one loves, the more one is open and becomes receptive to happiness and sorrow. Therefore the one who loves becomes vulnerable, can be hurt and disappointed. This may be called the dialectic of human life: we live because and in so far as we love--and we suffer and die because and in so far as we love. In this way we experience life and death in love. . . . Love makes life so lively and death so deadly (*CG*, 253).

This dialectic of human life is considered to be directly analogous to the life of God. Love and suffering are directly related in the life of God as they are in the life of human beings. If God is apathetic and impassible, then Moltmann assumes, he must also be unable to love (*TK*, 38). A God who cannot love is a dead God, poorer than any man or woman (*TK*, 38). He says that the God of traditional theism is poor because "he cannot love nor can he suffer" (*CG*, 253). But because God is love, he is capable of suffering (*TK*, 32).

God is love primarily because he is a God who suffers for others. Richard Bauckham observes:

> It is evident that Moltmann is not simply saying that God's love must be like human love in every respect. Rather he claims that being affected by the beloved and therefore vulnerable to suffering is essential to what is best and most valuable in human love. *Pathos* is not a deficiency of human love, which must be stripped from our concept of divine love, but is rather love's greatness, without which it is not recognizably love.[14]

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[14]Richard Bauckham, "In Defence of *The Crucified God*," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 96.

Bauckham believes that Moltmann is saying that the greatest part of love is the pathos of love, or its willingness to sacrifice oneself and suffer for the beloved. Moltmann states that "Love's capacity for suffering is fulfilled in the self-giving and self-sacrifice of the lover." And he believes that "self-sacrifice is God's very nature and essence" (TK, 32).

It is Moltmann's conviction that the historical passion of Christ reveals the eternal passion of God. If this is true, then, he says, "the self sacrifice of love must be God's eternal nature" (*TK*, 32). He follows C.E. Rolt in his thinking of how love is able to fulfill itself in self-sacrifice. Rolt holds to this axiom in his formulation of the Trinity: "God sacrifices himself in eternity, and his whole nature is embodied in this act. He is the lover, the beloved and the love itself" (*TK*, 32). From this axiom, he concludes that

> love has to give, for it is only in the act of giving that it truly possesses, and finds bliss. That is why God has to give himself; and he cannot possess himself apart from this act of serving. God has to give himself completely; and it is only in this way that he is God (*TK*, 33).

Further, Moltmann asserts that love cannot be completely itself without participating in suffering. Love must suffer from whatever contradicts its own nature. In the case of God, God is love, and that which contradicts God's own nature is evil. Therefore, because "God loves himself unselfishly," he must suffer evil, and by suffering evil, he is able to turn evil into good (*TK*, 33). Thus, for Moltmann, to say that God is love means that God is self-giving, which means that God exists for us on the cross (*TK*, 83).

So for Moltmann love is not love unless it is self-giving and suffers. God has to give himself completely in order to fulfill the requirements of love and ultimately to be Himself. However, the reason why God must suffer evil on account of loving himself unselfishly is not nearly as clear. This is an idea taken from a cryptic quote in Rolt's book, *The World's Redemption*[15] that goes unjustified in Moltmann's argument, and yet the

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[15]C.E. Rolt, *The World's Redemption* (London, 1913), 119.

connection between love and suffering is an extremely important one for Moltmann as will be seen the next section.

Love and Suffering

Moltmann asserts that if God loves, then God will necessarily suffer. But the suffering of God has direction and purpose for Moltmann. He calls the suffering of God an "active suffering." That is, it is a suffering in which God actively chooses to participate. He differentiates active suffering from two options that he thinks that the patristic thinkers were bound by, namely: "either an essential incapacity for suffering, or a fateful subjection to suffering" (*TK*, 23). He states that active suffering, by contrast, is the "voluntary laying oneself open to another and allowing oneself to be intimately affected by him; that is to say, the suffering of passionate love" (*TK*, 23).

God the Father actively forsook the Son for us--"for our sake he made him to be sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21), and the Son entered deliberately into a path that would lead to suffering and death (*TK*, 81). The Trinity is involved in this suffering, and this stress puts the innermost life of the Trinity at stake. The Son suffers death in forsakenness; the Father suffers the death of the Son. There is a correspondence of pain here in the separation of the Father and the Son. The Son loses the Father and the Father loses the Son in this descent into Hell. The communicating love of the Father turns to infinite pain over the sacrifice of the Son, and the responding love of the Son turns to infinite suffering over his rejection by the Father.

The suffering of God is not limited to the suffering that is experienced in the event of the cross. God also suffers in order to transform the pain of evil into glory. The bliss of God is not based on the absence of suffering, but on its acceptance and transformation. Moltmann again follows Rolt in his understanding of the role of evil in the world. Evil is "non-existence." Evil exists because God refused to create it, and because God has

commanded it not to exist. Evil, then, is equivalent to chaos that is ever-threatening to destroy the order that God has created. God endures this evil in his suffering love and transforms its deadly power into vital energy. Thus, "the power of the negative is caught up into the process of the becoming of being" (*TK*, 34). The evil that God suffers is the condition of his eternal bliss because it is the presupposition for his triumph. This triumph over evil through suffering is the mystery of the Cross. It is a mystery that lies at the center of God's eternal being (*TK*, 34).

God shows us that he is a living God by his capacity for suffering. In our suffering, God reveals himself as the suffering God. He envelops our anguish with his own immeasurable anguish (*TK*, 38). God interpenetrates everything in his boundless love. Moltmann sees this aspect of God's love as a self-limitation of entering our finite world to participate in it. Thus,

> God and the world are involved in a common redemptive process. In this process God participates in the world's pain and suffers in all who suffer. That is why we participate in God's pain. It is not only we that need God's compassion; God also needs ours (*TK*, 39)

The evolutionary process that is being referred to here is that of developing self-awareness. So God is developing self-awareness through the pain he experiences in the world. Only through this process will we, and God himself, be truly free (*TK*, 39). God's freedom is limited by Moltmann's understanding of God's love as a self-limitation. God is not free not to create. God did not have any other choice, but to create the world so that he could become actualized in it.

Moltmann believes that through our own experience of suffering human beings seek God. The questions we have about suffering and the questions we have about God are joint questions says Moltmann. "God and suffering belong together, just as in this life the cry for God and the suffering experienced in pain belong together" (*TK*, 49). The answer to these two questions is a common one. The question of theodicy is an all-embracing

eschatological inquiry that should not be softened or downplayed. The answer to this question is not found in the comfort of the afterlife that will make all of the present suffering worth the pain; rather it is found in the suffering love of God. It is in God's overcoming of the pain of the world manifested most prominently in the cross of Christ that we have our answer to the question of theodicy.

For Moltmann, the fact that God is love is diametrically opposed to the conception of God as an omnipotent universal monarch. Here he opposes the idea of a "Greek" conception of God and proposes what he believes to be a more accurate picture of God as he is manifested in the event of the Cross. God cannot be almighty power and be a passionate passible loving God at the same time. He explains that it is impossible to derive an omnipotent ruler corresponding to our understanding of an earthly ruler from the Christian doctrine of the Trinity that "unites God, the almighty Father, with Jesus the Son, whom he delivered up and whom the Romans crucified, and with the life-giving Spirit, who creates the new heaven and the new earth" (*TK*, 197). God the Father is not the archetype of the mighty ones of this world. He is the Father of the crucified Christ. "As the Father of Jesus Christ, he is almighty because he exposes himself to the experience of suffering, pain, helplessness and death" (*TK*, 197). Thus, God is not almighty power, but "it is his passionate, passible love that is almighty, nothing else" (*TK*, 197). The glory of God is not found in the crowns of victors but in "the face of the crucified Jesus, and in the faces of the oppressed whose brother he became" (*TK*, 198).

So we see that there are many different ways in which Moltmann understands love and suffering to be connected. It is also clear that Moltmann's understanding of what love is determines what God is like. We now move to the argument in which he places most of his energy, the passion of Christ.

The Passion of Christ

The Incarnation

The problem of human suffering creates an impetus for the question of theology. The fact that God is love gives us an idea of why he suffers and creates solidarity between God and humankind. The passion of Christ gives the answer to the questions of a suffering humanity and proves the love of God. The crucifixion, for Moltmann, is the foundation of the theology of a suffering God. Moltmann believes that the influence of Greek philosophy has skewed the theological truth of the incarnation. He argues against the highly philosophical and abstract "theistic concept of God" for the "Christian belief in the crucified God." According to Moltmann, the philosophical concept of God is highly metaphysical and does not easily coincide with the God that we know from our experience of suffering and from the revelation that we have of God in the cross. The nature of the "theistic concept of God" is determined by its unity, indivisibility, infinity, immovability, and immutability. Death, suffering, and mortality are excluded from the divine being. Moltmann suggests that this concept of God has been accepted down to the present day because of the human need to overcome finitude by finding security in a higher omnipotence and authority. The fatal flaw of this conception, according to Moltmann, is that it results in the complete evacuation of deity from the cross:

> In the metaphysical concept of God from ancient cosmology and the modern psychological concept of God, the being of the Godhead, of the origin of all things or the unconditioned mover, as the zone of the impossibility of death, stands in juxtaposition to human being as the zone of the necessity of death. If this concept of God is applied to Christ's death on the cross, the cross *must* be "evacuated" of deity, for by definition God cannot suffer and die. He is pure causality (*CG*, 214).

There is no room for suffering or death in the concept of the "theistic God." Moltmann says that we must be able to think about God differently. We must think of God as a God who suffers and dies if he is not to lose his identity (*CG*, 214).

Moltmann proclaims that the time has come to differentiate the Father of Christ

from the God of the pagans. The philosophical concept of God has confronted theologians with a picture of Christ that has the "unmoving, unemotional countenance of the God of Plato, bedecked with some features of Stoic ethics" (*CG*, 215). Moltmann sees this process of differentiation as a liberation of Christianity "from the bourgeois religions of the particular societies in which that theism has predominated" (*CG*, 215). He praises the early church for advancing furthest in the direction of developing trinitarian doctrine based on an understanding of God in respect to the incarnation and death of Jesus. He now wants to carry this further by using the Christian conception of the crucified God to carry out the modern task of interpreting the Trinity for the modern Christian.

Moltmann argues that sin does not create a need for the incarnation, but that the incarnation fulfills a more profound necessity in God's being. The incarnation perfectly communicates the triune God to his world (*TK*, 116). Moltmann asserts, "The Son of God did not become man simply because of the sin of men and women, but rather for the sake of perfecting creation" (*TK*, 116). Second, there is a dialectical necessity in Moltmann's understanding of the being of God that God must become man so that he may be truly God. Just as God must give in order to possess and find bliss, just as he must go through time in order to be eternal, and just as he must be an earthly servant to be Lord of heaven, so also he must be "man and nothing but man; and it is only in this way that he is completely God" (*TK*, 33). From this intrinsic necessity in the being of God to become incarnate, Moltmann surmises that "God's divinity is not cut off from his humanity, and his humanity is not cut off from his divinity" (*TK*, 33). This gives him a basis to argue that there cannot be a strict delineation between the suffering of Christ's humanity and the suffering of his divine nature.

Moltmann cannot abide by the orthodox understanding of Christ suffering on the cross mentioned above in chapter two, in which Christ suffers in his humanity, but not in his divinity. He says that if God, or the divine nature, is incapable of suffering, then we must

say that Christ's passion is merely a human tragedy (*TK*, 22). If one is only able to see Christ's passion as the suffering of a good man from Nazareth, then God will inevitably be the "cold, silent and unloved heavenly power" (*TK*, 22). This would be the end of the Christian faith. Therefore, Christian theology must perceive God himself in the passion of Christ and discover the passion of Christ in God. He advocates that it is logically more consistent to begin with an axiom of God's passion than to start with the assumption that God is apathetic and unable to suffer (*TK*, 22). Moltmann argues that Christ must have experienced fear, suffering, and worst of all abandonment and forsakenness, not only in his body but also in his divinity (*TK*, 76-77).

Thus, for Moltmann, the incarnation is a necessity for the completion of creation and for fulfillment of the being of God. It also requires that the suffering of Christ must be experienced in both his humanity and his divinity. If Christ's divinity does not participate in the suffering of Christ, then the crucifixion of Christ is merely a human tragedy, and our perception of God will be negatively affected so that we must abandon the Christian faith. The suffering that Christ experiences is also experienced by God the Father who suffers along with the Son. In the next section we will survey Moltmann's argument, which expresses how the passion of the Son is also the suffering of the Father.

Godforsakenness

The godforsakenness of Jesus Christ plays a special role in Moltmann's understanding of the theology of the cross. It is the question of Jesus upon the cross that must be the compass for all of our attempts at theology. He states, "Basically, every Christian theology is consciously or unconsciously answering the question, 'Why hast thou forsaken me?', when their doctrines of salvation say 'for this reason' or 'for that reason'" (*CG*, 153). Moltmann says that the beginning of the passion occurs when Jesus' prayer to take the cup of suffering away from him goes unanswered (*TK*, 76). He observes that

Jesus' experience in Gethsemane is characterized most by his newfound fear for God the Father. Moltmann assumes the following about Jesus' suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane: Jesus is evidently afraid to be alone with his Father and seeks the comfort of his friends. Jesus asks that the terrible cup of suffering be taken from him, but the Father does not listen. In fact, the Father withdraws from the Son and leaves him alone. This abandonment by the Father causes the disciples to experience great grief, and their response to that grief is to fall into a deep sleep (*TK*, 76). In the forsakenness of the cross the Son experienced the greatest misery "of all the damned of this earth" (*TK*, 77). He was not merely assailed in his human nature, but worse, "he was assailed in his person, his very essence, in his relationship to the Father--in his divine sonship" (*TK*, 77).

Moltmann says that this terrible cry of Christ from the cross is the very center of the Christian faith. It is something that people never get used to. It is the antithesis to the story and life of Christ. It is not by chance that this cry is the only time that Christ does not address God as "my Father" but instead "as if from a long way off and quite officially and formally as 'my God'" (*TK*, 78). This forsakenness shakes the very foundations of the Trinity:

> If the Father forsakes the Son, the Son does not merely lose his sonship. The Father loses his fatherhood as well. The love that binds the one to the other is transformed into a dividing curse. It is only as the One who is forsaken and cursed that the Son is still the Son. It is only as the One who forsakes, who surrenders the other, that the Father is still present. Communicating love and responding love are alike transformed into infinite pain and into the suffering and endurance of death (*TK*, 80).

It is not merely the loss of the Son of God to death, but the loss of the Son in forsakenness that creates the greatest test for the Trinity to overcome.

From Moltmann's perspective, it is in this total giving over of and separation of the Son from the Father that it is possible for the love of God to be fulfilled. For, it is only in this complete giving that God reveals to us his nature which is love. It is at the point of this greatest separation in the Garden of Gethsemane and in the forsakenness of the cross that

the will of the Father and the Son is most profoundly one in surrender. Moltmann explains that there is an "inner conformity between the will of the surrendered Son and the surrendering will of the Father" (*TK*, 82).

For Moltmann, the surrender itself is the means that produces suffering and solidarity with humanity. That God suffers with humanity seems to be more the point for Moltmann than that the sins of the world are forgiven in the suffering, death, and resurrection of the Son. The next section will explore how the suffering of Christ is related to the suffering of the Father.

The Suffering of Christ and the Suffering of God

For Moltmann, the event of the cross reveals God to the greatest extent. In the crucified Jesus, we see the "image of the invisible God." *This* is God, and God is like *this*. Moltmann asserts that we see the fullness of God in the event of the cross:

> God is not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he is in this humanity. The nucleus of everything that Christian theology says about "God" is to be found in this Christ event (CG, 205).

Thus, Moltmann states that "the Christ event on the cross is a God event. And conversely, the God event takes place on the cross of the risen Christ" (CG, 205). The cross is the filter through which all Christian life and theology must pass in order to be called Christian. He says that "the pain of the cross determines the inner life of the triune God from eternity to eternity" (TK, 161).

Moltmann stresses that Jesus Christ reveals God in a godless and godforsaken world. This means that God represents himself and reveals himself in the surrender of Jesus and his passion and death on the cross. Where God reveals himself, he also defines and identifies himself. Thus, Paul can say, "God himself was in Christ" (II Corinthians 5:19). Moltmann understands the logical conclusion to be that "God (himself) suffered in Jesus, God himself died in Jesus for us. God is on the cross of Jesus "for us," and

through that becomes God and Father of the godless and the godforsaken" (CG, 192). Although it appears that Moltmann advocates a patripassionist view of the suffering that takes place on the cross, he denies this and explains how the Father participates in the death of Christ.

The crux of the matter for Moltmann is that God the Father was very involved in the passion of Christ. He states that

> God was not silent or uninvolved in the cross of Jesus. Nor was he absent in the godforsakenness of Jesus. He acted in Jesus, the Son of God: in that men betrayed him, handed him over and delivered him up to death, God himself delivered him up. In the passion of the Son, the Father himself suffers the pains of abandonment. In the death of the Son, death comes upon God himself, and the Father suffers the death of his Son in his love for forsaken man (CG, 192).

Moltmann tells us that God immersed himself in every stage of the passion, even in the forsakenness and abandonment of Christ. God is in fact driving or orchestrating the whole event of the passion of Christ.

Consequently, Moltmann explains that

> what happened on the cross must be understood as an event between God and the Son of God. In the action of the Father in delivering up his Son to suffering and to a godless death, God is acting in himself. He is acting in himself in this manner of suffering and dying in order to open up in himself life and freedom for sinners (CG, 192).

The cross is an event that happens within the Trinity. It is an event between God the Father and God the Son. This tragedy within the relationships of the Godhead produces an "enmity" within the Trinity that results in the abandonment of the Son:

> The abandonment on the cross which separates the Son from the Father is something which takes place within God himself; it is stasis within God--"God against God"--particularly if we are to maintain that Jesus bore witness to and lived out the truth of God. We must not allow ourselves to overlook this "enmity" between God and God by failing to take seriously either the rejection of Jesus by God, the gospel of God which he lived out, or his last cry to God upon the cross (CG, 151-52).

The cross produced a situation in which "God was against God." The Son of God is forsaken by the Father and left to die a godless death. This abandonment of Jesus by the

Father was the "torment in his torments" (*CG*, 149).

The cry of Jesus is not one of self-pity and personal distress, but it is "a call upon God for God's sake, a legal plea" (*CG*, 150). In this plea, Jesus is putting at stake his personal existence, his theological existence, and his whole proclamation of God. "Thus ultimately, in his rejection, the deity of this God and the fatherhood of his Father, which Jesus had brought close to men, are at stake" (*CG*, 150-51). Jesus is calling upon the deity and faithfulness of his Father. Thus, says Moltmann, "the cry of Jesus in the words of Ps. 22 means not only 'my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' but at the same time, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken thyself?'" This must be so, according to Moltmann, because the theological context of what Jesus preached and lived, requires that the unity of the Son and the Father must be emphasized as strongly as this (*CG*, 151).

Paradoxically, Moltmann sees this terrible separation of forsakenness as also being the greatest moment of solidarity between the Father and the Son by virtue of the unity of their will. There is an inner conformity of will between "the will of the surrendered Son and the surrendering will of the Father" (*TK*, 82). In the dialectic of Moltmann's theology, the cross that divides "God from God to the utmost degree of enmity and distinction" also allows for the resurrection of the Son abandoned by God, and thus unites "God with God in the most intimate fellowship" (*CG*, 152).

One may wonder if the Father and the Son are so intimately connected in the event of the cross that they must also suffer in the same way. Moltmann asserts that they do not suffer in the same manner and attempts to clarify how he understands the suffering of the Father and the Son in the event of the cross. He states that we cannot say that the Father suffered and died in patripassian terms, nor can we say that Jesus died as God in theopaschite terms. Rather, we must speak in trinitarian terms if we are to express what happened between God the Father and God the Son on the cross. He explains:

The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the

> Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father, and if God has constituted himself as the Father of Jesus Christ, then he also suffers the death of his Fatherhood in the death of the Son. Unless this were so, the doctrine of the Trinity would still have a monotheistic background (*CG*, 243).

Thus, if we view the cross from a trinitarian perspective, then according to Moltmann, we must see that the Son suffers death while the Father suffers the grief of the loss of the Son.

Moltmann relates that the suffering and dying of Jesus, understood as the suffering and dying of the Son of God, are works of God towards himself and are therefore passions of God. In the event of the cross, "God overcomes himself, God passes judgment on himself, God takes the judgment on the sin of man upon himself." He assigns to himself the fate that men should rightfully endure. The cross of Jesus, understood as the cross of the Son of God, therefore reveals a change in God, namely that "God is other." This revelation is, for Moltmann, one that contradicts all possible metaphysical and historical ideas of God because it manifests that God is not an apathetic, abstract, and immovable God, but rather it proves that "God *is* love" (*CG*, 193).

What then does the human cross of Christ mean for God? For Moltmann, the answer is in the idea of God's passion, which "reveals itself in the suffering of a passionate love for his lost creatures, a suffering prepared for sacrifice" (*CG*, x). Because God is love, he also must suffer, but in opening himself to the suffering which is involved in love "he remains superior to it by virtue of his love" (*CG*, 230). "The justifiable denial that God is capable of suffering because of a deficiency in his being may not lead to a denial the he is incapable of suffering out of the fullness of his being, i.e. his love" (*CG*, 230). Thus, God suffers out of the fullness of his being and there is no deficiency created in the being of God by suffering. God suffers from a position of sufficiency of love, not out of a deficiency of being.

Moltmann proclaims that to take up this theology of the crucified Christ is to call for a reformation in theology and society. And it is certainly true that to base all Christian

theology and life on the question which Jesus asked as he died is to give theology a focus that is different from what has gone on before in theological inquiry. Moltmann challenges traditional theology with the ultimatum that "either Jesus who was abandoned by God is the end of all theology or he is the beginning of a specifically Christian, and therefore critical and liberating theology and life" (*CG*, 4). So Moltmann gives us the choice to try to find hope in the abandoned Christ and apathetic God of traditional theology or to embrace his specifically Christian, and therefore critical and liberating theology of life. As Moltmann describes the situation, it would seem rather foolish to do anything but follow his lead.

However, the evidence cited above in chapter two would suggest that what Moltmann offers here contains an either/or fallacy. His interpretation of the traditional understanding of God as apathetic regarding the forsakenness of the Son is without a strong factual basis. A better choice that he does not offer is to find hope in the God of the tradition of biblical theology that neither abandons the Son entirely nor is completely apathetic. Further, the theological construct he devises is a strange one that cryptically emphasizes our participation in a "God event" as the basis for our faith and religious practice. The nature of God is defined exclusively by the "event" of the cross:

> Anyone who speaks of God in Christian terms must tell of the history of Jesus as a history between the Son and the Father. In that case, "God" is not another nature or a heavenly person of a moral authority, but in fact an "event." However, it is not the event of co-humanity, but the event of Golgotha the event of the love of the Son and the grief of the Father from which the Spirit who opens up the future and creates life in fact derives. . . . There is in fact no "personal God" as a person projected in heaven. But there are persons in God: the Son, Father and the Spirit. In that case one does not simply pray to God as a heavenly Thou, but prays *in* God. One does not pray to an event but *in* this event. One prays through the Son to the Father in the Spirit." (CG, 247).

Moltmann's emphasis on the crucifixion as the event that determines Christian theology makes our relationship to God difficult to decipher.

His attempt to show how God experiences suffering through the crucifixion of the Son in surrender is very confusing because he seems to be saying different things at

different times. At some points it seems as if he is making a direct correlation between the pain felt by God and the pain experienced by Jesus. In other places he seems to be illustrating the suffering of God through analogy, but his conclusion that we are the creative result of the event of love that took place on the cross at Golgotha leaves us with questions rather than answers about how we are to decipher Moltmann's interpretation of the suffering of God. A further problem is his elimination of the immanent Trinity from theology, which will be examined in the next section.

<u>The Immanent and Economic Trinity</u>

Another result of Moltmann's focus on the event of the cross as the center of Christian theology is the dissolution of the immanent Trinity. Since the time of the early Church, there has usually been a distinction between the Trinity as it is in itself, the immanent or substantial Trinity, and the Trinity as it is revealed in the dispensation of salvation in the Bible, the economic Trinity. Moltmann explains that the immanent-economic distinction has been made to maintain the freedom and grace of God. The traditional understanding of God has been that he is completely self-sufficient and not bound in any way to create the world or to reveal himself. Nevertheless, he did create by virtue of a free act. Further, he chose to reveal himself to us by virtue of his grace for our salvation. This salvation is not something that we deserve by right, but it is made possible solely by the benevolence of his grace. Thus, the presupposition of an immanent Trinity is necessary to preserve the understanding that God is entirely self-sufficient and free to choose not to create. The formation of the economic Trinity illustrates God's grace in His willingness to reveal himself and to give us salvation through the sacrifice of his Son.

Moltmann raises the question as to whether this postulation of an immanent and economic Trinity is, in fact, a speculation rather than a necessary theological truth. And if it is a speculation is it necessary for Christian theology? He thinks that it is not. He says that

such a distinction would be necessary if, in the concept of God, there really were only the alternative between liberty and necessity. As it is, according to Moltmann, there is not such an alternative in God because "if God is love, then his liberty cannot consist of loving or of not loving. On the contrary, his love is his liberty and his liberty is his love" (*TK*, 151). So then, we must say that God loves the world with the same love that he himself is. To say that there must be a view of the Trinity that substantiates God in His self-sufficiency brings an unneeded element into the Trinity. Moltmann states:

> The notion of an immanent Trinity in which God is simply by himself, without the love which communicates salvation, brings an arbitrary element into the concept of God which means a break-up of the Christian concept. Consequently this idea safeguards neither God's liberty nor the grace of salvation. It introduces a contradiction into the relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity: the God who loves the world does not correspond to the God who suffices for himself (*TK*, 151).

Hence, not only is the concept of an immanent Trinity arbitrary for Moltmann, it also creates a contradiction in the concept of God because a God who is love, cannot be a God who is self-sufficient.

Moltmann advocates that there is only an economic Trinity that is revealed in the event of the cross. "The cross stands at the heart of the trinitarian being of God; it divides and conjoins the persons in their relationships to each other and portrays them in a specific way" (*CG*, 207). This Trinity cannot be reduced to a single identical subject, nor can it be said to be one God in three modes of being. Rather, "the divine trinitarian history as the open, unifying at-oneness of the three divine Persons in their relationships to one another" is how we may understand the unity of the Trinity. This unity of the three persons does not lie in a single divine essence or substance, but in the eternal perichoresis of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*TK*, 157). It is the doctrine of perichoresis that links together the threeness and oneness of the Trinity in such a way that Moltmann thinks avoids the heresies of modalism and subordinationism (*TK*, 175). The unity of the three divine persons lies in the relationships of their fellowship and not in their numerical unity (TK, 95).

The pain of the cross determines the inner life of the Trinity from eternity to eternity (*TK*, 161) and the relationships among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the event of the cross, we see "the lamb of God who was slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 5:12). This sacrifice was already in the God who is love even before the world was created. For Moltmann, "no Trinity is conceivable without the Lamb, without the sacrifice of love, without the crucified Son" (*TK*, 83). The crucifixion is the determining factor of the life of the trinitarian God even before the event of the crucifixion is revealed to humanity in time.

This is an important claim that deserves more exploration and evaluation. Without the crucifixion there is no Trinity for Moltmann. The Trinity begins with the crucifixion, thus it is only by means of the lamb that was slain form the foundation of the world that God could be realized or understood as a Trinitarian God. This is the basis for Moltmann's rejection of the immanent Trinity. But this makes it difficult to discern how we should conceive of God before the advent of the crucifixion. How do we talk about the existence of God, say, in the time of Abraham or Moses?

But, at a more rudimentary level than that, how do we conceive of a Trinity that experiences the pain of the cross in eternity if there is no immanent or substantial Trinity to which one might attribute this pain? A suggestion made by Richard Bauckham is that "one possible interpretation of Moltmann's concept of the cross in *The Crucified God* might be that it is in the Christ event that God *becomes* Trinity."[16] Thus, there would be no Trinity in eternity. Moltmann does not seem to dispute this understanding except by saying that the life of the Trinity is determined from eternity to eternity by the cross. His construction of the doctrine of the Trinity starts very conscientiously with the three persons of the economic

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[16]Richard Bauckham, "Jurgen Moltmann (His Doctrine of the Trinity)," in *One God in Trinity*, ed. Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland (Westchester, Illinois: Cornerstone Books, 1980), 121.

Trinity as they are revealed in the cross and does not comment on the state of the Trinity before the life of Jesus Christ.

Moltmann asserts that it is of decisive importance whether we start from the idea of the Trinity in order to understand the sovereignty of God as the Sovereignty of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or whether we start from the sovereignty of God in order to secure the sovereignty of the One God by means of the doctrine of the Trinity (*TK*, 140). His opinion is that one should begin with the assumption that there are three distinct Persons with the unity of one substance rather than the idea of a threefold single God who is one in identity. He urges that it is biblical to begin with the idea of threeness and work to see how the oneness of God manifests itself rather than to begin with the oneness of God, a philosophical concept, and work toward the threeness of God.

Moltmann emphasizes the need to examine the suffering of God within the context of the Trinity. His doctrine of the Trinity reveals the suffering of God to be a problem that occurs both among the relationships within the Trinity and in the distinct persons of the Trinity. The fact that Moltmann does not think that there is a need for a Trinity in and of itself makes it impossible to think about God as Trinity apart from the situation of the world and the suffering that is being experienced there. Thus the suffering of God as Trinity is also the suffering God experiences in the world in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The next section will deal with the so-called "death of God" that takes place in the Trinity and how Moltmann understands this.

The Death of God

If, as Moltmann says, we must understand the suffering and death of Jesus to affect not just his physical being, but also his divine being, then how do we understand his death? How can we understand the statement that God died on the cross of Jesus? If we recognize death to mean the "permanent cessation of the biological and organic processes of the

body, including the brain and therefore of consciousness and of other mental functions, in so far as these depend on the central nervous system,"[17] then we can say that this kind of death obviously happened to Jesus. But can we say that this happened to God, who has no body or central nervous system? Certainly not. So then, what is Moltmann trying to say in his statement that God died in Christ on the cross (*CG*, 190)?

Moltmann's explanation of this phenomenon in God is difficult to follow and seemingly contradictory. He emphasizes that what is being said in the phrase "God was in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:19) is that God suffered *in* Jesus and that God died *in* Jesus (CG, 190, 192).[18] There are at least two ambiguities in what is being said here. The first is that it is not clear what is meant by "God" here. Is it the "divine nature" that is being implied or "God the Father"? The second problem is to try to decipher what it means to suffer *in* Jesus and die *in* Jesus. Does this mean that "God" suffered and died vicariously through Jesus, or does it mean that God actually and directly suffered and died in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ? It seems from what Moltmann says elsewhere that he means that "God" here is to designate "God the Father" and that the suffering is a vicarious rather than a direct kind of suffering.

Moltmann states that the "sending" of the Son is to bring the whole career and appearance of Jesus under the single heading of Galatians 4:4: "When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." The fundamental reason for the coming of Jesus is his being sent by God. The purpose of the sending of the Son is the liberation of the children of God from slavery under the law (*CG*, 191).

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[17]D.G. Attfield, "Can God Be Crucified: A Discussion of J. Moltmann," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 30 (1977): 49.

[18]Italics mine.

This concept of "sending" is coupled with the "giving up" of the Son as is recorded in Romans 8:32, Galatians 2:20, John 3:16, Ephesians 5:25 and other passages. The giving up is "meant to be an interpretation of the particular suffering and death of Jesus" (*CG*, 191). The Father participates in the suffering and death of Jesus by giving up the Son to suffering and death. Thus, it seems to be a vicarious suffering and death that we see in God the Father even though Moltmann wants also to affirm that the divine nature is capable of suffering.[19]

He says that we must make more of a differentiation than is suggested by the phrase "the death of God." He asserts that "Jesus' death cannot be understood 'as the death of God' but only as death *in* God" (CG, 207). In other words, the death of the incarnate Jesus on the cross is the death of God in in a trinitarian dimension. The death of Jesus is a death that takes place within the Trinity. There is a death within the fellowship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. What this actually means or how this is to be understood is very difficult to discern. Does this perhaps mean that the Trinity was reduced to a "Dynamic Duo" for a period of time between the death and the resurrection of Jesus? Or does it mean that the experience of "spiritual" death was made real in the Trinity by means of a separation in the relationship between the Father and the Son? It seems more likely that he intends the latter to be understood, but he does not make this explicit.

Moltmann explains that the "origin of Christian theology is only the death on the cross in God and God in Jesus' death" (*CG*, 207). To understand this, he says that we must abandon the concept of God and begin thinking in terms of the relationships of the Son and the Father and the Spirit. "From the life of these three, which has within it the death of Jesus, there then emerges who God is and what his Godhead means" (*CG*, 207).

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[19] "It would be ridiculous to say that the incarnate Christ did not experience fear at the thought of the horribly slow death ahead of him or to say that he suffered only in body and not in his divinity" (*TK*, 76-77).

On the cross, Moltmann suggests, we must see the symbol of God with his hands outstretched to embrace the ends of the earth. "This symbol is an invitation to understand the Christ hanging on the cross as the 'outstretched' God of the Trinity" (*CG*, 207). However, in saying this, he does not tell us how the death in God affects the relationships of the Son and the Father and the Spirit; instead, he offers a symbol of God stretching out his arms to embrace the earth as a way to understand the death on the cross. This does little to help the reader understand how Moltmann thinks the divine nature is affected by the death of Jesus on the cross, and perhaps it is unfair to expect this from Moltmann because this does not seem to be a big concern for him. He is more anxious to show the reader that God suffers the greatest depth of human weakness and sorrow in a very real and empathetic fashion.

Even if this is not a great concern of Moltmann, it is nevertheless an important question to consider. How do we understand the divinity of Christ, or God the Father, or the Holy Spirit to be affected by the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross? As seen above, the Theopaschite controversy resulted in the decision that the Logos incarnate suffered, but not that the divine nature of Jesus suffered. A divine nature, which is a set of attributes, cannot suffer. However, we know from Scripture that the incarnate Christ suffered, and that when he suffered, he was both human and divine. The effect that the suffering of Jesus had on the Father and the Spirit is not terribly clear, but it seems reasonable to think that the suffering of one member of the Trinity would affect the other members of the Trinity is some way. In the next section, we will examine how Moltmann and other thinkers have dealt with this issue of Christology and the legitimacy of "transferring" the suffering of Christ to the divine nature or to God the Father.

Christology and the Transference of Suffering to the Divinity of Christ

The incarnation of Christ is the ultimate revelation of what God is really like. This is not merely speaking about God in human terms, but it is God in a material, concrete, empirically observable state. This is God's Word, the Son who "condescends to take on human flesh so that the mystery of God might be revealed in human form, in human measure, in human manner, in human mode."[20] For the Christian, it is the incarnation of Jesus Christ that provides the clearest accommodation to our human minds through which we may see all the other aspects of Christian theology. Ford Lewis Battles states,

> At the center of God's accommodating himself to human capacity, however, is his supreme act of condescension, the giving of his only Son to reconcile a fallen world to himself. If accommodation is the speech-bridge between the known and the unknown, between the infinitesimal and the infinite, between the apparent and the real, between the human and the divine, the Logos who tented among us is the point from which we must view creation, fall, and all history, before and since the incarnation.[21]

In the person of Christ, God is no longer merely speaking down to our level of understanding, he has become one of us.

Even so, the incarnation of Christ presents new challenges for us as we attempt to understand if or how we may speak of a suffering God. In John 14:9, Jesus tells his disciple, Philip, "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." To what extent do we take these words of Jesus to be true in regard to the essence of God's being? It is not feasible to attribute physical pain, bodily functions, or physical needs to God since it is reasonable to think that these were only part of Christ's human existence and not part of his divine, spiritual existence. It is much more readily evident that the power to do miracles, the

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[20]Ronald B. Bond, "God's 'Back Parts': Silence and the Accommodating Word," in *Silence the Word and the Sacred*, ed. E. Blodgett and H. Coward (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1989), 173.

[21]Ford L. Battles, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity." *Interpretation* 31 (January 1977): 21.

compassion and love that Jesus had for people, the judgment that he meted out to Pharisees and unbelievers, and the forgiveness of sins are the more easily transferable attributes of Jesus to the divine nature. The most important question for this investigation is the extent to which we may transfer the apparent emotional suffering of Jesus to the divinity of the Godhead.

Since it is true that Jesus is the Word of God that has become flesh and made his dwelling among human beings, and that he is fully human and fully divine, it is not hard to conceive that the divinity of Christ must suffer in some sense because we know that Jesus Christ suffered. It is only logical to think that the way that Jesus Christ was in his dealings with people and in his experience in the world is in some way indicative of the nature of God. But how do we say that his divinity was involved in suffering and remain within the realm of orthodoxy? We must at least be able to say that the incarnate Christ suffered, and in that suffering, Jesus Christ was both human and divine.

Moltmann has said that God must suffer because there is human suffering, because of the nature of love, and because of the passion of Jesus. He has abandoned the theopashcite distinction that Christ was able to suffer in his physical body, but that the divinity of Christ remains impassible as a ridiculous notion (*TK*, 76-77). His entire basis for theology is founded on the crucifixion of Christ and the resulting suffering, godforsakenness, and death within the Trinity. The suffering of Christ brings about the pain of God that defines the inner life of God from eternity to eternity (*TK*, 161). Moltmann makes a vicarious rather than direct transference of the suffering of Christ to the Father, but the Father is necessarily very involved in the passion of the Son (*CG*, 192). God the Father does not suffer in the same way that Jesus suffers: the Son suffers crucifixion and death while the Father suffers the grief of the loss of a Son. The Father suffers the giving up of the Son and the Son suffers the godforsakenness of death without the Father. Yet, Moltmann wants to say that there is a death in God and that God died in Jesus on the

cross (*CG*, 207). Thus, for Moltmann, there is certainly the idea that the cross of Christ causes suffering for the divine nature and for God the Father, but the way in which that suffering is portrayed or understood is not always clear or consistent.

Moltmann fails to distinguish the human suffering of Jesus which *is* human suffering from the divine suffering of the Father which is only analogous to human suffering.[22] Because he does not point out this difference, his theology of a suffering God becomes difficult to follow and contradictory at points. Although his theology would probably be much clearer if this distinction had been made, at least he has made some attempt to distinguish between the suffering of the Son and the suffering of the Father. Some theologians do not even go so far to allow for such a distinction; rather, they omit any qualification between the suffering of the Father and the suffering of the Son.

For some thinkers, the very fact that Jesus suffered at all gives one license to infer that God must suffer in the same way. George Lambert makes a direct correlation between the suffering of Christ and the suffering of God. He states:

> The problem with the theology of the church is that it did not take seriously the working of God as we know the Trinity. If Jesus be truly God, then God is despised and rejected, acquainted with grief, despised, without esteem, wounded for our sins, bruised for our iniquities, led to the slaughter as a lamb.[23]

H. Maldwyn Hughes makes a similar statement when he says that his "contention is not simply that Christ reveals a suffering God, but that the sufferings of Christ were the sufferings of God."[24] These statements are made without any qualification of how one may

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[22]Richard Bauckham, "In Defence of the Crucified God," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 114.

[23]George E. Lambert, "The Prior Suffering of God as a Tool in Pastoral Care of Trauma and of Traumatic Loss" (D. Min. thesis, Trinity Lutheran Seminary, 1986), 25.

[24]H. Maldwyn Hughes, *What is the Atonement?* (London: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., [1924]), 102-103.

understand the suffering of Christ to be the suffering of God. Thus, the reader is left to assume that there must be a direct correlation.

In much the same way, Bertrand Brasnett wants to propose that if we can see suffering in God during the period of the incarnation, then we can extrapolate that God must be capable of experiencing pain when he is not incarnate. He reasons that if we can agree with those who say that the incarnation is a revelation of God as a manifestation in time and space of the eternal life of Deity, then we may say that "as there was pain for God in the incarnation, so we hold that there is pain for God when not incarnate."[25] Thus, Brasnett wants to infer that there must be suffering within the unincarnate divine life of God as there is in the incarnate life of Christ. But, he does not specify what kind of pain God experiences in the incarnation or how he would experience that in the unincarnate state.

Jung Young Lee connects the sufferings of Christ to God both by means of trinitarian and incarnational theology. Integral to Lee's thinking is his theory of God's empathic love for his people who are bound up in sin. God's empathy is a result of the pain that God experiences because of the tension between his wrath toward sin and the love that he has toward sinners. Lee's trinitarian argument for the suffering of God links the idea of community in the Body of Christ to the concept of the Trinity. He reasons:

> In the body of Christ many members who are dissimilar are united to make one Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:12) and each member is indispensable for the integrality of the whole (I Corinthians 12:22-23). Moreover, "if one member suffers, all suffer together" (I Corinthians 12:26). If this analogy could be applied to the inner-trinitarian community, which is the original and primary community of all other communities, we are readily led to believe that the suffering of one person in the Trinity is eventually the suffering of the whole community of inner divine life. Therefore, the Trinity is the integral reality of divine passibility.[26]

Thus, the suffering of Christ would impact the community of the Trinity in such a way that

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[25]Brasnett, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 36.

[26]Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 76.

suffering of the other members of the Trinity would be the inevitable result.

In incarnational terms, he argues that the suffering of Christ's divinity is previous to the suffering of his humanity. "Divine Passibility was not the consequence of the incarnation but the incarnation was the consequence of divine passibility." He states that

> in the incarnation the suffering of His divinity, which is in unity with the suffering of His Father, comes to participate in His humanity in such a perfect manner that the suffering of His divinity is also the suffering of his humanity at the same time. This is certainly the paradoxical union of the divine and human suffering in the coming of God in Christ. This paradox repudiates any attempt to separate the suffering of Jesus' humanity from that of His divinity. It also safeguards against the assertion that the incarnation is only the beginning of divine passibility.[27]

Hence, for Lee, there is a prior assumption of the suffering of God even before the incarnation occurs. The suffering of God is prior to his condescension.

John Stott is somewhat more careful in his assessment of the sufferings of God. He concludes that "if God's full and final self-revelation was given in Jesus . . . then his (Jesus') feelings and sufferings are an authentic *reflection* of the feelings and sufferings of God himself."[28] He makes clear that the emotions of Jesus are authentic reflections of the suffering in God, but they do not constitute or comprise the suffering of God. This avenue of reflection, or perhaps we might say analogy, seems to be the best way to talk about the sufferings of Christ and their correlation to the suffering that may take place in the life of God. This will be expanded upon in the final chapter. This chapter will conclude with a survey of criticisms and conclusions concerning Moltmann's theology.

Criticisms of Moltmann's Theology

There are several problems with Moltmann's theological construct of a passible God. The first is that this God is too limited in power and scope. God is limited by

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[27]Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 56.

[28]John Stott, "God on the Gallows: How Could I Worship A God Immune to Pain?" *Christianity Today* 31(January 16, 1987): 29. Italics are mine.

Moltmann's understanding of the nature of God's love, and God is limited by his participation in the world. The second is that Moltmann understands the atonement primarily in terms of its ability to eradicate suffering and not in regard to the expiation of sin. The third problem is that Moltmann's depiction of God portrays a God who is not compeltely free to act in any way that he chooses.

Limited Deity

The first criticism is that Moltmann leaves us with a God who is too limited in power and scope. His theological vision includes the idea that in order to enter into the world, God must limit himself. This is not referring to the incarnation per say, but to any part of God's involvement within the world. God interpenetrates every living thing with his love and is thus also limited by being in the world. Because God has entered into the world, he has also entered into its evolution. This evolution is the redemptive process of the world; it is the process of all living things coming to an awareness of themselves. Therefore, "God and the world are involved in a common redemptive process" (*TK*, 39). In this process, God participates in the world's pain, and He suffers in the suffering of all who suffer. For Moltmann, this means that we also participate in the suffering of God. Thus, "it is not only that we need God's compassion; God also needs ours" (*TK*, 39). God needs our compassion because he too is experiencing the depth of suffering with us, and he is unable to overcome it by means of his power.

The evolutionary process of self-awareness comes about through the experience of pain. By arriving at awareness through pain, living beings become free. God also becomes free through this process of arriving at awareness through pain. Moltmann says that "the deliverance of the world from its contradiction is nothing less than God's deliverance of himself from the contradiction of his world" (*TK*, 39). We experience God's pain over the world in the experience of death. The sorrow we experience teaches us about God's

sorrow. The God who is love and who loves all of his creatures with an infinite love is bound to feel sorrow and loss at the death of every one of His created beings. Our sorrow and our loss is a participation in the pain of God. "That is why in our pain our hope is directed towards that divine future in which God will have all his creatures beside him to all eternity" (*TK*, 39-40).

Thus, according to Moltmann, not only is God dependent on our compassion, but he is also dependent on our existence in order to fulfill the necessity of his love. Creation is "the fruit of God's longing for 'his Other' and for that Other's free response to the divine love" (*TK*, 106). God cannot find bliss in eternal self-love if selflessness is part of love's very nature. Hence, God must create in order to fulfill his love. Moltmann says that it is impossible to conceive of a God who does not create because a non-creative God would be imperfect compared to an eternally creative God (*TK*, 106). In order to reach the fulfillment of His creative love, God must create the world. Therefore, God is dependent on creation to bring himself to self-awareness and to fulfill the extent of his love as selfless love. God is not self-sufficient. The limitedness of God in different capacities will be a common theme in the following sections on atonement and sin, and the freedom of God.

Atonement and Sin

The second criticism shows that Moltmann seems to understand well that the crucifixion of Christ was not merely the "expiatory offering in which the law was restored or the original creation was reconstituted after the fall of man," but that there is also the sense in which he died to give us "a share in his new life of resurrection and in his future of eternal life" (*TK*, 186). He espouses that in the cross, God takes "upon himself the unforgivable sin and the guilt for which there is no atonement, together with the rejection and anger that cannot be turned away, so that in Christ we might become his righteousness in the world" (*TK*, 192). And he makes the panentheistic observation that God is acting in

himself in the delivering up of his Son to suffering and a godless death in order to "open up in himself life and freedom for the sinner" (*TK*, 192). Moltmann obviously knows and understands the common traditional theological interpretation of the cross and even adds his own panentheistic twist.

However, he does not understand the significance of the cross to be in its efficacious atonement for the sin of humankind. Rather, the crucifixion is seen as a more complex event that has to do primarily with the questions of theodicy and the evolution of the Godhead. He states that

> the universal significance of the crucified Christ on Golgotha is only really comprehended through the theodicy question. The history of Christ's sufferings belongs to the history of the sufferings of mankind, by virtue of the passionate love which Christ manifests and reveals (*TK*, 52).

Therefore, the universal significance of the crucifixion of Christ is not the fact that humankind is exonerated of sin in this act, but that the question of the existence of evil is confronted by the suffering of Christ on the cross. God suffers because he loves and stands in solidarity with those who suffer. In love God meets the "involuntary suffering of the godforsaken with another kind of suffering: voluntary fellow-suffering."[29]

This is because, for Moltmann, suffering is a greater and farther reaching problem than sin is. He suggests that there is a cursory connection between sin and suffering, but that suffering is much broader and more devastating to the human race. He states:

> Of course there is a connection between sin and suffering. . . . Misery is the lot of anyone who sins against God. . . . We cannot say, 'if there were no sin, there would be no suffering.' Experience of suffering goes far beyond the experience of guilt and the experience of grace. It has its roots in the limitations of created reality itself. If creation-in-the-beginning is open for the history of good *and* evil, then that initial creation is also a creation capable of suffering, and capable of producing suffering" (*TK*, 50-51).

The problem of suffering is an all-encompassing problem for Moltmann that is woven into the very fabric of creation. Suffering precedes sin as a problem for humanity. He implies

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[29]Bauckham, "Jürgen Moltmann," 300.

that suffering would exist even if there were no sin because suffering goes beyond the experience of guilt and the experience of grace. We see this especially in what Moltmann calls innocent suffering: "What hurts far more than the connection between guilt and suffering is innocent suffering, the suffering of the righteous, the suffering of the poor, and the suffering of children" (*TK*, 51). For Moltmann, the cross gives us comfort because it meets suffering with the voluntary fellow-suffering of love. It does not solve the problem of suffering, but it manifests that there is solidarity in suffering.[30]

Moltmann shifts the purpose of the cross from an expiation for sin to a "universal significance" to be comprehended through the theodicy question. This interpretation takes a sharp turn from the biblical witness of the message of the cross. Richard Bauckham helps to illustrate this shift by describing Moltmann's soteriology in the following way:

> God's suffering is strongly soteriological: all suffering becomes God's *so that he may overcome it* (CG, 246). God's suffering is with those who suffer for the sake of their redemption from suffering.[31]

The God Moltmann portrays redeems us from suffering much more clearly than he redeems us from sin. And yet, in 1 Timothy 1:15, we are given the succinct message that "Jesus came to save sinners." There are many other verses that explicitly name the task of Jesus as the work of saving sinners from eternal death by sacrificing himself for the sins of many. First Peter 2:24 also illustrates this point by saying that "he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by this wound you have been healed." The explicit message here is that Christ's work on the cross was to forgive our sins, not simply to take away our suffering. In 2 Corinthians 5:20-21, Paul implores us to become reconciled to God, and the way that we are able to do this is through

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[30]Bauckham, "Jürgen Moltmann," 301.

[31]Richard Bauckham, "In Defence of the Crucified God," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 98-99.

the fact that Christ has become sin for us so that we might become righteous.

It is not directly apparent from the Bible that the primary significance of the cross involves a confrontation of the theodicy question. There is also a much greater concern over the problem of sin in the Bible than Moltmann is portraying in his interpretation. In fact, the Bible often portrays suffering in a quasi-positive light: suffering is that which produces character or refines the souls of the faithful, it is not portrayed as the ultimate evil that is to be overcome. Although it is a terrible burden and a curse for those who must endure it, suffering is temporary. Sin, however, is another matter that is much more serious with much more dire consequences.

Moltmann's depiction of the cross does not say much about the seriousness or the reality of sin. It thus omits the power of God to overcome sin and to transform people's lives. For Moltmann, we are mainly people who suffer; we are not mainly sinners. This skews the purpose of the cross and incarnation. We do not need to escape suffering to attain justification before God; we need to escape sin. The significance of the cross is the victory of Christ over sin. The cross deals with the root, fruit, and brute of sin.[32] To place its significance elsewhere is to remove from the cross what is most important. In the next section we will examine why Moltmann's understanding of God limits God's freedom.

Freedom of God

The third criticism of Moltmann relates to the idea of the God's freedom. For Moltmann, the opportunity to have a choice is an undesirable situation because it places the one who must make a decision in the position of having to choose. He advocates that the old German proverb, "having to choose is the torment of choice," is a truism and would apply to God if he were to have to make choices. However, he tells us that God is not

[32]David E. Cook, "Weak Church, Weak God: The Charge of Anthropomorphism," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. N. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 88.

bothered by this problem because God only acts in accord with his nature and his nature is love. Therefore, all of God's acts are done in concurrence with the directives of love and he does not have to make any choices concerning what is better or worse, or good or evil in a particular situation. This poses no limitation, according to Moltmann, but is complete freedom:

> God does not have the choice between being love and not being love. If he is love, then in loving the world he is by no means 'his own prisoner'; on the contrary, in loving the world he is entirely free because he is entirely himself. If he is the highest good, then his liberty cannot consist of having to choose between good and evil. On the contrary, it lies in doing the good which he himself is which means communicating himself (*TK*, 55).

The freedom of God consists in carrying out the love that is within himself. In doing this, God is doing good, and he is communicating himself to the world.

This conception of freedom of God is complicated by Moltmann's understanding of what it means for God to be love. To say that God is love entails that God *must* create and *must* suffer in order to fulfill himself. While Moltmann states that God's love is not and can never be selfish love, it is acted out for no other ostensible reason than to fulfill himself. If God did not create and did not suffer, God could not be God. Thus, the freedom of God is compromised by the fact that God's "unselfish" love , in essence, compels him to use the world and suffering as means to fulfill Himself. The freedom of God is compromised because there is no other means available to God by which he may be made whole. Therefore, God is not free to be Himself without creating and suffering because without doing these things he cannot act out his nature which is love.

Ronald Goetz notes that Moltmann has confused agape with eros in his depiction of God. This has the result of making God a prisoner to his own need to love despite Moltmann's protests to the contrary. Goetz states Moltmann's position as follows:

> For God's love toward us is not as the New Testament witnesses, an act of free loving divine condescension (agape); it is rather the necessary by-product of the Father's need for the Son (eros). Moltmann would try to have it both ways, that God chooses to create and at the same time must create in order to complete His

> love. This simply will not do. Either God creates in loving freedom, or He is in the thrall of a need to create which He cannot control, for creation is a function of His primordial, eternal, tri-personal need and desire.[33]

So, as Goetz has correctly assessed, Moltmann's theology is contradictory at this point because he has created a need in God without which God cannot be God. This neediness of God is a problem because it compromises God's ability to be truly free.

The problem here as it is well described by Paul Molnar is that Moltmann "dissolves God's will to act into what he describes as His essential nature."[34] It is impossible for Moltmann to distinguish between God's being and act, his nature and will, or creation and redemption because God's will to act is the same as God's essential nature. There is no distinction between God's will and God's being. Thus, God is not free to create or to descend to earth; rather, God must do these things because His act and His being are the same. With the loss of the immanent Trinity we have lost the ability to distinguish between being and act.

According to Moltmann, God also is not free to descend because He has neither power or dominion. God's act of condescension is not a condescension at all, but a struggle with those who suffer. Moltmann says that "it is impossible to form the figure of the omnipotent, universal monarch who is reflected in earthly rulers" from the community that is observed in the Trinity between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The act of the incarnation, crucifixion, and death of Christ is much more an act of solidarity with the human condition than it is a condescension from a position of power to a position of deep humility. Moltmann is convinced that the sovereignty of God must contradict the love of

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[33]Ronald Goetz, "Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann and the Theopaschite Revolution," in *Festschrift: A Tribute to Dr. William Hordern*, ed. Walter Freitag (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: University of Saskatchewan, 1985), 25.

[34]Paul D. Molnar, "The Function of the Trinity in Moltmann's Ecological Doctrine of Creation," *Theological Studies* 51 (December 1990): 681-682.

God. However, as Ronald Goetz observes, "His (God's) sovereignty is the *sine qua non* of his love" and his kenosis.[35] Only a God who has dominion could be said to humble himself in respect to humanity.

It is only after the loving freedom and sovereignty of God has been firmly established that there is any solid basis to address many of Moltmann's concerns.[36] For instance, God "needs" the world in the sense that he has chosen to bind himself to it for eternity, but not in order to complete Himself. God may out of His grace, mercy, and love choose to suffer with his creation, but not in order to fulfill himself. God's sovereignty is what makes his love so powerful and so free. Without sovereignty, God would be powerless to save and overcome sin and suffering in the lives of the humans he created.

Conclusion

Moltmann's attempt to construct a theology based on Jesus' cry of dereliction does produce a picture of God who suffers with us and who is intimately concerned with our well-being; however, this God leaves much to be desired because he is limited in power and freedom. Moltmann's refusal to recognize an immanent Trinity leads to the fact that God is defined by an "event" rather than being defined as a personal entity. Moltmann's God is determined by the human history of Jesus.[37] The human history and suffering of Jesus of Nazareth determines the Trinity and the life of God from eternity to eternity. This is also a God who is preoccupied with himself. "He creates the world out of a need for an 'other'

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[35]Goetz, "Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann and the Theopaschite Revolution," 25.

[36]Goetz, "Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann and the Theopaschite Revolution," 25.

[37]Henri Blocher, "Divine Immutability," in *The Power and Weakness of God*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 20.

and then through the world, finds deliverance from his own suffering."[38]

Moltmann believes that the historical event of the cross and the heart of the triune God can be understood together in a single perspective. This erases the distinction between the economic and immanent Trinity because there is no God outside of this event. God is not and cannot be seen as independent from the world. "There is only a God who can be seen from within the world's perspective as one who is subject to suffering love."[39]

What does the fact that God suffers with us accomplish for us? Perhaps it means that we do not have to renounce God as a monstrous deity that would watch us endure suffering, or worse, inflict evil upon us with an air of apathy and stoicism. God is suffering with us in our despair and grief. He is struggling with us against the evil that we encounter. But this raises another question. Is he doing all that he can against this evil? If he is and evil is continuing, is he powerless to stop it? If God is powerless to stop evil, then the concept of God would have to undergo a revision that Moltmann has not anticipated and the possibility of hope is undermined.[40]

God's willingness to suffer with us may make us feel better, but it does not transform us. God's identification with human suffering does not forgive us, it does not make us new people. It does not even help us to understand why there is suffering in the first place. We don't need solidarity in suffering with God nearly so much as we need solidarity in righteousness. Our righteousness before God can only be accomplished by

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[38]Michael J. Dodds, "Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering, and the Unchanging God of Love," *Theological Studies* 52 (June 1991): 332.

[39]Paul Molnar, "The Function of the Trinity in Moltmann's Ecological Doctrine of Creation," *Theological Studies* 51 (December 1990): 687.

[40]Grace M. Jantzen, "Christian Hope and Jesus' Despair," *The King's Theological Review* 5 (Spring 1982): 5.

the overcoming of sin by the power and grace of God. This conquering of sin was done through the suffering of the Son of God on the cross as He was made a propitiatory sacrifice for all of humankind. This tells us much about the love of God and what He is like, but it does not tell us everything that there is to know.

The next chapter will draw together conclusions and look toward how it is that we may think of God as one who is able to suffer and yet remain within the tradition and biblical truths.

CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSIONS ABOUT THE PASSIBILITY OF GOD

When a person is faced with a personal tragedy such as the death of a daughter or son, the unexpected loss of a parent, a spinal cord injury, a closed head injury, schizophrenia, rape, abuse, or any other of a myriad of terrible calamities that may beset us in this life, he or she, if mental faculties are still intact, eventually reaches the point of wondering "Why?" We cannot help it. We are "hard-wired" in such a way that we search for meaning in our lives--even in the beastliest of situations. Although it is almost certain that we will never find a satisfactory answer, we continue to ask the question. We have a sense that life should be better than this. This is not the way it is supposed to be; there must be some reason for what we are experiencing.

Some people do not even have to be personally affected by tragedy. They merely may observe the personal struggles of friends and relatives or imbibe the catastrophic images that are regularly brought into their consciousness by the six o'clock news or their hometown newspaper. They wonder how it is that things in the world could be so wrong, so disastrous. They too ask "Why?" And to whom does one address such a question? Ultimately, only God can answer these kind of queries, but it is rare to receive an answer that sufficiently explains away the suffering that has taken place. What answer could God give to a Jew to explain the Holocaust? What explanation could God give to help us understand why child abuse is part of his created order?

Certainly, we hear stories about tragedies that mimic the outcome of Joseph's: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done,

the saving of may lives."[1] We are able to see a clear and proper reason for what seemed to be suffering without hope or recourse. The evil that a person experiences is turned to a good outcome by God's design. In these kinds of situations, it is easy to say with Paul that "God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purposes."[2]

But more often, we hear stories that are like Job's. The narrative of his trials ends with his reply to God:

> I know that you can do all things;
> no plan of yours can be thwarted.
> You asked, "Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?"
> Surely I spoke of things I did not understand,
> things too wonderful for me to know.
> You said, "Listen now, and I will speak;
> I will question you and you shall answer me."
> My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you.
> Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.[3]

Job loses everything. His children are all killed, his wealth is taken away, and his health is ravaged. He is reduced to sitting in ashes and scraping the sores that cover him from head to toe with a potsherd. His friends assume that he must have done something terrible to deserve such a terrible judgment from God. His wife tells him to curse God and die. Job cries out to God requesting a fair trial, but God remains silent. Job never finds out why he had to suffer so horribly, even though the reader knows of the test that God allowed Satan to perform on Job, God's most faithful servant. Job does not have any of his questions answered. The glory of the presence of God obliterates his questions, and Job knows that all he can do is repent in dust and ashes. After a time, his health is restored, his wealth is

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[1]Genesis 50:20

[2]Romans 8:28

[3]Job 42:2-6.

restored, and he has more children, but his losses remain a mystery, beyond his ability to know or understand.

One thing that is certain in both the stories of Joseph and Job is that the problem of evil and suffering is invariably linked to God somehow. Thus, as believers, in our attempt to understand tragedy and make sense of it, we delve into theology. We ask: "If this is how things are here, if this kind of thing can happen to me, then what must God be like?" "How can I reconcile my understanding of God with the kind of experience I am having now?" This kind of questioning has led many people to the conclusion that God must suffer. They reason: "If he really loves us as much as the Bible says he does then he must be afflicted in our afflictions. He must sympathize with those who have troubles just as any decent human being would do."

This is where theologians run into trouble when they are trying to assess the passibility of God. It is tempting to think of God in terms that are suitable for a decent human being. And, of course, this is allowable to a great extent; God has the attributes that any good person would have. He is just, merciful, slow to anger, compassionate, loving, kind, patient and much more than this. He is also holy, righteous, faithful, perfect, sovereign, omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent. It is common for modern theologians to move from personal experience, or perhaps just human experience in general, to a description of or portrayal of God. Often when this is done, the more immanent or human aspects of God's nature are emphasized; the attributes that exemplify God's transcendence are compromised or lost altogether.

The loss of God's transcendence is the danger of doing theology from below. It is moving from human experience of God to a description of God without accounting for the "otherness" of God. The result is almost invariably a portrayal of a God who is sympathetic in the sense of being one who suffers with human beings, but whose transcendence and power is compromised to the point that he is unable to save human

beings from sin or have a transcendent nature that is meaningful. Instead of begining with an understanding of what God is like *in se,* they begin with an understanding of their own religious experience. They want to be able to understand what God is like by observing human experience and human nature, and in doing so, they often end up with an understanding of God that is more human in character than divine.

This is essentially a result of doing theology in a post-modern era. The heady thinkers of the Enlightenment and the Age of Modernity have taught us well how to reason. Descartes and many others who have followed him have instructed us to begin with the knowledge of ourselves and, only then, to move toward a knowledge of God. The prominent place that the Enlightenment gave to humanity in the scheme of reality is not easily relinquished. The result of this kind of approach yields a process of human *understanding seeking a faith* in God, rather than the previous maxim of Augustine's that knowledge of the divine is based on *faith seeking understanding.*

The vestiges of Friedrich Schleiermacher, and G.W. Hegel are especially pronounced in much of the theology that is being generated concerning the passibility of God. Schleiermacher, in his attempt to answer Imanuel Kant's attack on the plausibility of the phenomenal or spiritual realm, emphasized *religious experience* as the way to know God. This approach perhaps deemphasized the role of pure reason as a conduit to God, but it remained very anthropocentric by its accent on the subjectivity of the God-experience conferred to each individual. Hegel's dialectic method of thought has had a tremendous impact on thought in many areas of academia. Its brilliance is the joining together of two opposing entities--the thesis and antithesis--in order to produce a synthesis that takes the best aspects of both of the opposing forces. Many modern theologians find Hegel's system of thought to be helpful in their attempt to explain the difficult concepts of the Christian faith. Hegel's thought is especially prominent in the work of Moltmann.

But regardless of how we have arrived at this point, doing theology "from below"

is coming at it from the wrong direction. It is something like trying to play basketball without learning the rules first. There are no parameters; there is no distinct order for play. You can give a group of ten people who don't know the rules for the game of basketball a ball and place them on a court and tell them to play a game with it. They may go, and by means of their own creativity and personal preferences, invent a game using the basketball. They can run up and down the court and throw the ball into the goals at each end, but it is doubtful that the game they devise will be the game we know as basketball with all the same complexity of rules. The game of basketball is defined by a set of rules that govern play. The rulebook provides a standard by which someone can look at a group of people playing a game with a basketball on a court and know immediately whether that group of people is playing basketball or whether they are playing some other game.

When thinkers formulate theology from below, they are proceeding in a like manner. They disregard the "rulebook" of Scripture and the parameters of the tradition. They are not nearly so concerned with the nature of God as they are with the nature of their own experience of God. Thus, they invent a theology that is based almost entirely on personal experience and human creativity. They extol the anthropocentric method of doing theology by making human experience the measure of God's attributes. The long-standing doctrines of the Church are ignored so that new ones can be fashioned. Many essential attributes of the nature of God are compromised or lost by developing a theology that originates with human experience and emotion rather than beginning with the nature of what God is like. The theology that is a product of this kind of method is lacking because it does not deal with the same God that theology done "from above" would deal with. When a thinker is willing to change the attributes of God (for example to remove the omnipotence or omniscience from God's nature) to suit his or her own purposes better, then he or she removes his or her theology from the realm of traditional orthodox theology because the God that is being studied is a different God.

It would be like making traveling or double-dribbling legal in basketball. The game would be a very different game. It would look very similar to basketball. The rule changes would alleviate much of the difficulty encountered in playing the game, but it would not really be playing basketball. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that you would never get away with it in an organized league or in the National Basketball Association.

Therefore, we cannot follow Moltmann in our attempt to define the way in which God suffers, or we end up with a God too weak to save the world and the sinners in it, a God who is not free to be himself without suffering. We are too far removed from the traditional attributes of God to be able to be doing traditional Christian theology. Suffering cannot be considered the dominant attribute of God. It cannot drive our theological conclusions or overshadow the other attributes of God that are more commonly attributed to God in the Bible such as love or joy.

Before we can say anything about the passibility of God, we must first establish the kind of God that we are talking about. A portrayal of God that excludes omniscience, omnipotence, transcendence, or sovereignty excludes itself from being in the line of traditional orthodox theology. It is studying a different object than the one studied in traditional Christian theology. The claim that is being made here about the passibility of God is that one affirming the transcendent attributes of God and also asserting that God is capable of suffering if he chooses to do so. However, it is not necessary that God must suffer; God is free to choose not to suffer. Nothing can cause God to suffer without his assent, but if God chooses to suffer, it does not reduce God's greatness or his perfection in any way. God's suffering is active suffering; it is moving toward a goal. It is the suffering of redemption rather than penal suffering.

The Bible describes the suffering of God analogically. The anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms that are used in Scriptures give us reason to believe that God has chosen to suffer. He reveals this suffering to humanity by means of analogical

accommodation to our human capacity. He suffers because of the sin that has entered the world, and he suffers because he has compassion on those who suffer. The nature of divine suffering, what it consists of, or what its components are, is a mystery. Kitamori and Lee speculate that it is a result of the struggle between God's wrath against sin and his love of the sinner. This may be as good an explanation as any to help us understand what may be going on in the divine mind when God suffers.

The Demise of the Platonic Model of Deity

Theologians who want to assert that God suffers meet very little resistance in their respective circles of influence. The Greek notion of an impassible God has been decimated by arguments in the modern Christian theology concerning the passibility of God. The idea, in Christian theology, of a God who is utterly impassible in every respect is a notion that is now passé. The "de-Hellinization" of God has been accomplished in the area of the passibility of God in modern theology. However, the question that is left us after this is finished is, "Was this Greek concept of an impassible God ever completely embraced by Christian theologians?" The evidence cited in this dissertation would indicate "No, it was not." There were some theologians who came closer to embracing it than others: Clement of Alexandria, Anselm, Aquinas, and Calvin are theologians within the orthodox tradition that leaned more toward the Greek concept of God as it is portrayed in the second chapter of this work by Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus than others. But none of them would agree to adopt the Greek concept of an impassible God as it is portrayed by modern theologians--a God who is inactive, non-relational, distant, and uninvolved.

The philosophical conception of God, as it is portrayed in modern theological discourse, is rightly condemned, but it is erroneously attributed to the orthodox tradition of theology as a whole. The Hellenistic understanding of God that is battled against with such vigor and gusto is really something of a mirage. There are certainly some aspects of Greek

philosophy that are adopted by Christian theologians, but in the vast majority of cases the thinker shapes the Greek idea to fit the God of the Bible rather than the other way around. Christian thinkers who contributed to orthodox theology are not unscrupulously appropriating Greek ideals, but are using concepts and terms of Greek philosophy to describe the God of the Bible. Greek philosophy provides structure for ancient, medieval, and scholastic theology, but it is not the basis for thought about the Christian God of the Bible.

It is true that God suffers. When one reads the Bible there is an intuitive rightness about this, but this statement must be carefully tempered. Because of the negative connotations that are related to human suffering, it is easy to distort the passibility of God by attributing our own weaknesses to him. If we are going to assert that God suffers, then we must commit to the idea that God does not suffer in the same way that humans suffer. God is not swayed or immobilized by suffering as we are. Suffering is not the dominant characteristic of God. Joy, love, bliss, or compassion are much more likely candidates for that. God's suffering is an active travail that has purpose and direction; it is redemptive. Suffering cannot be thrust upon God from an outside source. God is free not to suffer, and yet God chooses to suffer. God is not a victim of the created order, he is sovereign over it. God does not suffer to change himself, he suffers to change us.

Semantics

In thinking about the orthodox tradition of theology, it is also important to understand the terms impassibility and immutability as they are used in contemporary theology as opposed to how they were used in ancient, medieval, and scholastic theology. In modern times, the word "impassible" when it is applied to God is thought to mean exclusively that God is "without the capacity for emotions." However, in the theological parlance of past eras "impassible" has meant that God is "without parts or passions." A

"passion" in this sense of the word is descriptive of "a disposition toward the committal of sin." Thus, an impassible God is a God who is not able to be tempted or disposed to the committal of sins. Thus, when the modern theologians talk about the impassibility of God, they are often assuming that it means something different from the theologians of past times who used the word.

The immutability of God is descriptive of the fact that God does not change. However, it is not a term that excludes all and any change in God. For example, it does not preclude the possibility that God could become incarnate for a time and dwell on the earth with human beings. It is primarily a term that reflects the unwavering faithfulness of God. God possesses ethical, moral, intentional, and volitional changelessness. We can be assured that God will perpetually hate evil and sin and that he will always love goodness and be merciful. The impassibility of God is a species or category of his immutability. We can be assured that God will always be sinless. These are the things with which the immutability and impassibility of God are most concerned. Thus, we may affirm that God is impassible with regard to passions that lead to sin, but that God is passible with regard to the fact that God may experience emotions and suffering provided that these are kept within the proper limits of Scripture and the tradition.

These facts are confirmed by the evidence that has been gathered from the theologians of the past two millennia: There is a strong majority opinion that it is right to contribute emotions to God and that we have to be very cautious when we talk about the suffering of God. Many of the very early theologians offer conflicting reports about the passibility of God.[4] Many of the early thinkers want to make a clear distinction between the two natures of Christ. They want to assert that the human part of Christ is susceptible to

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[4]See sections in chapter two on Philo, Ignatius, Tertullian, and Origen.

suffering and pain, but that the divine part of Christ is immune.[5] There are also several theologians from this early period such as Tatian who want to affirm the passibility of God. He states that the spirit of God is the "minister of suffering."[6] Tertullian too, even though he gives a mixed message about the suffering of God does make an allowance for a passible God, but God's passibility must be *divine* passibility and not confused with a notion of human suffering. Origen also offers opposing views, but make as strong case for the passibility of God. Therefore, the statement that all early Christian theology is overwhelmingly influenced by Greek philosophy is a generalization that has little evidence to support it.

Biblical Conclusions

If we are going to do traditional Christian theology instead of doing theology from below, then we must start from the traditional assumptions that are made about God and his relationship to human beings. One of those assumptions is that we are made in the image of God. With this in mind, Kelly Clark asks an interesting question: "With respect to feelings, are we image bearers of God?"[7] Do we bear God's image in our suffering? Nicholas Wolterstorff asks similar questions:

> In what respects do we mirror God? In our knowledge. In our love. In our justice. In our sociality. In our creativity. These are the answers the Christian tradition offers us.
>
> One answer rarely finds its way onto the list: in our suffering. Perhaps the thought is too appalling. Do we also mirror God in suffering? Are we to mirror him ever more closely in suffering? Was it meant that we should be icons in suffering?

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[5]See the sections on Irenaeus, Athanasius, Hilary of Poitiers, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril of Alexandria, and John of Damascus.

[6]Tatian, *Address of Tatian to the Greeks,* in *ANF vol. 2,* 71.

[7]Clark, "Hold Not Thy Peace," 182.

Is it our glory to suffer?[8]

Is it right to think that in our own suffering that we may mirror God--not that because we suffer, then God must suffer too, but the other way around?

Phillip Yancey observes that analogies that are given to us in the Bible concerning the suffering of God illustrate God's love for us, but also that he suffers as a result of the fact that we are able to reject his love.

> The Bible shows God's power to force a Pharaoh to his knees and reduce mighty Nebuchadnezzar to a cud-chewing lunatic. But it also shows the impotence of power to bring about what God most desires: our love. When his own love is spurned, even the Lord of the universe feels in some way like a parent who has lost what he values most, or a mother hen who sits helpless as her brood flees toward danger.[9]

The Bible provides ways for us to understand the suffering of God through analogy, especially in the Old Testament. We are able to see the likenesses of the portrayal of God's suffering to our own. There are also vast differences between ourselves and God and between our suffering and God's suffering. These have been alluded to above. But perhaps the likenesses that we are able to understand are clear to us because we are reflecting the feelings of God in our own feelings and reflecting the suffering of God in our own suffering.

If it is not right to think that we bear God's image in this way, then what about Jesus? He is the best revelation of God that we will ever know. Does his suffering reflect the nature of God's suffering? Clark notes:

> Jesus Christ . . . is not only the visible image of the invisible God, he is also the second Adam, the most perfect example of undistorted humanity. He has compassion for the multitude, weeps with Lazarus' mourners, laments over Jerusalem, grieves and sorrows at Gesthemane, and experience the entire range of

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[8]Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Lament for a Son* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 83.

[9]Phillip Yancey, "God, the Jilted Lover," *Christianity Today* (May 16, 1986): 72.

emotions associated with his abandonment by God in his crucifixion.[10] Jesus, at many different times in his life, exhibits feelings, compassion, and suffering. He mourns, laments, and deals with great physical and spiritual pain on the cross. He is the Second Person of the Trinity made flesh for our benefit.

Two passages in Scripture involving Jesus that are especially revelatory about the nature of the suffering of God are the story of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, and his own crucifixion. In the narrative of the raising of Lazarus, we see Jesus, who knows that the end of the story will be for the glory of God, weeping and being deeply moved because those around him are distressed by the loss of their brother and friend--in all their distresses, he too was distressed.[11] The manifestation of God that we are given in Christ is revealed as a God whose power is not diminished by weeping, nor is his integrity lessened by the fact that he mourned even though he knew the outcome would be for good. He mourns out of compassion and concern for those that he loves.

In the crucifixion of Christ, we see the power of God in the suffering, humiliation, and weakness of the cross. Martin Luther has said that "[God] has concealed his power only under weakness, his wisdom under foolishness, his goodness under austerity, his righteousness under sin, and his mercy under wrath. This is why many do not recognize God's power when they see his weakness."[12] "Paul identifies the suffering of Christ as 'the power of God'"[13] God's suffering is greater than our own could ever be because it is

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[10]Clark, "Hold Not Thy Peace," 182.

[11]Isaiah 63:9

[12]Martin Luther, *Lectures on Romans,* ed. and tr. by Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957), 246.

[13]Ohlrich, *The Suffering of God,* 57.

inherently redemptive. This "weakness" of God is the most powerful force in the universe. G.A. Studdert Kennedy says in the sense of a metaphor that the cross "is God's real throne, the throne of love that lifts Him up and draws all men to Him at last. The power of the Cross is the power of God."[14] We want to be careful not to glorify the cross or to remove its grisly nature, but it is important to realize that the suffering of God in the cross of Christ is the power of redemption, which is a great power indeed. God does not suffer from a position of subjection or weakness, but if God chooses to suffer, he does so triumphantly to redeem his fallen and wounded creation.

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[14] G.A. Studdert Kennedy, *The Hardest Part* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 70.

APPENDIX A

Chart of Theologians' Positions on Impassibility

NAME	DATE	STANCE ON IMPASSIBILITY
Philo	30 B.C.-A.D. 45	Does not completely absorb the Greek notion of divine immutability and impassibility
Ignatius	ca A.D. 110	May have believed that God is essentially passible rather than impassible
Irenaeus	ca130-ca200	Divides the person of Christ into divine and human. The human part is capable of suffering; the divine part is not.
Tatian	ca120-ca173	Says that the spirit of God is the "minister of the suffering of God"
Clement of Alexandria	ca153-ca217	Leaves us with a strong impression of impassibility, but does not level this with his own assertions about the emotions of God or the passibility of Christ
Tertullian	ca160-ca240	God experiences emotions incorruptibly. Makes allowances for a passible God, but God's passibility will be divine passibility
Patripassionist Controversy	2nd & 3rd centuries	It is not God but the flesh and soul of Christ that feels the pain of the crucifixion.
Origen	ca185-ca253	Makes a case for the passibility of God but also denies it.
Gregory Thaumaturgus	ca213-ca260	Capacity for suffering is not denied, but suffering may not affect God's nature. If God chooses suffering, suffering is not forced on him, i.e. God is not the subject of suffering.

Novation	?-258	The emotion necessary in suffering entails corruptibility. God cannot be passible because that means he would change. Change will inevitably lead to corruptibility and death.
Arnobius	?-330	Same as Novation
Lactanius	ca240-ca320	Understands the impassibility of God to mean that God is not ruled by passions not that God is emotionless. God experiences emotions.
Athanasius	ca296-373	Impassibility has to do with the ability to resist sin, not the ability to have emotions. Makes a division in the person of Christ about how Christ acts in his humanity and how he acts in his divinity: "Christ suffers, but receives no hurt himself by bearing our sins in his body on the tree."
Hilary of Poitiers	ca315-361	God took on a body in the incarnation that felt the force of suffering without its pain. Jesus did not need to eat, drink, sleep, etc., but was only conforming to the practices of us who have human bodies.
Gregory of Nazianzus	329-389	Suffering in the humanity of Christ is possible, but suffering in the divinity is not. The two natures are unmingled in the person of Christ.
Gregory of Nyssa	ca335-ca395	Christ suffered in the body. Divinity is incapable of corruption. "Suffering was of the body, but the operation [of salvation] was of God." Flesh becomes Christ and Lord, being transformed by the commixture into that which it was not by nature.
Augustine	354-430	Assumes the impassibility of God and then goes from there to try to attribute emotion to God. Emotions of God are very different from human emotion. Emotions cannot change or sway God.

Cyril of Alexandria	?-444	Christ suffered in his flesh as a human being, but the divine nature is impassible. "The nature which is over all things" cannot be receptive to suffering.
John of Damascus	ca675-ca749	Impassibility refers to an absence of passions in God and does not mean that God has no emotion or is unable to suffer. "Christ, who is compound of divinity and humanity truly suffered" in that part capable of passions. The divine part that is void of passion does not share in the suffering of the body.
Anselm	1033-1109	God is able to make us feel his compassion without any feeling or emotion in himself. When God bears humiliation or weakness, it is in his human substance no the divine substance, but there is one person that is both God and man.
Aquinas	1225-1274	God cannot be subject to suffering because suffering is due to deficiency. The nature of God drives out all defects. God can love, enjoy, and delight, but without passion. Christ suffered in the essence of his soul, but not in all of his powers. The impassible God suffers and dies, but this is only true in as much as the human nature of Christ is passible, not the divine nature which remains impassible.
Martin Luther	1483-1546	Affirms distinction between two natures, but strongly emphasized the fact that those two natures make up one person. The one person who is Christ must take part in suffering in both natures. We cannot be saved if the suffering and death of Christ is merely that of a man. Whatever man does, suffers, and speaks, the Son of God does, suffers, and speaks as the Incarnate Christ.

John Calvin	1509-1564	Emotions do not exist for God, rather they are human feelings and reactions that we project onto God. God is utterly impassible.
Stephen Charnock	1628-1680	God is impassible. He does not have passions as men have them but clothes himself with our nature so that we may understand him. He accommodates himself to us. In the incarnation the divine nature was untouched by the sufferings of Christ, but the sufferings of Christ would have had no meaning if God's nature were compromised in any way.
Charles Hodge	1797-1878	God is capable of feeling emotion. God's love is not a philosophical concept, but a very real one.
A. A. Hodge	1823-1886	He does not rule out divine affections. The incarnate Christ suffered. Affirms communication of attributes.
R. L. Dabney	1820-1898`	Divine nature is incapable of sympathetic passion of agitation of grief, but we receive an insight into divine benevolence and pity in Christ's weeping over Jerusalem. The divine nature may participate in passion and grief in the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures of Christ.

APPENDIX B

Propositions for Defense

Five from the Dissertation

1. To say that God suffers is a true statement, but the extent of this concept of passibility must be carefully defined within the bounds of what is allowed by the biblical testimony and the rich tradition of Christian thought.

2. The philosophical conception of God as it is portrayed in modern discussions about the passibility of God is rightly condemned, but this philosophical notion of God is erroneously attributed to the orthodox tradition of theology as a whole.

3. The answer to whether or not God may be considered to be passible, in some way, must ultimately rest on the authority of scriptural evidence.

4. God is impassible with regard to passions that lead to sin, but God is passible in that he may have emotions and may choose to suffer.

5. The anthropomorphisms and anthropopathisms that are used in Scriptures give us reason to believe that God has chosen to suffer.

Five from Ph.D. Course Work

6. Kant's refutation of the ontological argument is effective for the particular form of the argument he uses; however, Kant's victory is limited by both the version of the argument that he uses and by the metaphysical and ontological restrictions he places on the argument itself.

7. The Reformed understanding of providence does not lead to a philosophically deterministic or Stoic account of events, but, on the contrary, the Calvinistic doctrine of providence is a very nuanced and intricate doctrine of God's governance of His creation which provides great comfort for believers.

8. The paradoxical way in which Christ both suffers from the effects of sin and overcomes sin and death in His own death on the cross is best understood within the context of sacrifice because it is in the realm of sacrifice that we may see, plainly and concurrently, the seriousness of human sin and the forgiving grace of God.

9. God's nature is such that He strongly desires to be in relationship with His creatures, and His omnipotence is such that the ordering of states of affairs does not necessarily preclude the involvement of human agents; hence, petitionary prayer is a reasonable

practice because it allows us to be in relationship to God, and it is efficacious because it is possible for God to control all things in such a way that our prayers do have real bearing on states of affairs in the world.

10. John Calvin maintains a positive assessment of natural law even though it is severely impaired by sin; for even in this damaged state, it not only undergirds societal structures, but it also leaves us "without excuse" before our fellow human beings and, especially before, God in regard to morality and civic duty.

Two Miscellaneous

11. Calvin Theological Seminary is a better place to be instructed in Reformed theology than is Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.

12. Decathletes are the best all-around athletes in the world.

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