# The eternally passible God : a theological study on the compatibility of divine passibility and immutability

Jack Johnson

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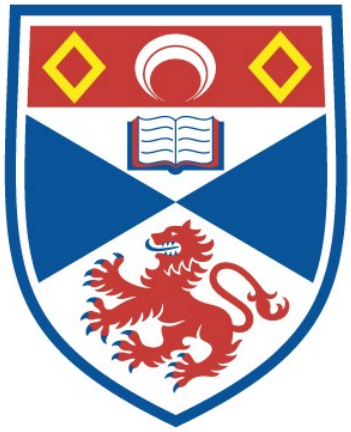
at the
University of St Andrews



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## Abstract

This thesis aims to answer the compelling question: 'can God be both immutable and passible?' Drawing on the work of Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, it will submit that an eternal God can be conceived of as being affected whilst remaining unchanged. The line of argumentation is that construing the way God exists regarding temporality and atemporality has significant implications for the broader discussion of divine being. This argument allows other doctrines associated with classical theism (such as Divine Simplicity) to be maintained (whilst not being a strictly classical theology) whilst upholding passibility. As such, this thesis generates Christological and trinitarian questions as to what a view of 'God' means for the existence of Father, Son, and Spirit, as revealed and worshipped in the Christian tradition.

The argument concludes with a discussion of the topic of prayer as a practical outworking of the proposed doctrine of God presented throughout this thesis. This answers the question 'what is prayer?' according to the view of God outlined in the first four chapters, namely that God is eternal, immutable, and passible. It suggests a significant reconsideration of the outworking of a given theological practice and a new understanding of the purpose and theological underpinning of prayer according to an eternal God.

‘Nothing in the world is harder than convincing someone of an unfamiliar truth.’

Patrick Rothfuss

# Introduction

Academic theology in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has witnessed a rise in the affirmation of the passibility of God, which denies the traditional doctrine of divine impassibility. Such a denial has ramifications for wider conceptions of the divine attributes (most notably immutability) to the point that a number of classical divine attributes are often either abandoned or radically altered. As I explain below, this has resulted in a divide among academic theologians between passibilist and impassibilist thinkers, but with the broad consensus that acceptance of a passible God requires major changes to the way we understand other divine attributes, or even new ways of thinking about the being of God. This thesis explores whether such a divide is necessary, and if not, whether it is possible to reconcile these two theological camps. It is my contention that a theology of divine passibility need not abandon other classical divine attributes and that a large number of these attributes in fact aid an understanding of a passible God.

The tension arising from this debate can also be seen outside of academic theological discussions. For example, in lay theology, most contemporary Christian worship music includes claims of divine faithfulness and immutability whilst also using passibilist themes in its lyrics. The lyrics of songs such as Hillsong United's *Highlands* or Rend Collective's *Weep With Me* both explicitly and implicitly use themes or even specific words and phrases to communicate both God's passibility and immutability.[12] For example, the chorus of *Weep With Me* reads:

Yet I will praise You
Yet I will sing of Your name
Here in the shadows
I'll lift up an offering of praise
What was true in the light

[1] Benjamin William Hastings and Joel Timothy Houston, *Highlands (Song of Ascent),* 2019, https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/hillsongunited/highlandssongofascent.html.
[2] Gareth Andrew Gilkeson and Christopher Dean, *Weep With Me,* 2018, Llewellynhttps://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/rendcollective/weepwithme.html.

Is still true in the dark
You're good and You're kind
And You care for this heart
Lord I believe
That You weep with me.[3]

Evident throughout this song are claims of God's faithfulness, such as 'what's true in the light is still true in the dark' (an implicit immutability statement) as well as descriptions of divine passibility; for example, God 'car[ing] for this heart' and that God 'weep[s] with me'. This illustrates how theological motifs are communicated in contemporary Christian worship. Groups such as Hillsong and Rend Collective exert a large influence on the contemporary Christian worship scene, both directly through corporate church worship and through online streaming. Consequently, the theological outlook these bands communicate is digested by millions of Christians worldwide, fundamentally shaping lay Christian belief. Because these worship songs influence both individual and corporate worship, there has been an increase in notions of a 'suffering' God in various Christian settings. Beyond charismatic and Pentecostal churches, the depiction of the suffering God in modern liturgical settings has also been noted by the eminent Catholic priest and theologian Gilles Emery.[4] Emery observes that in both preaching and sung worship, there is a theme of divine suffering.[5] His testimony reveals that these themes extend beyond a number of errant songs and in fact are common lay ideas.

Another example of this popularisation of the belief in divine passibility is Paul Young's novel *The Shack*, a *New York Times* bestseller which has sold over 18 million copies. This book, which was subject to an enormous amount of controversy (some of which was for good reason), developed a huge following in some parts of the Christian world, even being adapted into a Hollywood film. One of the core issues the book wrestles with is the suffering of God as present

[3] Ibid.
[4]Gilles Emery, 'The Immutability of the God of Love and the Problem of Language Concerning the "Suffering of God"', in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering*, ed. James F. Keating and Thomas Joseph White (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), 27.
[5] Ibid.

to humanity, and from early on we see the suffering of the entire Trinity, as depicted in the following extract:

> 'how can you know how I feel' Mack asked, looking back into her eyes.
>
> Papa didn't answer, only looked down at their hands. His gaze followed hers and for the first time Mack noticed the scars in her wrists, like those he now assumed Jesus also had on his… 'don't ever think that what my Son chose to do didn't cost us dearly. Love always leaves a significant mark', she stated softly and gently. 'We were there together'.[67]

In this quotation, Young describes God the Father (depicted in the novel as a Black woman) as bearing the marks of the cross and experiencing some emotional pain at the memory of the cross. Yet as one continues through the book, a number of the dialogues make reference to divine faithfulness and immutability.[8]

As these songs, books, and the personal testimony of Emery show, the simultaneous affirmation of God's immutable faithfulness and divine passibility is notably present in the twentieth and twenty-first century Church, but this is not to say that they are not present in pre-twentieth century worship or liturgical settings. For example, F. W. Faber's hymn *There's a Wideness in God's Mercy* speaks of how 'There is no place where earth's sorrows are more keenly felt than heaven'.[9] Evident here is a presence in the liturgy for depictions of a passible God, yet this description still speaks of the certainty of the God described. Indeed, Katherine Sonderegger comments how this passage in Faber's hymn represents an idea of divine suffering that has become a 'modern dogma'.[10] This idea of divine suffering representing a 'modern dogma' shows

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[6] Paul Young, *The Shack; Where Tragedy Confronts Eternity* (Great Britan; Hodder& Stoughton; 2008), 95-96
[7] This passage may make one consider Patripassianism, and whilst it certainly raises some problems (such as the scars of the Father), it is not a modalistic conception because we view Jesus as a distinct entity from the Father (which is part of the point of the 'we' statements).
[8]Young, *The Shack*, 124-126.
[9]Frederick W. Faber, 'There's a Wideness in God's Mercy', *Jubilate Hymns*, https://www.jubilate.co.uk/songs/theres_a_wideness_in_Gods_mercy, (1854) accessed June 14, 2023.
[10] Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: Volume One, the Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015), 155.

the way in which key theological ideas are in contention. As we can see in the material cited above, the disagreement is not one that is simply academic, rather it is a live issue for the beliefs of the laity. This means that there are seemingly contradictory or paradoxical beliefs in the preaching and worship of the wider church. One of the key differences between academic and lay theology lies in this issue. As we shall see, most (yet not all), academic theologians either reject both immutability (in a strong sense) and passibility or maintain both; this is not the case in the wider Church.

This thesis seeks to find a position that can maintain both standpoints in a way that is biblically and philosophically consistent; a position which holds that affirmations of divine immutability and passibility are not incompatible. To move from a development of terms into a new theological schema and outworking, this thesis is divided into five chapters, with each chapter building on the discussion and conclusion of the chapters that proceed it. In so doing, it follows the line of argument similar to that of Eleonore Stump in *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers* regarding the compatibility between classical theism and anthropomorphic depictions of God's actions in the Bible. For instance, it includes a chapter that sets out the discussion of the core attributes and ends with a chapter on prayer. Stump will form a continual dialogic partner throughout this thesis, particularly in Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five. This highlights the approach taken to the considered issues, in that most thinkers are referenced in relation to their writings and views on specific topics of interest to the core question. Consequently the work of very few thinkers is addressed as fully as it could be. In part, this is because the thesis aims to draw together diverging viewpoints into a cohesive argument rather than focus specifically on one thinker.

Chapter One focuses on the passibility debate within the context of the relationship between God and creation. It does so by examining the way impassibilists and passibilists approach key theological issues such as theological language and the love of God. The purpose

of this chapter is not to create a cohesive view or argument of a passible God. Instead, it is to discuss salient points of debate between passibilists and impassibilists, thereby addressing some key considerations for the constructive work regarding passibility and divine attributes.

Chapter Two provides a brief overview of divine simplicity and immutability. This presents the key discussions that surround simplicity and immutability and shows some of the connections to the other divine attributes, but this chapter does not develop an argument for each attribute, which is beyond the scope of this thesis.[11] Instead, this thesis considers how the attributes could function with passibility instead of impassibility. In part, this is because the divine attributes presuppose each other; thus, to consider any one of the attributes in isolation would omit a core part of the discussion.

This leads to Chapter Three, which discusses God's relationship to time and eternity. It is my contention that a theology that can adequately describe both God's immanence and transcendence as non-competitive can facilitate a theological schema which simultaneously affirms God's passibility and immutability. In particular, I focus on the claims made in Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann's work on eternity, as well as briefly examining work by Brian Leftow. I will argue that conceiving God's relationship to time and eternity in this manner can radically affect the immutability-passibility debate. This chapter forms the lynchpin of the thesis, providing one possible way of conceiving of a passible God without rejecting all the constituent parts of classical theism. Chapters One through Three set up the debate and provide a potential solution for the immutability-passibility problem in modern theology, thereby allowing for a more detailed discussion on the Trinity in Chapter Four.

The distinction between immutability and mutability as well as impassability and passibility is often articulated in terms of the two natures of the second person of the Trinity,

[11] There are a number of works that explore specific attributes, such as *God without Parts* by James Dolezal. The issue (as will be made clear in Chapter Two) is that they are designed to function alongside other attributes. This does not mean that these works lack value, but that criticism aimed at these works often misses the point as the attributes are largely interdependent.

and the unique action of the second person's assumption of human flesh in the incarnation. With this in mind, Chapter Four considers the implications of Stump and Kretzmann's account of time, eternity, and divine being for Christology and trinitarian theology. The aim is to develop a way to affirm that God is passible whilst still maintaining most of the classical divine attributes. As such, the argument of this chapter should not be considered strictly 'classical' in its approach to God, but as an attempt to utilise some of the classical divine attributes in a schema that always draws on a qualified form of passibility.

As noted at the beginning of this introduction, one of the issues my argument seeks to address is the breakdown between academic theology and the lay theological beliefs held in the wider Church. Whilst this thesis aims to provide a tentative solution to what might be considered a problem of academic theology, the view of God it presents has implications for beliefs and practices within the wider Church. To illuminate these implications, the focus of Chapter Five is on a theology of prayer, one of the practices shared across Christian denominations. Additionally, prayer also forms the outworking of Stump's work in *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers* which, as noted above, is a key discussion point. Much as it does for Stump, prayer functions as a test case for the broader implications of this thesis, showing how concepts of passibility and eternity affect both the understanding of God and our theological *praxis*.

The breakdown between passibility and immutability is problematic because of what it means for our doctrine of God and the outworking of this in theological *praxis*. As we shall see (both later in the Introduction and in Chapter Two), the issue of immutability is recognised by both sides of the debate in its importance when formulating a doctrine of God. And if it is true to say that God suffers then this impacts what else is said of God. Such questions raise fundamental issues regarding divine faithfulness, knowledge, and divine-human relationship among others. It is for this reason that this topic is such a key issue, and as we shall see, continues to be a focus for research.

Thus, this thesis not only provides a potential solution for a theological issue, namely the breakdown between passibility and immutability, but also demonstrates how a view of God as passible yet immutable can be utilised in navigating other theological discussions, such as Christology and Trinity. In addition, it will identify the practical implications for Christian belief and practice. This then provides an outworking for how this view of divine being can affect a myriad of other theological discussions and debates.

This thesis is primarily a constructive work of systematic theology, hence it will draw from a number of thinkers across the history of the tradition, the aim being to begin the development of a cohesive system for understanding this debate. To that end, this thesis, particularly Chapters One and Two, will draw out a number of key themes and thinkers to illustrate some of the ways in which this debate is construed. Given that the major constructive work of this thesis does not occur until Chapter Three, some problems will arise throughout Chapter Two in regard to holding a view of an immutable yet passible God.

As Chapters One and Two will attest, views on immutability and impassibility are often held together. Thus, this thesis aims to tentatively provide one possible way of addressing the core question of how one could affirm that God is both passible and immutable, and explain why the link between immutability and impassibility can be broken.

Prior to considering different conceptions of immutability and impassibility, an overview of these positions is required at the outset of this project. To that end, I now summarise three possible ways of approaching the debate over divine impassibility in twentieth and twenty-first-century theology: those who hold that God is passible and mutable, those who hold that God is impassible and immutable, and those who hold that God is passible *yet* immutable. These approaches will be connected to specific key theological voices in the modern (im)passibility debate. Because numerous twentieth and twenty-first-century theological voices draw extensively on previous debates and arguments from the broader church tradition (e.g.

Thomas Weinandy drawing on Cyril of Alexandria), the survey of the different approaches I present here will not only serve as a review of recent scholarly literature but also a condensed (albeit non-exhaustive) overview of the key arguments presented throughout Church history and the wider theological tradition.

### (0.1.1) Key Positions in the Modern Debate

In this section, I survey three significant 'camps' that make up the (im)passibility debate: 'mutable-passibilist' theologians who believe that God is not only passible but also mutable (including Jürgen Moltmann and followers such as Thomas Jay Oord), 'immutable-impassibilist' theologians who adhere to the classical doctrines of divine immutability and impassibility (including critics of Moltmann such as Thomas Weinandy and Paul Gavrilyuk), and 'immutable-passibilist' theologians who seek to develop a third way which affirms divine passibility whilst upholding divine immutability (most notably, Bruce McCormack). I will first discuss the mutable-passibilist camp followed by the immutable-impassibilist camp. These two 'camps' of theologians are the predominant camps between which the modern debate on divine passibility is contested. After reviewing mutable-passibilism and immutable-impassibilism and their respective arguments, I discuss the third possible approach to the (im)passibility debate: immutable-passibilism – the claim that God is immutable *yet* passible. This position has been put forward in recent years by Bruce McCormack. McCormack thus exemplifies the development in modern theology where theologians seek to re-imagine approaches to the question of divine impassibility and offer a thorough consideration of all the possible theological options that could be adopted. However, whilst McCormack's theological task is congruous with the aims of this thesis, my own approach will differ significantly, not just in application but also in the strength of the critiques levelled at both passibilists and impassibilists. Nevertheless, these three overviews elucidate some of the major fault lines and key influences on each side in modern theology.

## (0.1.2) Mutable-Passibilism

Perhaps more influential than any other thinker on this theological topic, Jürgen Moltmann's conception of a passible and mutable God represents a significant change to the traditional belief in immutability and impassibility. Following World War II, Moltmann strived to respond to a world reeling from the horrors of the war. For Moltmann, the question of 'where is God in suffering' is answered by divine presence. For instance, he writes:

> God and suffering belong together, just as in this life the cry for God and the suffering experienced in pain belong together. The question about God and the question about suffering are a joint, a common question. And they only find a common answer.[12]

Moltmann's argumentation locates God as being present in suffering to those who suffer. His move is to suggest that those in suffering and distress can know God as one who is with them; the argument being that a God who suffers with you is one who brings hope and companionship, even in pain. This reasoning has since been taken in various directions, notably within liberation theology, where the suffering God is often presented as one who suffers with the oppressed and who 'feels' their pain, thereby associating God not with the persecutor but with the persecuted.

For many passibilists, the notion of divine emotions and/or suffering entails the mutability of God. As Daniel Castelo notes, when Moltmann seeks to answer the question as to 'what the cross means for God Himself',[13] he does so by introducing conflict and negativity into the Godhead.[14] Indeed, for Moltmann, the introduction of passibility into the Godhead entails

[12] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God: the Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press, 1981), 49.
[13] Daniel Castelo, *The Apathetic God: Exploring the Contemporary Relevance of Divine Impassibility* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009), 77.
[14] Ibid.

mutability because God is seen to be responsive to the mutable created world. Thus, for Moltmann, divine responsiveness always occurs *after* a human action, that is to say, it entails that God experiences emotions or suffering *with* us. In other words, human action is a necessary condition for God to experience with us, because human affectedness is required for divine affectedness. This means that God is experiencing changes in emotions when He responds to creatures subjected to suffering. Just as creatures undergo different and indeed *changing* states of experience over time, God – who experiences what such creatures experience – must also undergo some kind of change. In this sense, arguments for a passible God are often taken to require a mutable God, and it is usually argued that God must be allowed to change and experience in order to be passible.

What Moltmann presupposes here is that love or other 'passions' such as anger, joy, and grief function in a way that elicits some kind of change in the subject of the 'passion'.[15] To argue that God experiences in this way, Moltmann assumes divine mutability. A mutable passible God is one who changes as He experiences the various 'passions', which in turn are a result of His 'responsiveness' and, by extension, engagement with passible creatures. What is evident in the mutable-passibilism of Moltmann and his followers is not just a shift from divine impassibility to passibility, but also the beginning of an entirely new way of thinking about God. This is because, by introducing mutability, Moltmann is slowly but surely dismantling the classical way of conceiving God's being. Immutability, as will be evidenced in the next two chapters, is key to a number of other traditional ways of thinking about God. Therefore, by replacing this with mutability, Moltmann is forced to re-imagine the way in which divine being is conceptualised.

Moltmann's break from the 'classical' conception of an impassible God is driven by his conviction that Scripture points to a suffering God. One of the main reasons for this is that he

[15] James E. Dolezal, 'Strong Impassibility' in *Divine Impassibility Four Views of God's Emotions and Suffering*, eds., Robert J. Matz and A. Chadwick Thornhill (inter varsity press, United States of America, 2019), 19-20.

believes that if God cannot suffer then He cannot love. Moltmann writes, 'were God incapable of suffering in any respect, and therefore in an absolute sense, then He would also be incapable of Love'.[16] Moltmann's construal of God as Love is informed by his account of divine relationality. He holds that divine relationality is important because the God we 'know'—the God who is revealed to us—is inherently a relational God. As Moltmann puts it, 'we humans can know nothing of an unrelational God'.[17] It is this relationality that manifests through passibility. For Moltmann, it is a passible God who opens up to the experience of the other and engages experientially with creation: a God who *relates to* His creation in His emotional and experiential life.

In this regard, Moltmann is attempting a number of things, the first of which is to link several ideas together. To achieve this, Moltmann's mutable-passibilism presupposes three interrelated principles:

1. Relationships involve passible experiences.
2. The Christian God, who is Love, is a relational God.
3. Love involves relationship and requires passibility.

Because Moltmann adopts points one and two, he therefore concludes that a God who is loving would be a relational God who passibly experiences different emotional states in His relations. Part of Moltmann's point here is to stress the idea that human knowledge of God is dependent upon divine revelation. Revelation for Moltmann is primarily drawn from the biblical narrative which, as he sees it, describes the passibility of God, which is both experiential and engaging in a mutable sense. This focus on the revelation is interweaved with his view of relationships and

[16] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 237.
[17] Jürgen Moltmann, 'The Passibility or Impassibility of God', in *Within the Love of God: Essays on the Doctrine of God in Honour of Paul S. Fiddes*, trans. Judith Wolfe, eds., Anthony Clarke and Andrew Moore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 110.

love, and it is by combining these ideas that we see Moltmann attempting to ground his ideas in a way that differs from a classical view of God.[18]

For Moltmann, suffering, relationality, and love are all mutually entailing: if God is any of these things, He must also be the others, and because God is love then He must also be relational (in this specific sense of relationality) and capable of suffering. Because of his commitment to the three interrelated principles listed above, Moltmann claims that God loves us and we love God 'relationally'.[19] Indeed, this expression of passible love and relationships is for Moltmann a sign of the fullness of God's being, rather than an imposed deficiency that is caused by His relationships.[20] What this means for Moltmann is that the passibility (or relationality) required for God to love, expresses not that God is deficient but that suffering via love is a positive—even divine—characteristic. This is tied to Moltmann's core belief that the Cross is the central revelation by which we know God, and because this is a suffering event that demonstrates God's love, we come to know that passibility is not a deficiency. This entire argument rests on Moltmann's premises surrounding revelation as well as the definition of love and relationships.

It is his definition of suffering, love, and relationships that leads Moltmann to hold that God is passible. Such notions are of course not unique to Moltmann's theology but belong to a much longer history within the Christian tradition. Moltmann's break with theological tradition lies not only in his affirmation of divine passibility but also in his re-conception of suffering, love, and relationships in passibilist and indeed mutable terms. It can be said that, in contrast to classical theological conceptions of these three notions, Moltmann's definition of divine suffering, divine love, and divine relationships are all premised on – or even projected from – a

[18] This move is taken up by a number of passibilists after Moltmann, who are explicit in their critique of classical ways of thinking. Such critiques will be examined later in this thesis.
[19] All of this is understood to imply passibility. Of course, both relationships and love could be seen as entailing each other in an impassible way, but this is rejected by Moltmann.
[20] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 238.

*human* understanding of creaturely suffering, creaturely love, and creaturely relationships as necessarily mutable: thus, Moltmann has an analogical conception of divine and creaturely properties (albeit with a potentially univocal bent). That Moltmann leans towards univocal language is alluded to by Stephen Holmes, who suggests social views reject analogy in favour of a univocal understanding of language.[21] Whilst it is certainly true to argue, as Karen Kilby does, that Moltmann and others are prone to projecting creaturely ideas upon God.[22] I am not convinced that this results in a full-scale abandonment of analogical language. I shall return to the question of univocity and the difference between divine and creaturely love and relationship in Chapter One, where I discuss the theological notion of analogy in detail.

What we see in the thoughts of Moltmann is how interconnected his ideas are. For Moltmann, and a number of passibilists that come after him, the claim of passibility makes a difference to a vast swathe of theological discussions. In part, this is because Moltmann's wholescale rejection of classically conceived attributes results in a project that must drastically reconceive the divine being, and it is this reconception that allows Moltmann to filter everything through a passible lens. Passibility is not just another theological idea among many, but the key idea, the idea that allows interpretation of all else. What we can see here is that the doctrine of God is the point upon which the rest of Moltmann's theology sits. While it is not essential that passibility becomes a guiding idea, its use in this way should highlight for us the potential importance of the topic. This is especially true given how widely passibility has been adopted in the modern church, with the resulting issues.[23]

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[21] Stephen R. Holmes, 'Classical Trinity: Evangelical Perspective', *Two views on the doctrine of the Trinity*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2014) 27-28.
[22] Karen Kilby, 'Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with the Social Doctrine of the Trinity', New Blackfriars, 81, 956 (October 2000): 442.
[23] One might note the way in which Charismatic and Pentecostal movements focus on ideas of divine 'presence', and how passibility is employed in this style of worship to communicate these ideas (for example, the worship songs noted above). In this way we see how divine passibility can be used to affect other theological and practical ideas.

### (0.1.3) Immutable-Impassibilism

The view that is generally considered the traditional or classical account is that God is both impassible and immutable.[24] One of the key voices advocating this position in recent theology is Thomas Weinandy. As I shall demonstrate, Weinandy draws on key voices in the tradition, rendering their positions to some degree a modern defence of the traditional or classical mainstream 'church history' position. This approach is similar to Paul Gavrilyuk, another key contemporary 'classical' voice whose views will be examined in subsequent chapters.

Thomas Weinandy is a Roman Catholic theologian and one of the major defenders of a classical approach to divine being; he can be considered one of the foremost modern exponents of Cyril of Alexandria's Christology. In his exposition of this Christology, Weinandy writes:

> Thus, while human attributes can be truly predicated of the Son, since the Son actually exists as a humble man, the Son – as Cyril would argue at length in the later controversy – remained impassible as God.[25]

The Cyrillian position articulated by Weinandy forms a core part of classical theology (and indeed of Weinandy's own position). But it is also one of the key points of contention in modern theology. This is precisely the very point that Moltmann opposes when he argues that God does indeed suffer and thereby challenges Cyril's formulation of a Christ who only suffers 'in the flesh'. One important facet of the debate is that the Cyrillian two-nature Christology that was adopted at Chalcedon (the idea of the Son being both fully divine and fully human) is not in contention.[26] Indeed, it is precisely on the grounds of the unity of the divine and human natures in Christ that Moltmann argues that God can be said to be passible, for, as Moltmann writes,

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[24] Although the history of the church highlights that not everyone agrees on these questions, I am using 'classical' theism here to denote subscribing to a loose articulation of the divine attributes, rather than indicating full agreement on every issue.

[25] Thomas G. Weinandy, 'Cyril and the Mystery of the Incarnation' in *The Theology of St Cyril of Alexandria: A Critical Appreciation*, eds., Weinandy, and Daniel A Keating, (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), 28.

[26] Indeed, Timothy Pawl notes how important Cyril's writings are in exposing Chalcedon. Timothy Pawl, 'Conciliar Christology' in *St Andrews Encyclopaedia of Theology*, eds., Brendan N. Wolfe et al. (University of St Andrews, November 17, 2022), accessed August 29, 2023, https://www.saet.ac.uk/Christianity/ConciliarChristology,.

'[the] Divinity of Christ is revealed precisely in his humiliation and his manhood in his exultation'.[27] This is important because both positions, despite their significant differences, draw on some of the same foundational claims in developing their doctrines. However, as I later make clear, these foundational claims also lead to central disagreements.

In contrast to the passibilist conclusion Moltmann draws from two-nature Christology, Weinandy argues that God cannot be passibly affected by creation because of God's utter transcendence from the world, His uniqueness, and His difference from all things other than Himself: God is 'wholly other'.[28] For Weinandy, this principle of divine transcendence must be maintained when we interpret Scripture, including its descriptions of God as loving, compassionate, forgiving, and angry. He expands on this in the following:

> The very superlative, extravagant and even excessive, expression of the love, the compassion, the forgiveness and, indeed, the anger, accentuates that the one who displays all of this intense passion is someone who transcends what is beyond the merely customary and human. This is why Yahweh 'is God and no mortal.' What makes Yahweh's thoughts so different from our own and what makes his ways so different from our own is that he is so different from us.[29]

In this extract Weinandy emphasises that the biblical language is articulating the genuine truth of God's character, but also that God is so comprehensively other to humanity that notions of His transcendent attributes inevitably escape human understanding; hence fully grasping the distinctions between creator and creature is rendered difficult. Transcendence here is used to underscore the creator-creature distinction. For Weinandy, God's transcendence is part of *who* God is given that He is a distinctly different 'kind' of being to the created order. This difference

[27] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 3rd ed., trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden, (Munich: SCM Press, 2008), 209.
[28] Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2000), 59.
[29] Ibid.

is underscored by the way in which Weinandy thinks God exists as well as his formulation of the divine attributes.

Following Thomas Aquinas, Weinandy contends that God's infinity, immutability, and perfection all stem from His existence as pure actuality.[30] Weinandy further argues that because God is pure act, He has a specific sort of relation to creation that is different to the relations humans have with each other. Weinandy aims to show how God, as described in classical thought, is dynamic and relational because of the way in which the divine attributes affect who we think God is. In so doing, Weinandy's argument follows Aquinas' account of the asymmetrical relation between God and creation.[31] Aquinas writes that 'in God relation to the creature is not a real relation, but only a relation of reason; whereas the relation of the creature to God is a real relation…'[32] A theory of relations is a way of describing how different things/beings relate to one another. In the quotation presented earlier, the two differing relations represent two ways of thinking about the divine-human relationship. In a real relationship, the parties in question are affected by one another. In a relationship of reason, a 'new' relation begins without the relation being said to affect the parties involved. Aquinas is therefore arguing that humans are affected by God through their relationship, whereas God is not affected by entering into a relationship with humans. This logic allows Aquinas, and also Weinandy, to underscore the difference between creation and the creator by outlining the different ways in which God and creation relate to one another. Stressing the difference between a 'relationship of reason' and a 'real relationship' means Aquinas can argue that creation can be passibly affected by God, and therefore have an emotional reaction to the creator, whilst the creator, who is still relationally engaged (albeit in a way different to Moltmann's hypothesis), does not undergo a

[30] Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Change: The Word's Becoming in the Incarnation*, (Still River, Mass: St Bede's Publications, 1985), 78.
[31] Weinandy, *Does God Change*, 90-92.
[32] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q45, A3, Trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (Benziger Bros. 1947), taken from Christian Classics Ethereal Library (CCEL), https://ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa/summa.FP_Q45_A3.html.

passible or mutable experience (or at least not on the basis of the relation to creation). The relationship is one of reason – there is no change in knowledge or experience for God. This difference is characterised in almost a directly opposite way to that of Moltmann, who suggests a relationship requires receptivity, which, as Aquinas contends, is explicitly denied by a relationship of reason.[33] Emery points out that because the Thomistic notion of a relation of reason denies that God can be responsive (at least in terms of how we normally define responsiveness), there are a number of theologians who have criticised this notion as it seems to imply God is indifferent to our suffering and prayers.[34] It is this response that we find in Moltmann, where the denial of divine affectedness leads to a rejection of the traditional account of relations.

It is therefore clear that the way one describes the relations between God and creation is a contentious issue for the conception of divine (im)passibility. It is important to note that both positions are aiming to affirm the relationality of God, but set this up very differently – Moltmann will argue that the relationship entails a passibility that is affected by creation, whereas Weinandy and Aquinas, through an account of mixed relations, explicitly deny this without denying God's relationality to creation. These differences highlight the importance of definitions in this debate for, as we have already seen, Moltmann defines relationship in a strictly passible (and reciprocal) sense, and applies this to both humans and God. Conversely, Weinandy contends that such a relationship takes one form for humans and another for God. Moreover, implicit in these arguments are the underlying notions of divine love and presuppositions regarding language. As I make clear in Chapter One, both of these topics are interpreted differently by classical and non-classical thinkers. Although I leave this debate for the next chapter, this brief overview highlights just how important these implicit notions are to the question of (im)passibility.

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Emery, 'The Immutability of the God of Love and the Problem of Language Concerning the "Suffering of God"', 39.

Whilst Chapter Two examines more closely the case for immutability, here it is important to state that classical thinkers believe immutability protects the idea of God's goodness, perfection, omnipotence, aseity, and simplicity. Classical theological thinkers such as Aquinas and Weinandy hold that introducing mutability would compromise this by arguing that God is not already maximally perfect, omnipotent, good, and so on. If one agrees with Aquinas and Weinandy, then whether one sides with the immutable-impassible or passible-mutable position fundamentally affects a number of other theological ideas, such as the character of God (if divine goodness and/ or perfection are compromised), whether God knows all things and the implications (due to omnipotence) and so. What this means both theologically and practically for this thesis is that the conclusions one comes to on these issues have ripple effects on wider theology (as we shall see in Chapters Four and Five).

As I have already argued, the introduction of passibility usually entails a mutable God, so both divine mutability and passibility are rejected by classical theologians. Not unlike Moltmann, these thinkers also draw on scriptures to ground their arguments, as well as philosophical reasoning. Aquinas, for example, refers to Malachi 3:6 in his defence of divine immutability (and, by extension, divine impassibility).[35] This is important for it seems to directly contradict the critique aimed at classical thinkers by some passibilists, namely that their view is philosophical rather than biblical (this is discussed in more detail later).[36] For classical thinkers like Weinandy and Aquinas, passibility compromises divine immutability, and the notions of divine mutability and passibility not only erode the creator–creature distinction but also weaken a number of other doctrines related to the being of God.

This account of 'asymmetrical relations' defines God's relationship to creation in such a way that the relationship is maintained, but would deny a passible experience or any mutable

[35] Aquians *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.9, A.1.
[36] Jung Young Lee, *God Suffers For Us: a Systematic Inquiry into a Concept of Divine Passibility* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 46.

experience to God. In other words, God does not feel as humans do in this relationship nor does He learn or change from it (which is quite different to Moltmann's idea of creator-creature relations). The classical position's denial of both passible and mutable divine experiences again underscores the way in which such a framework is used by passibilists to argue for a passible God and, by extension, how passibility is often employed to argue for a mutable God. For example, should God be taken to 'feel' as humans passibly do in a relationship, this could imply that this feeling is a new one, or is at least occurring in a new way because of a specific event. In turn, this new experience or specificity implies a change in God's emotional state or even in God's being, thereby allowing the case to be made for mutability because of passibility.

This move implies a symmetrical relationship between God and creatures, as opposed to the mixed or asymmetrical relationship upheld by the classical theological tradition. An asymmetrical relationship between God and creation means that God can engage relationally with creation, albeit in a way that does not involve a real relation on the part of God. The fact that God only suffers 'in the flesh' and has a relationship of reason rather than a 'real' relationship with humanity articulates both an immutable God and an impassible one, with these ideas being tied together in order to safeguard immutability.[37]

As will be explored further in Chapter Two, there are a number of ways in which immutability can be understood. That said, and indeed as I have already argued, the connection between impassibility and immutability is usually strong given the way immutability denies the sort of change that passibility usually implies, as a passible God is normally understood to involve God being affected by creation or experiencing new emotions/suffering. The link

[37] One key point this demonstrates is the way (im)passibility is linked to (im)mutability. David Ray Griffin explicitly links them, arguing that impassibility means God cannot be affected by any other realities, whereas immutability means God cannot be changed at all. If we invert Griffin's assertion, we find that a passible God would entail a mutable one because of how He sees immutability functioning. For Griffin, impassibility and immutability mean God cannot be responsive to creation. Indeed, Stump notes that whilst Griffin is an opponent of classical theism, this view is also held by a number of proponents. See David Ray Griffin, God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy, (Lanham, Md: University Press of America, 1991), 74;
Eleonore Stump, The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2016), 20-21.

between impassibility and immutability is one of the key reasons for the development of other parts of theology.[38] For example, Cyril's Christology safeguards divine immutability by denying divine passibility and locating passibility solely within the human nature of Christ. This is important because it highlights one of the core strengths of impassibility – the safeguarding of immutability, and why this is important is explored further in Chapter Two. The desire to safeguard immutability implies that there are theological difficulties with not doing so. What this highlights is that while subscribing to one of these predominant views may be cohesive and provide an adequate solution to some of the proposed 'problems', this will nevertheless come at a cost. Additionally, as noted above the potential issues (cohesive and/ or paradoxical theological belief) present in the theology of the laity would seem to suggest an unwillingness to subscribe to either immutable-impassibilism or mutable-passibilism. The fact that both sides see issues with the other (in part due to the outworking on issues of prayer, omniscience, love/ divine relationship and others) suggests to me that this debate is key – not simply as a standalone theological disagreement but also because of how it affects wider theology. Some of these issues will be explored further in subsequent chapters.

### (0.1.4) Immutable-Passibilism

Thus far, I have examined the two principal ways of construing the (im)passibility debate in the modern era, mutable passibilism and immutable impassibilism. However, attempts have also been made to generate a third way, namely immutable passibilism. One of the foremost theologians who attempts such a schema is Bruce McCormack. In his 2021 book *The Humility of the Eternal Son: Reformed Kenoticism and the Repair of Chalcedon*, McCormack asserts that though he

[38] Griffin, God, Power, and Evil, 74

finds Chalcedon's Christological formulation problematic, the logic of the formulation is correct. He writes:

> What I have in mind is a conception that preserves the logic (if not the categories) of Chalcedon's differentiation of God and the human – but does so in the form of a new, previously unheard of and untested, application.[39]

In McCormack's view, the way in which the early church uses classical categories to formulate Christological doctrine is problematic even though its impetus is correct. In his critique of the classical categories that uphold, or assume a relation between, divine immutability and impassibility, McCormack builds upon his previous work on immutability and passibility in relation to 'psychological ontology'. This is most clearly evident in a 2017 article McCormack co-authored with Alexandra Pârvan, in which they assert:

> The separate ontology of the divine Christ and the human Christ secures God's immutability and impassibility in incarnation by setting aside the person of the whole Christ.
>
> And so, for Augustine, God suffers in the human Jesus (*ep. 219,3*) and at the same time God is always and necessarily impassible (*c. s. Arrian. 6; 31; 10. ev. tr. 52,3; pat. 1; Simpl. 2,2,2*). It remains unclear how Jesus Christ lives as one person, if the human Jesus can live something alone (the suffering), despite the fact that he can never live as the human Jesus alone.[40]

McCormack and Pârvan are critiquing a classical understanding of Christ (here represented by Augustine) which they argue separates the person of Christ into two natures, ascribing certain qualities (such as passibility) to the human, and others (such as impassibility) to the divine. Yet

[39] Bruce Lindley McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son: Reformed Kenoticism and the Repair of Chalcedon,* (Current Issues in Theology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) 9-24.
[40] Alexandra Pârvan and Bruce L. McCormack, 'Immutability, (Im)passibility and Suffering: Steps towards a "Psychological" Ontology of God', *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 59, no. 1 (2017), 22.

the person of Christ is whole, and so McCormack and Pârvan wonder how Christ can really be spoken of as one person. This is particularly pertinent in the case of Augustine, whom McCormack and Pârvan criticise for not developing any ontological reasoning for his assertion of Christ's unity.[41] Indeed, they posit that whilst Augustine strongly asserts Christ's unity, he also offers contradictory statements about Christ, and that his desire to secure the immutability and impassibility of God in the incarnation leads to a problematic Christology.[42] They employ this critique of Augustine to underscore how they establish their own christological ideas.

McCormack and Pârvan claim that the whole person of Christ, human and divine, stands in relation to both God and man, eternally.[43] The emphasis on the 'whole person of Christ' is used to link the human nature of Christ, which is situated in time, to the divine nature of Christ, which is atemporal. McCormack and Pârvan note that:

> Because [the second person of the Trinity] is relation to the human being in Jesus Christ, time is not foreign to God's being; and because he is that relation eternally and immutably, time is encompassed in his being without moving God between past, present and future.[44]

In other words, McCormack and Pârvan argue that time is experienced by God without locating God strictly in the present.[45]

The idea here is that God is eternally and atemporally in relation to Jesus Christ, so at no point is time alien to God. Equally, this relationship is eternal and hence does not locate God strictly in time, but makes manifest God who is atemporal at specific moments. They contend that this means God transcends suffering and death, because these categories do not mark a beginning or ending in the atemporal life of God even though, temporally speaking, they are

[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Pârvan and McCormack, 'Immutability, (Im)passibility and Suffering', 24.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

marked events. God is thereby passible yet eternally unchanging and therefore immutable. For McCormack and Pârvan, the unity of the person of Christ provides a link between divine atemporality and temporal knowledge/location through Christ, which they explain as follows:

> An attempt has been made here to think together divine immutability with divine passibility based on the view that the second trinitarian person is eternally generated as divine-human relation, which is what accounts for the inseparability of natures in the incarnated Christ.[46]

This quote indicates their intention of using the divine-human relationship in the second person to allow for an immutable God who nonetheless suffers, and so can be said to be passible. As noted, this comes with a critique of some of the classical categories whilst at the same time employing others in its formulation (such as immutability and the concept of eternity).

The critique of classical ways of thinking presented in the extract discussed above comes to the fore in Chapters Five through Seven in *The Humility of the Eternal Son*, where McCormack discusses the idea of the 'self-humiliating God'. In both his 2021 book and his co-authored 2017 article, McCormack seeks to preserve some sense of immutability without adhering to the classical ways in which this has been formulated. This rejection of a number of classical ideas includes the rejection of the view that immutability entails impassibility.[47] In so doing, McCormack moves to argue for passibility in the Godhead as well as in the human nature of Jesus. Indeed, as we have already seen, McCormack uses the passibility of Jesus' human nature as the ground for positing passibility in the divine nature. This move, as I have already suggested, is salient in the theology of Moltmann, and hence denotes one place where McCormack endeavours to engage with this stream of twentieth-century theology, albeit without also subscribing to Moltmann's affirmation of divine mutability.

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[46] Pârvan and McCormack, 'Immutability, (Im)passibility and Suffering', 25.
[47] McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son,* 15.

How McCormack will develop a passibilist yet immutabilist doctrine of God remains unclear, given that this is the central topic of his forthcoming sequel to *The Humility of the Eternal Son*. That said, it is safe to note two of McCormack's key commitments in formulating his argument. Firstly, he proposes that theology ought to begin with revelation in the person of Jesus Christ and offers wider scriptural support (also considered as revelation) for both passibility and immutability. McCormack argues that the ground for his claims will ultimately be biblical exegesis.[48] It is for this reason that he focuses much of his attention on the biblical passages. Secondly, he employs specific conceptions of time and eternity (as briefly outlined above) to account for a passible yet immutable God (a conclusion drawn from his exegesis). Based on these two commitments, McCormack argues that God can reveal Himself in the person of Christ as passible and immutable, made possible by a God who reveals Himself as both eternal and yet intimately involved in time in the revelation of the Son – but without committing to the classical notions of divine simplicity or pure act.[49]

To the extent that McCormack's departure from such classical theological notions is influenced by the thoughts of Barth, Bulgakov, and Balthasar, his immutable-passibilism is very much rooted in modern theology and categories rather than in classical thinking. McCormack draws on these thinkers to ground his project (accepting the 'spirit' of Chalcedon, but not the categories), which suggests that the abandonment of classical categories in pursuit of a passible yet immutable God has been a significant part of the work of a number of modern thinkers.[50] By using these thinkers as a new place in which to locate a modern 'tradition', and focusing much attention on exegesis, McCormack is able to examine modern theology rather than scrutinising the classical debates that surround divine attributes in the usual manner. Consequently, McCormack sidesteps some of the discussion on divine attributes by focusing on what these

[48] McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son,* 15.
[49] Pârvan and McCormack, 'Immutability, (Im)passibility and Suffering', 24; McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son,* 253-255.
[50] McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son,* 100.

modern voices have to say. In so doing, he abandons many classical categories (but not all). This is one of the key ways in which McCormack's project differs from the other two approaches I have discussed so far, as both the passible-mutable and impassible-immutable positions directly engage with the classical debates, drawing many of their conceptual and metaphysical starting points from the early and medieval church discussions (either to support these positions or to disregard them).[51]

McCormack's abandonment of classical categories becomes apparent when he goes on to state that the second volume of his work will show why both divine simplicity and impassibility ought to be abandoned.[52] But although McCormack does abandon many classical categories, he also has a deep desire to uphold divine immutability, which is evident in his discussion of other theologians' work. For example, despite his affinities with Eberhard Jüngel in their respective engagements with Barth, a key disagreement he has with Jüngel concerns the latter's willingness to abandon immutability.[53]

McCormack's views present an intriguing challenge to both mutable passibilists and the more traditional immutable impassibilists in that he recognises some of the core strengths of each side's argument and draws on some of the biblical and philosophical arguments made by both. Yet despite this, he levels strong critiques against both positions that seem to make his own position more polemical than it perhaps needs to be (for example, it is not apparent that his views necessarily entail a rejection of divine simplicity).

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[51] This is not to say that McCormack is ignoring the early and medieval debates, but that he wishes to sidestep them in order to present his work.

[52] McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son,* 287.

[53] McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son,* 281. Here, McCormack presses the need for divine immutability by arguing that Jüngel is wrong in limiting his 'ontology of the future' in a way that abandons ideas of protology (at least until the future has already 'arrived').[53] Instead, McCormack believes 'the end can contain the beginning, only if the beginning contains the end'. See McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son* 280-281. Indeed, McCormack reveals the necessity for divine immutability in his thought by linking it to divine omniscience, sovereignty, and eternity. This is because he seeks to underscore God's identification with the crucified Jesus as a concrete event that was first realised in 'pretemporal eternity.' This highlights the central nature of both eternity and immutability to the thought of McCormack. Moreover, pushing for a passible and immutable God via the concept of eternity highlights his own stated desire to embrace the 'spirit' of Chalcedon, but not the categories.

## (0.1.5) Concluding Remarks

The three core positions I have briefly discussed, along with some of their proponents, provide a succinct overview of the modern debate. Various representatives from these three positions will re-appear later in this thesis, where sample issues are discussed to show how impassibilists and passibilists engage on certain matters. The purpose of this is to draw the key points from both immutable-impassibilist and mutable-passibilist positions in an attempt to construct a mediating solution to the debate. For this reason, in relation to questions of passibility and immutability, I will not focus on any individual thinkers' works in great detail. Rather, this thesis will attempt to synthesise these key ideas in a constructive manner. This solution will become apparent in Chapter Three and draws on the important contributions from both positions. The preceding first two subsections of this introduction showed how passibility is often understood to entail mutability, and impassibility-immutability in both the theological tradition and the modern debate over divine passibility. A key reason for this is that passibility is usually understood as a specific form of change, whereas immutability is a more general denial of change.[54] Thus, to allow one type of change entails a breakdown of the more general prohibition on changeable categories. In modern theology, the concept of a passible and mutable God has led to a number of theological approaches which draw their conclusions from this starting point (Liberation Theology, Process Theology, Open Theism), namely that God changes, experiences, and 'feels'. These theological positions all see value in the idea of an emotional and suffering God for a number of reasons, including how they interpret the biblical text, their experience of God and how this helps address other theological questions. As we shall see this is also connected to other questions such, Language, divine attributes, Trinity and Prayer.[55]

[54] Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy*, 74.
[55] While for some theologians, passibility has a direct impact on other key theological issues (such as some of the arguments in liberation theology). Many passibilists (like the lay church) would seem to not have a 'need' to claim

The exception to this is Bruce McCormack whose work *The Humility of the Eternal Son* serves to show where the contemporary debate is moving. For whilst McCormack seeks to maintain Chalcedon in some sense, he does so by radically reimagining theological concepts. Although I agree with some of the critiques levelled by McCormack (and others), I believe his solution to be overly severe, especially given how it undermines several important contributions by many classical theologians. In contrast to his work, my thesis aims to provide a solution which maintains classical categories such as divine simplicity (which McCormack claims needs to be abandoned[56]) without strictly being a classical theology. The reason for this is that I believe some of the key points made by Weinandy, Gavrilyuk, and others as they represent Chalcedonian Christology make important contributions to theological thought on divine being as well as presenting a genuine challenge to the 'new orthodoxy' of passibilist theology. In this sense, this thesis offers a more moderate version of the passible immutable camp's approach. Whereas McCormack explicitly argues for a kenotic and reformed Christology,[57] this thesis does not seek to defend a specifically reformed approach or a kenotic one. But despite the disagreements between the aims of this project and that of McCormack's, they share a desire to see a reconciliation between immutability and passibility. This desire is rooted partly in the strength of both the other positions with regard to their reasoning and tradition, and partly in engaging with the critiques of each side.

At the outset of this introduction, I noted the ways in which passibility and immutability seem to be maintained in vast swathes of the church (including charismatic and Roman Catholic churches).[58] The pervasiveness of these views, coupled with what they mean for other theological

God is passible. Rather the belief is largely down to how they interpret scripture and what they think is the correct (or appropriate) way to describe God. In this sense, the debate around passibility is one that is focused on how we talk about God, and who God is.

[56] McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son,* 287.

[57] McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son,* 249.

[58] While not all members of charismatic, Pentecostals or Roman Catholics traditions, will subscribe to the issues presented here. However, if even a proportion of them do subscribe to these ideas, they represent a sizable block of Christians. For example, a 2011 research by Pew found that Charismatic and Pentecostal Christians make up 27% of all Christians, see, *Pew Research Centre*, 'Global Christianity a Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's

issues, is what makes the question of whether immutability and passibility can be reconciled the core aim of this thesis. In this regard, Chapters One, Two and Three will flesh out the difficulties and eventually attempt to reconcile passibility and immutability. Chapters Four and Five will then elaborate the implications of the solution proposed in Chapter Three for questions of Trinity, Christology and prayer.

Thus, we now turn to the first chapter of this project which focuses on a small number of key debates between passibilists and impassibilists in order to highlight how each side constructs its arguments and the key concepts it holds as central in their theologies. This will illuminate how the sides differ on some core issues and allow this project to make definitional claims in order to advance the constructive aims of this thesis.

Christian Population 300 Px Pew-Templeton Global Religious Futures Project,' 2011, https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2011/12/Christianity-fullreport-web.pdf. 67.

# Chapter 1, God and Creation

## (1.1) Introduction

This chapter examines salient points of discussion within the (im)passibility debate to illustrate key points of divergence between the two most prominent theological positions: mutable-passibilism and immutable-impassibilism (as outlined in the introduction). After reviewing different conceptions of passibility and impassibility, as well as their respective strengths and weaknesses, this chapter introduces a qualified definition of passibility that takes into account the critiques of both passibilists and impassibilists.

First, it is important to note that there are variations in what theologians have meant by impassibility, especially in the early Church. Richard Creel pays significant attention to this in *Divine Impassibility: an essay in Philosophical Theology*, tracing the differences in thought between various theologians.[59] For the purposes of this chapter, the passibility of God refers to the idea that God does, in fact, suffer and experience emotions. This definition is purposefully loose, as it allows me to examine the major concerns and contributions of passibilist theologians, many of whom differ on various aspects. Moreover, this definition requires a consideration of what is meant by the words 'emotions',' suffering', and 'experience'. All three are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

Gavrilyuk draws on church history to argue that although impassibility has been the predominant view throughout the Christian tradition, it is almost always expressed in a qualified sense.[60] According to Gavrilyuk, even though Scripture seems to align itself with the passibilist position, it is qualified impassibility that has historically distinguished the Christian God from

[59] Richard Creel, *Divine Impassibility: an Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3-9.
[60] Paul Gavrilyuk, 'God's Impassible Suffering in the Flesh', in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), 143.

gods of other religions.[61] Gavrilyuk made the following comments in a discussion of Emperor Julian's attack on Christianity as well as the Marcionite controversy:

> Many philosophers were puzzled by the fact that Christians, while decrying the Homeric myths with remarkable passion, accorded such a great place in their religion to certain barbaric books in which God was described in the most naïve, anthropomorphic, and anthropopathic terms. Pagan readers of the Bible could justifiably ask, was not the God of the prophets afflicted with the same kinds of passions as the gods of the poets?[62]

It is evident in Gavrilyuk's work that the discussion around the (im)passibility of God goes back to the earliest stages of Christian history, which suggests that the answer to these questions is not as clear as we might assume. Gavrilyuk deploys a qualified impassibility to articulate God's utter difference from creation and takes up some of the arguments developed by early theologians in their responses to early pagan critiques of Christianity.[63] Gavrilyuk's move to adopt a qualified form of impassibility (which he believes the Fathers opt for) adds nuance to the way in which impassibility is considered to function. For Gavrilyuk, without the qualification a form of impassibility emerges that is usually rejected by heterodox articulations of Christianity.[64] This demonstrates that qualifications are central when referencing impassability and, as will be made clear, this is no less true of passibilist theology. These positions do not usually stand as stark opposites to each other; rather, each is carefully curated due to the concerns they hold.

By qualifying impassibility, Gavrilyuk shows it to be a broad term that can be employed in a number of different ways depending on how it is defined. For this reason, Castelo contends that impassibility can operate according to a number of different 'operational premises'. This means the term is employed differently by different people, and hence means different things

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[61] Paul Gavrilyuk, 'The Christian God v. Passionate Pagan Deities: Impassibility as an Apophatic Qualifier of Divine Emotions' in *The Suffering of the Impassible God: the Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 61, accessed January 13, 2023, https://doi-org.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/10.1093/0199269823.001.0001,.

[62] Gavrilyuk, 'The Christian God v. Passionate Pagan Deities', 51.

[63] Gavrilyuk, 'The Christian God v. Passionate Pagan Deities', 55-56.

[64] Gavrilyuk, 'God's Impassible Suffering in the Flesh', 143.

depending on who you talk to. Consequently, the term impassibility, as Castelo puts it, can be somewhat 'unwieldy'.[65] What this reveals is that the exact meaning remains debatable. Despite this issue (one that could also be applied to passibilists), Gavrilyuk's qualifications disclose the need felt by many church fathers to ensure an appropriate distinction between God and creation. It is through impassibility that this is achieved, because God is shown to be unlike both the gods of the classical period and the rest of creation.

It is also important to emphasise that there is a significant crossover between the definition of passibility and accounts of impassibility in the early church. As Gavrilyuk writes:

> Creatures are finite, visible, and passible; God, in contrast, is infinite, invisible, and impassible. One should beware of overinterpreting this contrast in the sense of 'detached', 'apathetic', and 'unemotional'. There is no warrant for such an interpretation in the sources. The idea expressed is fairly general and modest: God is unlike everything else, and therefore He acts and suffers action in a manner different from everything else.[66]

If Gavrilyuk is correct, then the classical conception of *im*passibility does not mean that God is 'unemotional' or does not 'suffer' at all. He is 'impassible' insofar as God 'suffers action in a manner different from everything else'. This definition seeks to protect the creator–creature distinction by emphasising the difference between God and human, and by maintaining some sense of divine 'suffering'. Such a definition might seem closer to that held by the majority of modern passibilists. However, as I will show, not all arguments for impassibility allow for such freedom. What needs to be clarified here is that impassibility is not necessarily the exact opposite of the definition sketched above. There are some who hold the strict position that God *in no way* suffers, as Gavrilyuk writes:

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[65] Castelo, *The Apathetic God*, 63.
[66] Paul Gavrilyuk, 'The Christian God v. Passionate Pagan Deities', 61.

> Their profound theological differences notwithstanding, the Docetists, Arians, and Nestorians shared a common approach to divine impassibility. All three groups deployed divine impassibility in an unqualified sense, as a property that categorically excluded God's participation in any form of suffering. It is significant that the Church has rejected such a use of divine impassibility as flawed.[67]

In contrast to those groups which the Christian tradition has deemed heretical, Gavrilyuk argues that orthodox versions of impassibility are not usually unqualified, even if (as we shall see) their use of language would sometimes indicate a leaning in that direction. One example of this is that large numbers of contemporary impassibilists qualify their account of divine suffering by using phrases like 'suffered in the flesh' which draws on a theology of incarnation and communication of idioms.[68] Consequently, it would be fair to say that for most of Christian history, the passibility of God has generally been rejected.[69] That said, it is certainly possible to identify arguments for both passibility and impassibility. Sometimes such statements are even presented by the same thinker. To a degree, whether a person's proclamations represent passibility or impassibility depends on how we understand (im)passibility. For example, Novatian asserts:

> Moreover, if we read of [God's] wrath, and consider certain descriptions of His indignation, and learn that hatred is asserted of Him, yet we are not to understand these to be asserted of Him in the sense in which they are human vices. For all these things, although they may corrupt man, cannot at all corrupt the divine power. For such passions as these will rightly be said to be in men, and will not rightly be judged to be in

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[67] Paul Gavrilyuk, 'God's Impassible Suffering in the Flesh', in *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2009), 143.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Indeed, impassibility has been held by some to be part of the post-death perfected state for humans. As Nicholas of Cusa writes: 'when freed from the body of death—arise after the likeness of Him and will put on with an impassible nature'. Cusa effectively makes an impassible nature part of what it is to be perfected in eternity, rather than simply something applied to the divine. According to Cusa, for humans to become like God, they must also become impassible. See Nicholas of Cusa, *Moreover, for our sake He Was Crucified*, Sermon Preached April 15, 1457, trans. by Jasper Hopkins, https://jasper-hopkins.info/SermonsCCLXXVI-CCXCIII.pdf, 233.

> God. For man may be corrupted by these things, because he can be corrupted; God may not be corrupted by them, because He cannot be corrupted…For that God is angry, arises from no vice in Him.[70]

This passage in Novatian could be read as a qualified form of impassibility, in which God is set apart from creation but without denying *all* forms of emotions.[71] However, one could also read this as a statement about qualified divine passibility, in which God is not moved to anger by sin in Himself (i.e. it is not because there is a deficiency in God), but nonetheless experiences anger. This highlights that impassibility can be understood in different ways and, moreover, can be understood in different senses when applied to different *beings*. In this way, impassible is being used analogically with regard to God and impassible creatures; for example, God is impassible in a different (analogical) sense from the impassible table. This relationship, between God, creation and analogy are discussed further later in this chapter.

For the purposes of this chapter, I define impassibility using the qualified approach described by Gavrilyuk, which posits that God only experiences emotions in a way that is proper to His Divinity. As such, I primarily examine impassibilist accounts that describe (and allow) divine suffering as being 'in the flesh' when discussing Christ. In this thesis, suffering is defined as experiencing pain or distress, which can be construed as either physical or non-physical. The differentiation of physical from non-physical is of particular importance for both this thesis and this chapter, as I seek to examine the Father and Spirit who do not suffer in the physical realm but could still be said to suffer in a non-physical sense. The concept of God's emotional life articulates the idea that in some sense He experiences emotions such as joy or anger (as I explain later, there are different ways of imagining what sense this is). The passibility debate is concerned with the entire Godhead, not merely the human nature of Jesus. This definition allows the

[70] Novatian, *Concerning the Trinity*, Chapter 5, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, https://ccel.org/ccel/novatian/treatise/anf05.vi.iii.vi.html.
[71] It is in this way that Gavrilyuk interprets the passage. See Gavrilyuk, 'The Christian God v. Passionate Pagan Deities', 58.

arguments from both passibilists and impassibilists to be heard (and dialogue to commence), without stipulating that the two positions are polar opposites. This is important for the overall aims of this project which seeks to engage with both positions in a constructive way.

I now examine two key debates that occur between immutable-impassibilism and mutable-passibilism, and in so doing note the various ways theologians address the questions asked of them. This serves to elucidate the relative strengths and weaknesses of each position on various key topics. Along with the overview of the three predominant modern positions outlined in the introduction, this enables me to develop a definition of passibility that can be used to fulfil the constructive aims of this thesis.

## (1.2) Analogy

### (1.2.1) A brief introduction to analogy

As noted previously, there are various forms of passibilist and impassibilist arguments, which means that the views adopted vary in the extent to which impassibility and passibility are qualified. Alongside this plethora of views is the use of language and analogy, which are employed in slightly different ways by each side of the debate (and with various nuances within each broad camp). The variable use of language is an important starting point in discussing these two key camps of modern theological discourse. The presuppositions they hold can result in each side using the same words in different ways. In this regard, the belief that God is (im)passible affects how one thinks about language and its relation to creation. As is perhaps clear, the way one uses language defines what is being said, and also how things are to be said. Because of this, this subsection briefly highlights some of the general approaches to language between the mutable/passible position and the immutable/ impassible position. What it will demonstrate is that there are a number of important dissimilarities between the impassibilist and passibilist positions, despite the fact that both often adopt an analogical approach to theological language (although how analogy is employed by each side differs). These differences will

demonstrate that there is not only a metaphysical discussion to the (im)passibility debate but also a linguistic one, meaning the two positions often talk past each other. As will be made clear, this difference is affected by (im)passibility, as this belief affects the way in which language is used. These differences are not only important as a means of providing conceptual clarity but also highlight fundamentally differing beliefs regarding God. As I suggest below, the different uses of language affect the ways in which the positions think about God's as relational and what the implications of this relationality are for our experience of interactions with God (especially concerning prayer, as we shall see in Chapter Five).

Additionally, the fact that both positions can use the exact same phrasing to mean different things can result in 'straw manning', whereby the discussion is framed in terms that do not accurately describe the opposing position. For this project, the subject of analogy will show how each side uses language and, ergo, some of the assumptions that are being made. It also serves to establish what is meant by certain phrases, and in what sense claims regarding divine emotions and suffering ought to be understood. Understanding these assumptions will illuminate some of the underlying distinctions between the schools of thought, as discussed in the third part of this subsection. Whilst the thinkers I consider represent what I see as common trends in the use of language, it is of course possible (or even likely) that there are (im)passibilist thinkers who do not use language in the way I suggest. Nevertheless, these undoubtedly represent strong trends within these schools of thought.

One important facet of this discussion is that both positions see the value in the use of analogical language. As a result, each side attempts to avoid alternative uses of language along with their associated costs/benefits. Although there are a number of important differences, the fact that both positions can be seen to use analogy is a crucial similarity. This is key when considering the fact that analogical predication has been used to qualify the way one talks about God. Thus, both positions seek to employ qualifications in speech, even if, as we shall see, the question of (im)passibility marks an important distinction. In this way, the discussion will look

primarily at the similarities and differences in the use of language, both in type (such as uses of analogy) and particularly where specific words are concerned (such as love). The conversation surrounding specific words and ideas drives much of the discussion, since it is the practical questions of how God and humans relate to each other that directly intersect with the purpose of 'God-talk'. The discussion will then inform how language should be understood to be used throughout the rest of the thesis: namely, that passibility will be used in a specific analogical sense.

Finally, because the subject of analogy is concerned with the ways in which it is appropriate to speak of God and what can be said of God, this subsection also address the question of fittingness with regard to (im)passibility and God, and assesses what and how language can and should be used when discussing God. In so doing, it asks whether passibility or impassibility is more appropriately applied to God. This question of appropriate application or 'fittingness' enables the discussion to talk more broadly about the role of language, particularly the relationship between regular speech and language specific to God-talk. The discussion will focus on what this means for our specific choice of words, for example, what it means to suggest God 'experiences'. This discussion is important because it is a key precursor to the discussion of whether passibility or impassibility is the best way of describing God (given the various claims made by thinkers from each side of the debate). As we shall see, the passibilist use of analogy is often different from the use by impassibilist writers. In passibilist accounts of so-called 'bi-directional analogy', both passibility and analogy go hand in hand. This is because passibilists (as noted in the introduction) argue that the biblical passages that imply passibility of God should be taken as such, while also hoping to keep God as a distinct being, different from creation. In broad terms, the passibilist argument is that while God is different to creation, both God and creation can be understood to be passible, albeit in an analogical way.[72]

[72] That said, I will suggest that while God should be considered passible, this passibility should not be understood in univocal terms.

The subject of language is rooted in discussions surrounding the question of knowledge of God, and quests for tools to describe Him. This is, in many ways, a key task of theology, because if we are unable to discuss God due to a limitation of language, one might wonder what purpose theology has. Theology has long grappled with this problem, which Frederick Ferré describes thus:

> The Theist is caught in a crossfire. Either Human Language is allowed to retain its meaning…in which case it cannot be about the God of Theism…or language, 'purified' of its anthropocentric roots, is emptied of meaning for human beings, in which case It can be neither human language nor –for us –'about' God.[73]

Ferré points out that Christian theology seeks language that can describe the incomprehensible God without becoming devoid of meaning. As a result, the conversation around theological language gravitates around the types of language that we use, especially the use of analogy.

The three principal 'types' of language categorised in the theology of language are equivocity, univocity, and analogy. Equivocity means that the words we use for God and for creation have two completely different meanings that bear no relation to one another, whereas univocity means that such words only have one shared meaning that applies in the same sense, or indeed same voice (uni-vocal), to both God and creation. In this regard, God-talk that uses either of these would mean that words articulate a strict difference or sameness. For example, if love is understood univocally, then God's love and our love are understood in exactly the same sense, whereas if it is understood equivocally, then our love and God's love are completely different and bear no resemblance at all. To use univocal language is thus to potentially make God describable in the *same* way as a creature is describable, and thereby to remove a sense of divine otherness. This use of language runs the risk of making God effectively a person (albeit 'bigger' than we are) in that God is described in the same sense that we describe ourselves. By

[73] Frederick Ferré, *Language, Logic and God* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1962), 68.

the same token, to use equivocal language is to imply that there is no similarity in any sense between creation and God. This completely removes what can be known of God, because there is no sense in which we can understand what is said of God. Analogy, however, presumes a certain 'likeness' between words whilst denying full univocity, thus also accounting for some difference between God and creation.[74] However, in the approaches adopted by different theologians, the specific meaning of analogy also differs. Therefore, I first outline the way most passibilists understand analogy before moving on to contrast this with a classical understanding. This brief overview will set up the more detailed discussion between these two camps in the next part of this subsection.

Like the impassibilists of the classical tradition, passibilists such as Thomas Jay Oord understand divine revelation through scripture as involving the use of analogy.[75] In other words, they accept that there is no strict univocity concerning our understanding of words and how they apply to God, but nevertheless assume that we can understand 'some' of the meaning and content of these words. However, unlike the uni-directionality of classical theology whereby certain properties (e.g. goodness) are said to be proper to God but not to creatures, the passibilist approach assumes that analogical language usually works 'bi-directionally'.[76] This means there is a basic understanding of the word that applies in both a human and divine sense, without it being an exact meaning that applies to both humans and God. This use of analogy suggests it has an intrinsic nature because both God and humans are passible, and so these words can be said to be *properly* true of both creatures and the creator. In this sense, the analogy

[74] Reinhard Hütter, 'Attending to the Wisdom of God' in *The Analogy of Being: Invention of the Antichrist or the Wisdom of God?*, ed., Thomas Joseph White, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Cambridge: William B Eerdmans, 2011), 217-218.
[75] Of course, some theologians would suggest revelation functions non-analogically, such as through univocal language.
[76] Oord, 'Analogies of Love between God and Creatures: A Response to Kevin Vanhoozer' *in Love, Divine and Human: Contemporary Essays in Systematic and Philosophical Theology*, eds., Oliver Crisp, J.M. Arcadi and J. Wessling, (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 27-28.

is intrinsic to both creatures and God because it is true (or *proper*) of both.[77] The assumption that both creatures and God are passible is key to this bi-directional account. This is because the passibilists assume that these words articulate an experience that is true to both parties. Indeed, for Oord, this bi-directional account contrasts directly with that of Kevin Vanhoozer, who, Oord contends, holds a classical Thomistic 'uni-directional' understanding of analogy.[78] As explained below, Aquinas' theory of analogy posits that certain properties or perfections are *proper* to God (only), whereas under Oord's bi-directional reading, analogy describes what is proper to both (whilst allowing for difference). For example, in the case of love, Oord's bi-directional analogy posits that although both God and creatures are *properly* loving, God is still loving in a different way to humans. Whereas God is the origin and perfection of 'love' – for God *is* love – human beings are said to be 'properly' loving insofar as they are created as creatures with the capacity to love. Like traditional accounts of analogy, this does not mean that humans *are* love in the same way that this could be said of God. The importance of symmetry and passibility in this case is central because what it is to be loving is understood as passible (this is discussed in more detail later). Because both God and humans are passible, there can be a symmetrical relation between these descriptions without this becoming purely univocal. This is because God is differentiated from humans but is passible in the way that humans are passible, and so a likeness can be assumed between such descriptions. Moltmann argues that the bible portrays humans as identified and determined by their incorporation into God's promise and covenant.[79] He writes that our 'essence, and that means identity and continuity, is determined by the call of God, by His being called into a partnership in the covenant by the event of justification'.[80] For Moltmann, who we are, our 'essence', is constituted by our relationship with God because we are called to

[77] In this way, the created nature of humans as passible and capable of love, joy, and so on, is a result of God's creation. But this does not mean that one could say that humans 'are' love, as one might say about God, but that both humans and God are 'loving'; God because He is love, and humans because we were created to love.
[78] Oord, 'Analogies of Love between God and Creatures', 28.
[79] Jürgen Moltmann, *Hope and Planning*, trans. Margaret Clarkson, (London: SCM Press, 1971), 105.
[80] Ibid.

love by God who is love. Clarke Chapman points out that Moltmann's view of the *Imago Dei* is that of a reflection of God through our relationship.[81] Moltmann himself writes that we are 'destined to reflect the image of God'.[82] This is because we reflect God who is love. Therefore, because our very essence is constituted though our relationship to God, one can say that humans are by essence a reflection of the divine love. In this sense, it is true that humans are properly loving, as designed by God, despite not *being* love in the way God is. Moltmann's view seems quite close (if not identical) to the sort of relationship that Oord is describing in terms of bi-directional analogical relations. Neither seem to be suggesting that we are *exactly* like God (in a univocal sense), but both postulate that we are how we are because of God, and this in turn allows us to know something about God from our creaturely nature.

However, despite the bi-directional analogical relationship indicating that both humans and God can be *properly* thought of as loving, just, and so on, there is a difference between those it is predicated of (depending on *who* is predicated). For example, one might say that both humans and God are joyful, and that the word joy here shares a basic meaning, but humans and God are not joyful in exactly the same way, as they are distinctly different 'kinds' of 'beings' (e.g. joy is experienced in a finite way in relation to our finite creaturely being and existence). However, whilst they are different 'kinds' of beings, both humans and God are passible. Therefore, despite not being joyful in exactly the same univocal way, there is still meaning to both the statement 'God is joyful' and the statement 'humans are joyful' because the language articulates a basic meaning that is true for both.[83] The underlying assumption is that God has created creatures in a specific way and exists in a specific way, and whilst this is not the same for humans, we bear a likeness. For example, the fact that both humans and God are passible, and

[81] G. Clarke Chapman, 'On Being Human: Moltmann's Anthropology of Hope', *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 55, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 69-84.
[82] Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity: Political Theology and Ethics*, rans. M. Douglas Meeks, London: SCM Press, 1984), 22.
[83] 'Analogy', *Interdisciplinary Encyclopaedia of Religion and Science,* eds., G. Tanzella-Nitti, I. Colagé and A. Strumia (2010), accessed August 15, 2023, https://inters.org/analogy.

hence can be loving/joyful and so on in an analogically passible manner. This is not intended to erode the differences between God and humans but instead emphasise that the analogical relationship ought to be construed in such a way that the 'likeness' generated by passibility is apparent, rather than setting up the relationship between one passible being and another impassible being. Moreover, it is also designed to highlight the way a created being can be thought of. In other words, because God is the ground of love, justice, mercy, and so on, He is properly considered to be these things (much like in a classical account). Yet because God has created us in a specific way, these characteristics (loving, just, merciful) are also considered proper to human beings on account of our design – the difference is that we are designed to love, whereas God *is* love. The key point that links this idea is that because both humans and God are passible, then language that suggests we are 'like' God depicts both humans and God as passibly being these things.[84] The danger here is that such a view falls in univocity, but, as will become evident, most passibilists strive to avoid this.

This means that language can be understood to posit positive knowledge about God, because the words are considered to have a basic (shared) meaning (even if, when considering God, we do not have access to a full meaning/understanding). Oord writes that 'Such analogical relations are bidirectional; God relates to creatures and creatures relate to God'.[85] This idea of 'bidirectional' analogical relations (what might also be called symmetrical relations) posits that the relationship between 'things' like love always involves a 'likeness'; whether one predicates the loving of God or of humans in this way, it makes no difference. This does not mean there is a direct equivalence between the love of humans and the love of God, and there are a number of reasons for this. For example, humans do not love perfectly (whereas God does). Humans do not love as much or indeed as many people as God does, nor do humans love constantly as God

[84] Indeed, Kazoh Kitamori's work seems to imply a similar sort of move. He describes the 'symbolism of pain' and also the mysticism of experience. In both cases, Kitamori seems to wish to avoid a univocal discussion (thereby preserving ideas of mystery and symbolism), yet clearly thinks that the passibility of both God and the creatures allows to make certain claims. See *Theology of the Pain of God* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1966), 68-73.
[85] Oord, 'Analogies of Love between God and Creatures', 27-28.

does and, most importantly, unlike God, we are not love, even though we are created with the capacity to love. This short list of reasons shows that love cannot be understood in a univocal sense,[86] because human love is not divine love, but a human can understand the claim 'God is love' from their experience of creaturely love. Here, what is defined as love shares a basic similarity between both God and humans, as it is understood by both according to their passibility. This does not mean that it is identical, only that there is a basic shared meaning that can be understood through analogical claims about God and humans. In part, this basic shared meaning is related to the fact that both humans and God are passible. Consequently, passibilist thinkers such as Moltmann or Oord argue that God loves, is just, merciful, and so on in a way that is more similar than how thinkers such as Gavrilyuk or Weinandy describe divine emotion. Thus, (im)passibility makes an enormous difference to how the 'likeness' and 'unlikeness' of all analogical relations is considered.

Whilst differences can still be highlighted, the suggestion that both God and humans are passible affects how an analogical understanding of these emotions is presented. This passible understanding of divine emotions is what is meant by the phrase 'bi-directional' analogous relationship; that humans understand divine love from an experience of human love and our experiences of divine love shed light on how love is supposed to function in creaturely terms. The essential idea here is that when God reveals himself through use of the language, humans can be said to know something of God.[87] This is because knowledge of God is only partly understood through creaturely categories. For example, the nature of love is first understood by humans in our interactions with other humans, and saying God is loving in this sense requires a

[86] Whilst a univocalist might claim there are some differences, even in their account of love, the suggestion would likely be that the word is understood in the same 'sense', even if it is not 'exactly' the same. The difference here is that even in a symmetrical account of analogical relations, these differences are not to be understood as merely different 'senses'; there is a distinct difference between *how* God is said to be loving and *how* humans are said to be loving. This is in part due to the differences in being – God's consistency and perfection in particular mean such a concept of love is not simply a different sense but represents the sort of unlikeness that is required by an analogical account.

[87] Even the most minimal claim about God is based on revelation.

correlation between this experience and what it is for God to love. Moreover, because both humans and God are passible, some basic similarity already exists when ascribing emotional language to God. However, because this does not fully describe the way in which God loves, there is an awareness that this knowledge of divine love is incomplete – we only have this awareness because God reveals himself as both likeness and as other.[88] Nevertheless, the analogical relationship between two distinctly different yet passible beings and two distinctly different beings, where one of those beings is impassible, creates a different sort of relationship between the 'likeness' and 'unlikeness' of analogy.

Because this knowledge of God (both knowledge of who God is and knowledge of lack of understanding concerning God) is rooted in revelation, claims that God is loving in ways different to humans are only made on the basis of revelation. That said, there is an importance attached to how some of this communication functions through creaturely categories. This relationship between both the otherness of God and God's likeness appears to be the sort of analogical relationship Moltmann has in mind in *The Crucified God*.[89] Moltmann posits that analogical language can work in various ways, which at its most extreme reduces God talk to a point where nothing can be known about God due to our difference from Him. Instead, Moltmann wants to suggest that God reveals Himself such that His difference is made known by both likeness and opposite; for example, His grace is revealed in human sinfulness.[90] Moltmann stresses that analogy must work in such a way that knowledge is included in the equation. In other words, God's revelation must be able to be (to some degree) understood; in Moltmann's words, analogy must be 'supplemented by the dialectical principle of knowledge'.[91] It is perhaps here that the link between Moltmann and Oord is most clear, in that analogy is envisioned to communicate something true using human categories. That God reveals in this way is why there

[88] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 22
[89] Ibid.
[90] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 22-23.
[91] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 22.

is the suggestion of a symmetrical relation, in that what God is 'like' can be known by the other, namely, creation.

In this view, espoused by Moltmann and Oord, it seems to be the case that whilst humans know what love is, they only know that God is love because God reveals this to them. Moreover, because of the way God reveals, humans can know what this means only to a certain extent (in the sense of the symmetrical use of the word, made known via revelation), and the fact that God is different (which is also revealed knowledge) is known via God.

This 'bi-directional' view, often held by passibilists, differs from the way classical theologians describe analogy in that many classical thinkers reject bi-directionality (or symmetry).[92] However, classical thinkers also believe a number of the same things that non-classical thinkers do. For example, Aquinas discusses analogy as representing a middle ground between equivocal and univocal language, writing that:

> For in analogies the idea is not, as it is in univocals, one and the same, yet it is not totally diverse as in equivocals; but a term which is thus used in a multiple sense signifies various proportions to some one thing…[93]

Thus, Aquinas argues that when used analogously, words provide us with a certain level of meaning, but each meaning is relative to the 'thing' it predicates.[94] For example, we might say God is kind, and that humans are kind, but whilst God is the one who defines kindness, and so kind in respect to Godself, the human is kind only in relation to God's perfect kindness. Thus, where attributes pertain essentially to God, God is considered to be the primary analogate whereas humans are considered to be secondary analogates. Because of this, the primary analogate informs of the truth of something and what can be said of the secondary analogate (for

[92] Whilst Aquinas is taken as representative of a dominant way of thinking about analogy. there are a number of different ways one could use analogy in regard to the divine-human relationship (or indeed creaturely relationships), see Dawn Eschenauer Chow, 'The Passibility of God: A Plea For Analogy', *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers*, 35, Issue 4 (2018), 397.
[93] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q13, Q5.
[94] As noted above, this is similar to how Moltmann and Oord formulate their ideas, although for Aquinas these things are only *properly* predicated of God.

example, what it is to be good, kind, love, etc.), whereas the secondary analogate does not tell us anything intrinsically about the primary analogate (beyond that the secondary analogate is caused by, or exists in relation to, the primary). Using analogy in this way allows us to say what is true of the primary analogate; for example, God is love. But to say humans (the secondary analogate) are loving (and to experience human love) does not inform us of what God's love is. In this way, 'true' love is God's love, as the primary analogate, and although predication of the secondary analogates bears a relationship to the primary, they are still different.[95] As such, there exists an asymmetry (or as Oord would put it, uni-directionality, as opposed to the bi-directionality noted above) to the use of language, because it is not true that God loves 'like' humans, but it is true that humans love 'like' God. As Aquinas writes, 'it is more proper to say that the creature is like God than that God is like the creature'.[96] It is on the question of asymmetry then that the major disagreement arises, not whether analogy is the correct way to describe God.

Aquinas' formulation here is paralleled by his aforementioned account of 'mixed relations': that humans have a 'real' relationship with God, but God has a relation of reason with humanity.[97] Suggesting that God only has a relationship of reason means that one can say it is proper to have a directionality of language on the basis that whilst we relate to God, God does not 'really' relate to us. The example Aquinas uses is to say that a man is not said to be like his picture, even if the picture is like the man.[98] The analogy here is clearly directional (or asymmetrical) due to the relationship between God and man (or the man and his picture). In this regard, words predicated of God are different to those predicated of humans on account of the relations and directionality. This is because God *is* love while human beings only love since God 'first loved us' (1 John 4:9). Whereas finite human beings cannot be said to be perfectly loving or exist as 'love itself', God can be said to be *perfectly* loving or indeed be perfect Love itself, such

[95] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, Q.13, A5.
[96] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* I.29
[97] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.45, A3.
[98] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* I.29

that love can be, as Aquinas says, 'properly [*proprie*] predicated of God'.[99] In this way, whereas love is 'properly predicated of God' or 'proper' to God, love is only '*im*properly' predicated of human creatures.[100]

Thus, there is a distinct directionality (asymmetry) rather than a 'bi-directionality'. Aquinas' version of analogy is sometimes described as an asymmetrical use of language, which protects a creator–creature distinction without reducing language to a univocity of meaning. Hence, whilst analogy assumes both a likeness and an unlikeness, due to (im)passibility there is an immediate distinction in how humans are said to be 'like' God.

The preceding discussion illuminates the basic way in which these two arguments for analogy are formulated. Usually, for a non-classical account, the language of analogy is considered to have some intrinsic value for both parties (as seen in both Oord and Moltmann). This analogous relationship will maintain differences between both humans and God, but it does mean that one can say, 'God loves in a way that is like humans' and also that 'humans love in a way that is like God', according to their being. Conversely, a classic formulation posits that 'humans love like God' but not that 'God loves like humans' on the basis that God is the primary analogate and humans a secondary analogate.

As noted previously, how one interprets these differences will affect what words we use and what we think these words mean. For example, one could suggest that God 'experiences' emotion based on either of these analogous understandings of God. But whether this experience is said to be 'affective' is determined by (a.) whether God is understood to be passible, and (b.) whether the analogical relationship between divine and creaturely properties is symmetrical or

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[99]Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.20, 2.

[100] Use of the word 'properly' here is meant to provide conceptual clarity regarding a group of thinkers who describe this means of talking in different ways. For example, Aquinas in *Summa Theologica*, I, 13, 5. discusses what things signify versus the mode of signification, in relation to words predicated of humans or God Aquinas here writes, 'we signify some perfection distinct from a man's essence, and distinct from his power and existence, and from all similar things; whereas when we apply to it God, we do not mean to signify anything distinct from His essence, or power, or existence.' Aquinas' point here is to distinguish how the use of words differs between humans and God.

not. In our specific case, the effect of this is that our preconceptions concerning passibility and asymmetry affect what we mean by the phrase 'God experiences'. The discussion here is thus not about whether God *needs* to be 'passible' in order to experience emotions. Rather, the question is whether it is more *fitting* to describe God as 'passible' rather than as 'impassible'. Given the use of analogy, both the terms 'passible' and 'impassible' are approximations of what God's divine nature is truly like in Godself. But recognising how we usually understand the word 'passible' in ordinary language (such as a lay understanding of Love, joy or other emotions), I argue 'passible' would seem to be the more appropriate term to speak of God's nature as it implies affection and experience in a way that 'impassible' does not. Therefore, whilst using analogous language, both positions are employing this differently, the importance of which is discussed in more detail later.

### (1.3.2) Impassibilists and Passibilists; differing uses of analogy

As noted above, passibilists and impassibilists both use analogy but employ it differently. Thus far, I have presented the basic idea that surrounds analogy as well as its non-classical and classical deployments. I now examine more closely the classical approach and the modern 'response' of many passibilists to this use of analogical language. The discussion of (a)symmetry is important because although both positions argue that we only know God or know about God on the basis of revelation, the meaning and content of words is perceived as different. In an asymmetrical (uni-directional) account, we are like God who gives the grounding for the attribution as the primary analogate (God is properly love, justice, mercy, kindness, anger, intelligent, etc.). In this regard, what is true love/mercy/justice and so on in a human sense is determined by God, who is the ground for these things. Alternatively, the symmetrical (bi-directional) analogy indicates that whilst these attributions are grounded in God, we are created by God to love/ be just/merciful and so forth, meaning it is proper to say that God and humans are these things

(albeit for different reasons).[101] Moltmann is emphasising that humans made in the image of God have a close relationship to Him. Dominic Robinson describes Moltmann's view in the following way:

> The more we express this model of relationship the more we move away from what he regards as a monotheism prevalent within the tradition which amounts to a monarchical and so unequal view of the God–human relationship, in which human beings are slaves to a dominant Lord of history.[102]

Robinson contends that Moltmann is actively moving away from a view of the creator-creature relationship as overly unequal. One of the methods he employs to do this is to ensure that the God-talk we use does not emphasise God's utter difference from the world, but instead can be used to highlight how God and humans can be said to be like each other. Moltmann does not, however, become strictly univocal in describing God and humans, as some inequality remains on account of humans being made by God, and the fact that humans can only engage with God when He has first engaged with them.[103] However, this position of being made, in turn, allows Moltmann to posit a much closer relationship than was previously suggested. Nevertheless, although there seems to be some form of analogical predication, Karen Kilby has highlighted that Moltmann has a tendency to project some human concepts onto God (although she also notes that this is true to some degree of much theological discussion). [104] It seems to me that, at least in terms of his view of trinitarian 'persons', this is the case regardless of whether Moltmann is using analogy or univocal language. Kilby herself does not name which sort of language Moltmann seems to use (potentially a purposeful move), but does indicate that 'perichoresis is

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[101] God is said to be these things by virtue of His nature. God is love, whereas humans are created with the ability and design to do these things, to *be* loving, just, etc. Because these terms are understood to denote passibility, human loving is understood to correspond to divine love (which can be understood bi-directionally) despite the differences in our nature.

[102] Dominic Robinson, *Understanding the "Imago Dei": The Thought of Barth, von Balthasar and Moltmann*, (Farnham; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 137.

[103] Robinson, *Understanding the "Imago Dei",* 129-130.

[104] Karen Kilby, 'Perichoresis and Projection: Problems with Social Doctrines of the Trinity', *New Blackfriars*, 81, 956 (October 2000): 442.

used to describe what is not understood'.[105] If this is the case (as I believe), then it would seem that there is at least some analogical predication on the basis that there is an assumed lack of understanding, as well as the projection. Moltmann's tendency to project and his view of perichoresis certainly appears to generate problems when it comes to trinitarian theology (as Kilby and others point out). Nevertheless, I am less certain that his projection equates to an outright move to univocity, due to Moltmann's own comments on the use of analogy and the fact that he seems to want to retain some level of divine mystery/otherness (as evidenced by the mystery of perichoresis).

In terms of this thesis, such a use of language will impact the way any sense of divine emotions is to be understood. It is not simply a metaphysical starting point but a linguistic one. Furthermore, both the metaphysical and linguistic conceptions influence the debate (as well as being interrelated). Numerous non-classical and classical theologians accept that the use of analogy involves a certain 'likeness' as well as an 'unlikeness'. For example, one might say human love is like God's love and this likeness might be caring for the other, but implicit in this is the idea that human love is unlike God's love in that it is not everlasting, perfect, or intrinsic (hence analogy differs from equivocal and univocal concepts). However, where the key disagreement becomes apparent is whether we can invert this example; for instance, can we say God's love is like human love? For most passibilists, the answer is yes – and this is because, as highlighted above, they emphasise the bi-directionality of the words used and therefore both likeness and unlikeness in whatever way the word is employed analogically. This means that the statements 'God is intelligent' and 'humans are intelligent' carry a shared basic (analogical) meaning without implying full similitude between the words or subjects. For most impassibilists, this is not the case, as they would contend that what is *properly* said is determined based on who one speaks about; hence, what might be 'likeness' (between God and creatures) in a bi-directional analogical

[105] Ibid.

account is changed into an 'unlikeness', depending on whether one is referring to creation or the creator. In other words, one can say 'humans are like God' but not that 'God is like humans' as the analogical relationship suggests the nature of the thing signified is properly true only in the primary analogate (in this case God). This indicates that passibilists and impassibilists who adopt these views of language are already starting from very different places, because although both positions can affirm that God is love, what this means is different even though the wording may be the same.

The classical position is quite different to that of many modern passibilists. The conception Oord offers represents a specific way of approaching theological language that attempts to make a distinct break with the more classical view espoused by thinkers such as Aquinas. Both groups would argue that the revelation of God occurs through language, and potentially that these words ought to be understood as correlating with the standard use of such words. However, an important difference arises in whether language is thought to have a symmetrical nature. In other words, the claim 'God is love' (in the sense of love relationships) is understood to mean that the word love is related to a creaturely understanding of the word/phrase (in its definition and usage), which is also applied to humans in a similar way and can also be applied to God. Thus, one can say both God loves like humans and humans love like God. For Aquinas, only God can be said to be properly love, whereas humans possess love. Despite this, Aquinas also believes this relationship is asymmetrical, and so it is not 'proper' to say God loves in a way that is similar to how humans love. Whilst the use of such an analogy does protect the creator-creature distinction, it generates the fear that this form of analogy in fact prevents meaningful claims about God. This certainly appears to be true for Moltmann, as he contends that unless analogy is held in tension with knowledge then this ceases to allow us to know anything about God.[106] For Moltmann, analogy must permit a level of symmetrical

[106] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 22.

knowledge, otherwise the 'likeness' becomes obscurity. If one can say what God is 'like' (if this is indeed possible) but that this likeness does not relate to the creature (for example, Aquinas' statement that it is not proper to say God is *like* the creature), then one does not have revelation but obscurity. This is because Moltmann believes it must be possible to understand likeness either by similarity or by oppositeness. Hence, a passible God is love and passible creation is loving, thereby the similarity is known by experience of passible love. Likewise, through our sin God's grace is revealed. In both these cases there cannot be a strict univocity because we cannot fully comprehend God's grace nor know what it is for God to *be* love. Nevertheless, a basic level of knowledge is assumed that allows one to posit an analogical relation.

The concern for Moltmann or Oord is that a uni-directional analogy (as argued by Aquinas) prevents one from knowing about God. Consequently, they seek to claim at least a basic level of symmetry and, moreover, to stress the value of revelation. This symmetrical view is not, however, intended to reduce all God-talk to mere creaturely discussion, nor is it supposed to break down the creator-creature distinction (although this is undoubtably a risk). Instead, the symmetrical approach to language implies that something of God's self-revelation can be understood using creaturely categories, precisely because these categories are used by God to communicate with creation. Although this might also seem to be true of classical analogy, Moltmann and others are reacting to what they see as a problem with classical analogy: specifically, if one cannot say what God's love is 'like', then what is it? For these thinkers, it is not enough to describe human love as like God's love, if we do not know what that is. The alternative offered by Moltmann is a dialectical relationship, where revelation and analogy function together with 'revelation of the opposite' as well as 'like only being known by like', which then brings correspondence with God.[107] Indeed, Moltmann speaks in similar terms about the self-revelation of God, stating that 'God does not contradict himself; rather, the way God

[107] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 22.

appears to us in His revelation "is the way He is beforehand in himself" – otherwise, the term "self-revelation" would be inappropriate'.[108] In Moltmann's thoughts we can see the importance of God's revelation being understood in terms of categories that we can understand, both to provide knowledge of ourselves and knowledge of God. Thus, the fact that revelation takes place in human categories entails, for these thinkers, a relationship between the being of God and the language of creatures by which God communicates. In turn, what is implied is a likeness between creation and God that allows words to carry meaning about both. Moreover, such a move enables them to claim that God is receptive and as such is affected by creatures.[109] This is partly because these thinkers believe both humans and God function (passibly) and that, as Oord puts it, He has 'no good reason to think divine love is different in this respect'.[110] The attempt seems to be to circumvent what is seen as the fundamental problem of classical analogy, which Elizabeth A. Johnson describes thus:

> Since it rejects any identity between God and creature while insisting on a similarity between them, Scholastic analogy lapses into logical unclarity; like a balloon cut loose from its mooring, it floats in the air.[111]

Johnson's point is that scholastic analogy requires both a strong distinction between creature and creator whilst still arguing for a similarity as evidenced in the use of analogy, resulting in a use of language that seems paradoxical. This paradoxical argument suggests that creatures are like something that cannot be known, reducing this 'likeness' to mystery. The desire of Moltmann and Oord is to avoid what can be viewed as a paradoxical type of God talk without ending up with equivocal or univocal language only.

Although both groups believe there is an intrinsic nature to the analogy, this is being employed in different ways. For Moltmann and Oord, the intrinsic nature thereby communicates

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[108] Moltmann, 'The Passibility or Impassibility of God', 115.
[109] Oord, 'Analogies of Love between God and Creatures', 28.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Elizabeth A. Johnson, 'The Right Way to Speak About God: Pannenberg on Analogy', *Theological Studies*, 43, no 4 (Dec 1982): 684.

a basic meaning without reducing God to creaturely status or elevating creatures to the level of God. In this use of analogy, it is assumed there are things that can be known from the use of language without there being a total knowledge of God, or even the meaning of the words. Hence, the 'self-revelation' of God through language means that the idea of God as love is communicated using a creaturely word with a creaturely definition – to this degree, God is understood to be love. However, it also assumes that God is more than this definition, that although we can make a claim about God and love from this creaturely category, this claim should not be taken to be exhaustive. In short, it does not assume a univocal understanding between love for God and love for us. Alternatively, the classical view holds that the meaning of the word is found *properly* only in God,[112] meaning that there is a distinct asymmetry between what can be said *(im)properly* predicated of humans and what can be *properly* predicated of God. Weinandy, in describing Aquinas' thoughts, says that:

> What God reveals in word and action is beyond finite reality and beyond man's normal ways of obtaining knowledge, and thus is verifiable not by a superior philosophical knowledge, but by God's authority.[113]

In this quote, the gap between the two positions becomes apparent. For whilst both would agree that God reveals and that this knowledge rests on God's authority, Moltmann would contend that God reveals through finite reality, either by showing His likeness (such as with a passible love relation) or by showing what He is opposite to (grace and sin).[114] Because Moltmann holds revelation as important, he would likely agree with much of the above quote; however, where he departs is not whether there are things beyond our knowledge, but that certain disclosures can be understood via the creaturely categories through which God works. To this end, passibility is

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[113] Weinandy, *Does God Change?,* 73.
[114] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 21.

extremely important because for Moltmann, descriptions of God's emotional life are akin to the human experience of these things.

In myriad ways, what is striking about the claims of Moltmann and Oord is the implicit value they see in the attempt of many classical thinkers to preserve a form of God-talk that allows for both mystery and some level of knowledge about God. The differences lie in whether they believe these classical attempts are successful (assuming that they are not) and their desire for 'divine reception' (in a passible sense).[115] In other words, these passibilist thinkers want to claim that God can be affected by creation. These two desires are linked in several ways. The desire to talk meaningfully about God whilst maintaining divine mystery and the belief in divine passibility (and affectedness) results in linguistic moves that show how God can be spoken of in a way that describes His passibility whilst ensuring that His mystery is maintained. Moltmann and Oord argue that this is best accomplished via analogy, albeit a different use of analogy to that of most classical accounts.

For passible thinkers, there is the suggestion that a 'literalness' is intended for the words used to describe God, but not that these words reveal the fullness of God.[116] Thus, it is not that God can be said to be 'just' the creaturely definition; instead, it claims that God is revealed to an extent by that definition, but not wholly. Therefore, one can make a positive claim about who God is on the basis of a 'bi-directional' analogy, but can never claim to fully know God. This means that *a non-classical account can posit (as Moltmann and Oord do) that God 'experiences' without making the concept of God's experience a purely creaturely one.*

In a passibilist account of analogy, God can be said to 'experience'. Experience here means something similar and knowable to a creaturely meaning of experience, without it being entirely the same meaning. For example, one might say a passible God experiences joy, implying that experience and joy communicate something according to a creaturely understanding of these

[115] Oord, 'Analogies of Love between God and Creatures', 28
[116] These thinkers often adopt the sort of approach and critique levelled by Terrance E. Fretheim, see Terrance E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God; an Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1984), 7.

words (we might say God is affected, happy, and so on), but the passibilist thinker can also maintain that God's experience differs from creaturely experience, and that joy is understood in a different (perfect, intrinsic, and perhaps in other ways) manner. Moreover, because God is understood to be passible, the human understanding of words that might involve passibility can also be applied to God, and thus there is a passible sense to words such as love, joy, and so on that would not be applied in a classical account. However, the important point here is that just because some words now bear a likeness due to passibility, this likeness is not univocity.[117]

For Moltmann, this is achieved by claiming both 'revelation of the opposite' and 'the analogical principle that "like only being known by like"'.[118] Here, the analogical claim of 'likeness' is held in tension with an otherness of God. Moltmann believes that unless God reveals himself as He who identifies with (and indeed is) those who are abandoned, rejected, and despised, then analogy would only result in a theology of glory. Instead, analogy shows that God is that which is glorified yet also that which is despised; He is understood and both like and unlike, worshipped and despised. And it is in this tension that the church lives, as it seeks to be for the other, and worships the God who is despised.[119] Moltmann's point is that analogy is key in articulating a passible God; alongside revelation, this allows one to construe God as both like us and yet more than this. Moltmann needs the revelation of the opposite in order to allow human knowledge of God. As he puts it, 'if the principle of likeness is applied strictly, then God is only known by God'.[120] It is this idea that Moltmann seeks to move away from by making revelation such a central part of his theology and holding it in tension with analogy. That the classical form of analogy precludes knowing God is essentially the main fear of passible thinkers.

Finally, despite the differences in the use of analogy, it remains important that both positions seek to employ an analogical understanding rather than a univocal one. This is because

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[117] Of course, some passibilists would claim there is a univocity in God-talk; however, it seems to be the case that this is not an essential way of understanding God-talk in relation to a passible God.
[118] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 22.
[119] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 22-23.
[120] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 21.

both recognise that univocal language often leads to the creator-creature distinction breaking down. This is a result of effectively making a claim that God can be discussed in the way that humans are discussed, that is, with us knowing exactly how God 'experiences' and 'what' God experiences. Conversely, by using analogy, both positions maintain that there are things beyond our knowledge. The core difference, however, comes down to exactly how much can be known and what can be said, with non-classical accounts of analogy suggesting that more can be known than a classical account would allow, especially in enabling us to say that God is in some sense like us. Despite this claim, the non-classical account continues to assert that there are limits to this knowledge and denies a univocity of language in God-talk.

### (1.3.3) How does analogy affect the impassibility debate?

As alluded to in the previous section, the bi-directional conception of analogy is rooted in a passibilist conception of both divine and creaturely love. Jürgen Moltmann argues in *The Crucified God* that for God to be 'love' as the Bible claims, He must be passible. Moltmann writes that 'were God incapable of suffering in any respect, and therefore in an absolute sense, then He would also be incapable of love'.[121] For Moltmann, the involvement in suffering (whether this is physical or non-physical) on behalf of/or with others is a necessary requirement for a loving relationship. This is because a being which cannot be involved is 'insensitive' and 'unfeeling' and hence unable to love.[122] Thus, according to Moltmann, if we wish to maintain that God is 'love' then we must contend that that He is passible. Moltmann's view of the cross is central to accounting for the significance of this assertion. He believes the cross is the central point of Christian theology, as seen in his quoting of Martin Luther's famous phrase '*crux probat omnia*'.[123] Moltmann implies that the cross is the lens through which we should view all theology, including

[121] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 23.
[122] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 229.
[123] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 1.

the divine attributes and the assertion that God is love. For Moltmann, then, the idea that 'God is love' is revealed most fully on and through the cross, because it is the cross that shows us God must be passible, so it is through this lens that we see God as responsive to suffering (and therefore as involved on behalf of the other) and therefore learn what it means to say that 'God is love'.[124] Thus, Moltmann's theology is primarily a crucicentric approach. This, however, leads him to make definitional claims, given that his view of the cross then prescribes what can and cannot be said. For instance, any account of love that does not, in Moltmann's view, fit with a (specific) view of the cross ought to be discounted, as such a thing is not love according to the standard he has created. Moltmann's approach here is to make the cross as central, and he does so, in part, by tying love and suffering together. The bond that Moltmann creates (between the cross, love, and suffering) means that if one is to think of God in these terms, one is forced to either assume divine passibility or deny that God is love. This is because the denial of divine suffering equates to the denial of God as love.[125]

Richard Bauckham writes that Moltmann's approach to love includes a focus on God's involvement with creatures, meaning that 'vulnerability to suffering is essential'.[126] He reiterates that Moltmann's argument that 'if God is "love" then He must be passible' is based upon his reflection on the events of the cross and the idea of divine involvement. The fact that Moltmann roots his conception of love in the theology of the cross reveals an important logic to his

[124] This also highlights how Moltmann's approach begins as an epistemic argument which draws heavily on human experience and phenomenology, yet quickly morphs into a speculative metaphysical discussion on who God is in Godself (moving from discussion on the cross to discussion on God as Love). In turn, this highlights how language more broadly describes both God's action (in this case on the cross) and also who God is said to be in Godself (in this case a specific version of 'God is love'), and can do so in differing ways (making the topic of language and its use key).

[125] As we shall see, Moltmann here is presupposing a series of ideas. But this is true for all sides of the debate. In order to talk meaningfully, both sides assume certain things about a number of topics such as language or revelation and its interpretation. These topics are key since the approaches in question (as we can already see) result in quite different schemas, especially in what they say about God and the way in which God is understood and approached by creation.

[126] Richard Bauckham, 'In Defence of the Crucified God' in *The Power and Weakness of God: Impassibility and Orthodoxy*. Paper presented at the Third Edinburgh Conference in Christian Dogmatics, 1989 (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 95.

theology. Specifically, Moltmann is not arguing that love requires God to be passible (as though love entailed this intrinsically). Instead, he is interpreting what it is for God to be loving based on his view of the cross: namely, that God reveals himself to be 'love' in an act of suffering. Writing on Moltmann, Daniel Castelo explains that 'the themes of suffering and love are once again interrelated in non-distinguishable form'.[127] For Moltmann, his understanding of the love of God derives from his view of the cross as the place where God suffers for us. As Bauckham points out, Moltmann is not arguing for a kind of natural reason. On the contrary, by making the cross central, Moltmann's theology is rooted in a specific understanding of the biblical text, which then informs his understanding of how God acts in the world. In this way, we see that definitional claims enter Moltmann's argument, but beginning from the cross rather than a pre-established, extra-biblical definition of love. This 'definition' is therefore the implicit starting point for Moltmann's thinking. Hence, one might wonder if it is the cross or these definitional claims that denote the beginning point.

An important critique of the link Moltmann and other passibilists construct between the cross and passibility, and with the conception of God as love, is made by Robin Cook. Cook argues that this connection is simply the presupposition of the passibilist played out in another area of theology.[128] Cook points out that whilst the connection between passibility and love emerges out of Moltmann's view of the cross, it is not self-evident that this view of the cross leads to this view of love[129] as the connection between them (and also passibility) pre-supposes other theological commitments. For example, an intrinsic connection between love and suffering, the cross as the primary lens, the nature of Christ, and so on. In essence, for Moltmann there is an assumed foundation that affects other theological discussions, even if there is no overt connection made between these theological ideas. Moreover, Moltmann has also

[127] Daniel Castelo, *Only the Impassible God Can Help: Moltmann and the Contemporary Status of Divine Impassibility* (Duke University, 2005), 222.
[128] Robin Cook, *Divine Impassibility, Divine Love* (Cardiff: Cardiff University, 2006), 154.
[129] Ibid.

made claims about the cross which he often takes for granted when discussing other areas of his theology. Nevertheless, he is explicit in his view that the cross forms the starting point for theology, which is why he makes the claims he does. Furthermore, because Cook fails to provide an alternative interpretation of the cross, he also fails to adequately address Moltmann's reasoning. As a result, he fundamentally misses the point of Moltmann's subsequent working (in this case, love). That said, Moltmann's position also leads to the natural attack that to disagree with his view of the cross is to render his view of love redundant, because the two are essentially related. If one presents an alternative reading, then the rest of his theology is also weakened, as the underpinning framework is no longer accepted. Therefore, to critique what Moltmann thinks about God's love, it is essential to formulate an alternative view of how the cross and God's love function in relationship with each other. The absence of such therefore causes one to talk past Moltmann rather than engage in a theological discussion of the issue at hand, as one is not addressing the root of the argument. Instead, the focus has become the outworking of Moltmann's theology. Any critique of the theological outcome must be rooted in a critique of the foundational claim if it is to address the central issue. The response to Cook's critique is to make obvious his failure to engage with the foundations of Moltmann's position. One might disagree that this is the correct focal point for theology; nevertheless we must recognise that his primary conviction that 'the cross probes everything' impacts the rest of his theology. From this, we can then infer a key reason as to why Moltmann would argue for a passible God based on his interpretation of the event of the cross. For Moltmann, the primary and ultimate example that God is passible comes from the cross, where God is seen as love. This is not to say that Cook is incorrect to assert that Moltmann holds unsubstantiated pre-suppositions, but the point is that he has not properly engaged with the way Moltmann formulates his argument. That said, the point regarding pre-suppositions is an important one, because it highlights that the idea of 'starting from the cross' necessarily comes with a foundational claim about what this means. In

this sense, it would seem that the definitional pre-suppositions matter to Moltmann as much as the classical approaches he critiques.

Building on Moltmann's passibilism, Oord argues that love is a 'two-way street': 'a love relationship involves multiple parties being affected… love presupposes that the lover has been influenced by the beloved'.[130] Thus, love requires both some kind of response and an opening up of yourself to the other, and hence is expected to affect both God and the creature and involves, as Oord goes on to say, 'give-and-receive relations.'[131] For Oord, there is a distinct sense that love requires both parties involved to be affected by the other. This is an essential part of what it is to be involved in a 'love relationship'. In part, this type of description is related to the way Oord believes analogical relations work (as discussed earlier in chapter one). Oord believes that one can employ analogical language in a symmetrical manner which articulates something that is true for both God and the creature. Accordingly, claiming that a love relationship involves multiple parties being affected might reflect how he understands human relations. This, in turn, can be applied to a human divine relationship, given that he believes the word 'love' is applied analogically when discussing God and creatures. Oord's aim is to demonstrate that referring to God as involved in a love relationship entails some of what we would expect in a love relationship between humans.

Moltmann's belief that God experiences emotions and changes through His relationship with a passible creation colours his idea of relationships. For instance, if humans are passible, and relationships involve an experiential nature, then this is also how the divine-human relationship works. Such a view is to some degree anthropocentric, which in part is a result of how Moltmann views the use of language. As I have shown in the discussion on analogy, Moltmann views language as communicating a meaning that can be used (at a basic level) to apply to both God and creation. Consequently, Moltmann can claim a fundamental similarity

[130] Oord, 'Analogies of Love between God and Creatures', 28-29.
[131] Oord, 'Analogies of Love between God and Creatures', 28.

between human relationships and the divine-human relationship (partly due to the fact that both humans and God are passible). This link means that divine revelation is understood, to a degree, in human terms, without allowing Moltmann to claim a 'full' knowledge of God.

As demonstrated, analogy is about how one understands God-talk to function; and, moreover, the way in which we think revelation is understood. Clearly, it would be wrong to claim that Aquinas (if we accept the reading of him espoused earlier) or other impassibilist thinkers disregard the idea of revelation in regard to God-talk. Rather, the question concerns the pre-suppositions one holds in discussing said revelation. If one believes God is fundamentally beyond knowledge and comprehension, then revelation is fundamentally limited by our creaturely status, as Pseudo-Dionysius explains:

> Guide us to that topmost height of mystic lore which exceedeth light and more than exceedeth knowledge, where the simple, absolute, and unchangeable mysteries of heavenly Truth lie hidden in the dazzling obscurity of the secret Silence, outshining all brilliance with the intensity of their darkness, and surcharging our blinded intellects with the utterly impalpable and invisible fairness of glories which exceed all beauty![132]

In this passage Pseudo-Dionysius clearly marks the revelation of God, and to a degree describes revelation as a process through which God guides us (using apophatic language). Nevertheless, what is described is beyond what we can properly describe in human categories, or at least fully understand. In the same vein, the classical use of analogical language describes the revelation of God in a way that places limits on the creaturely understanding of God, safeguarding a creator-creature distinction. Such a view, however, differs substantively from the way in which Oord or Moltmann describe God and revelation as things known and describable, if not fully known or completely describable. This is not to reduce this form of analogy to the sort of critique suggested by Johnson. On the contrary, it indicates that because God reveals using human

[132] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, Chapter One, trans. C.E. Rolt, https://ccel.org/ccel/rolt/dionysius/dionysius.v.html

categories, then these categories (language, experience, etc) can be said to be true of God. This is not to deny that the passibilist approach places limits on what can be known or described – a passibilist would likely contend that knowing God's love is like human love, which is a different claim to knowing what it is for God *to be* love (even if we know we can claim it). What emerges is a distinct difference between where the two sides draw their lines in regard to revelation, knowledge, and description. In this way, the use of analogy is both epistemic and metaphysical. This passibilist use of analogy accepts that knowledge is derived from revelation and so requires language that articulates what can be known from the revelation and to what degree (in this sense it is an epistemic claim). Such epistemological claims are made on a metaphysical assumption that knowledge is derived from divine revelation.[133] In this way, the language of analogy is key because it carries ontological implications for claims about God, which are always held within a sense of mystery. For Moltmann and others, there is a desire to use revelation (in this case the biblical texts) to orientate language use.[134]

In terms of the (im)passibility debate, the question of language is fundamental in that both positions use similar phrases and concepts but come to a radically different conclusion, partly on the basis of how they believe analogy functions. However, it is not that either side disregards

[133] This is not necessarily unique of passibilists, as Joshua P. Hochschild argues; analogy is used as both epistemic and metaphysical in the thought of Aquinas (although this is slightly different from my argument above). See, Joshua P. Hochschild, 'Aquinas's Two Concepts of Analogy and a Complex Semantics for Naming the Simple God', The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review, 83, 2, (2019) 161. Additionally, it's worth noting that debates around the use of language (its use and purpose) are not only confined to 'modern' thinkers (such as Moltmann). Hochschild notes that almost all interpreters of Aquinas on analogy are forced to engage in various debates; he describes these debates in the following way, 'Is there a theory that could be explicitly stated, or did Aquinas have principled reasons for not developing a systematic theory of analogy? Did his views on analogy develop over his career? Is analogy primarily a metaphysical or a logical teaching for Aquinas? Is there a consistent, or at least most mature, account of different modes or types of analogy in Aquinas?' This illustrates that while Moltmann's account contains both epistemic and Metaphysical discussions, this might also be considered true of Aquinas. While Moltmann is using analogy in a specific way, it would be a mistake to suggest that the concerns he has are not shared by impassibilist thinkers. See, Hochschild, 'Aquinas's Two Concepts of Analogy and a Complex Semantics for Naming the Simple God', 159–160.

[134] While it would be unfair to suggest this aim is not a desire shared by classical thinkers, the claims of passibility v impassibility (and symmetry v asymmetry) fundamentally shape how analogy is understood and used. Consequently, because there are differing presuppositions on the use of language (especially in relation to interpreting revelation), the discussion on (im)passbilility begins from different places (even if the words used would suggest the same starting position).

analogy in favour of univocity or equivocation, but that classical and non-classical approaches assume different things. Unlike most classical approaches, many non-classical uses of analogy (such as Moltmann or Oord) posit that humans have a specific knowledge of God (via a passible revelation), a bi-directionality (symmetry) of language, and an intrinsic meaning to words, resulting in differing assertions about what can be said of God and the creation. Together, these result in the claim that divine-human communication (revelation) articulates about God via human language things that are properly said of both (e.g. God loves and humans love). Whilst this articulation is properly said of both God and humans (in an analogical sense), it is God who remains the ground of these things. This is because God is understood to *be* love, justice, and mercy as intrinsic to His being, whereas humans are created to be loving, just, and merciful out of God's creation. Therefore, a univocal account would not be satisfactory because humans cannot be said to *be* these things; rather, we possess them because of God. That said, the suggestion that these things are understood passibly (for both God and creatures) means there can be likeness, in the way that Moltmann desires, without a univocity.

Notwithstanding this bi-directionality, an analogical impetus remains. For example, to say the Father suffers is not to say He suffers in the same way as humans do, but it is to say that there is a 'likeness' regarding 'to suffer'. In this sense, it is not that God has become a human – He remains distinct – but yet there is a sense in which the descriptions that are applied can be understood as applying in a basic sense to both humans and God, albeit not in a univocal way.[135] Likewise, this is not to be understood in an equivocal way – it is not that suffering now has two meanings, one human and one divine; instead, it suggests that some of what it is to 'suffer' is true of both a human manifestation and a divine manifestation, but these are not identical.

[135] It is in this that we see both the epistemological and the metaphysical relating to each other. The denial of univocal language in favour of analogy provides accurate, understandable communication about who God is, without making an exhaustive claim, thereby preserving ideas of divine mystery and unknowability. The key difference is that passibility is counted as primarily something known by (human experience) and revealed to us (divine revelation), even if the mode of this experience is, at least in part, unknown.

This analogical understanding of suffering or emotions allows the passibilist to claim that we may understand God's suffering or emotions to a degree (a basic similarity due to passibility), yet not fully understand the precise way in which God 'experiences' these things. Using such a version of analogy rather than a univocal sense allows the passibilist to maintain a creator-creature distinction (albeit differently from a classical thinker) as well as a sense in which one can have some positive knowledge of God. For the passibilist, God is able to have relationships and emotions without being reduced to a creaturely way of experiencing. Indeed, all of these terms – 'emotions', 'experiences', and so on – are to be understood in an analogical way, but this is thought to communicate an understanding that can be applied to both God and creation without fully articulating what is going on. This account of analogy is unlike univocity, in that it maintains a clear difference between God and creatures (the two are not reducible to one another). But unlike the asymmetric or uni-directional analogy, the bi-directional account places more emphasis on human language. The bi-directional account suggests that our understanding of words is shaped by our passible experience of the world and of God, and as God is also considered to be passible, then words used to describe God (such as love) can be understood as denoting a passible meaning. And so even though there is an irreducible analogical difference between God and creature (for example, God experiences differently to the creature), we should acknowledge that God is still experiencing (in some sense) passibly. For example, to say that God is loving somehow still corresponds to our, however improper, passible understanding of what it is to be loving, but this does not mean humans are 'love' in the way that we might say 'God is love'. The two key differences in the way this is understood are passibility and symmetry, which render this non-classical account quite different to the classical accounts explored earlier.

This subsection illustrates not only some of the core considerations of each side (such as bi-directionality, (im)passibility, knowledge, revelation, and so on) but also one of the essential ways in which each side constructs its argument. The differing uses of analogical predication mean that the two positions are almost destined to disagree because the most basic forms of

God-talk are not aligned. Thus, as this thesis continues, particularly in this chapter, the disagreements should be understood as being starker than they first appear because the mechanisms for their discussion and description are unaligned. It is evident that this linguistic commitment fundamentally shapes the way in which one orientates God-talk, and thus our interpretation of divine revelation. The theological use of analogy deeply affects what we consider are the appropriate ways to talk about God and what can be said of God, in that the question revolves around what can be *properly* said of God.[136] In this sense, the words we use, and the way we use them, are connected to the appropriateness of this action. Accordingly, the question of whether it is appropriate to assert that God loves like humans is both a question of analogy and of 'fittingness'. It is to this question that I now turn.

### (1.3.4) What is Fitting?

The discussion around analogy is, as shown, related to what is considered appropriate for describing God and how this description takes place. As such, it is related to the discussion of what 'befits' God and God-talk. Thus far, I have presented two similar yet distinct approaches to the subject of analogy, and to God-talk. The question of 'fittingness' now opens this discussion up to a number of other points regarding (im)passibility, before focusing once again on the question of analogy.

The debates of the early Christians and Pagans elucidate the discussion on the fittingness of the emotions of God/ gods, as Gavrilyuk notes:

> What manner of divine involvement was most appropriate? What intentions, emotions, and actions may fittingly be ascribed to God? Early Fathers and poets gave very different answers to these questions.[137]

[136] Indeed, as argued above, the use of language designates what we think it is true to say of both God's being (who God is) and God's action (what God does).
[137] Gavrilyuk, 'The Christian God v. Passionate Pagan Deities', 50

As Gavrilyuk goes on to elucidate, the gods of antiquity are often prone to very human emotions and experiences, whether it be rage, lust, jealousy, or joy. The Greek Gods, however, often seemed ruled by their emotions and vices. The deeply important contribution of Christian thought is that although God may have what Gavrilyuk calls 'emotionally coloured characteristics', these are nonetheless within God's total control; that is to say, God is not ruled by His emotions or characteristics and 'morally objectional emotions are foreign to Him'.[138]

For a large number of impassibilists, the notion that God would suffer in the flesh (as drawn out by Cyril) as the incarnate God is quite acceptable; for example, Aquinas' argument that Christ's death is fitting[139] However, this is quite different to claiming that Christ dies or suffers in his divine nature, or that God dies or suffers in Godself. There are a number of reasons why one might reject suffering and emotion, some of which have already been discussed whilst others will be discussed in subsequent subsections. One question raised by Creel is whether God feels the disappointment of the sadist when the object of their torture dies.[140] If an impassible God is 'forced' to feel the emotions of all of creation, then God would be forced to feel, as Gavrilyuk puts it, 'morally objectionable emotions.'[141] Such a conception of divine passibility is indeed worrying, and appears to be the unfortunate consequence of the arguments of liberation made by James Cone, namely, that God suffers with the oppressed.[142] For if Cone is right in asserting that God always experiences with the oppressed due to His engagement in suffering, then, as Creel argues, surely God must also be destined to suffer with those who persecute. If Creel is correct then passibility would seem to force God to suffer the emotions of those who perform evil acts.[143] Such a view seems abhorrent and is likely to be rejected, but if

[138] Ibid.
[139] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, III, Q.50.
[140] Creel, *Divine Impassibility,* 118.
[141] Gavrilyuk, 'The Christian God v. Passionate Pagan Deities', 51.
[142] Cones, *God of the Oppressed,* 177.
[143] Creel, *Divine Impassibility,* 118.

true then it would seem to be 'unfitting' for God due to the way it identifies Him with the perpetrators of evil.

By contrast, passibilists would not tend to use classical language such as 'fittingness' but would nevertheless pursue an almost identical line of argument. An example is Moltmann's argument that a God who cannot suffer cannot love.[144] On this basis, the passibility of God would be considered 'fitting' because of how this has been linked to the description of 'God is love'. Indeed, Fretheim perhaps takes this even further and argues that many traditional ways of speaking about God need revising as they do not take seriously the lived experience of Christians; they need to rethink their conceptions in light of biblical metaphors that are 'not merely illustrative or decorative' and, instead, do indeed tell us something about God.[145] If this is the case, then passibility would seem to befit God on the basis that this reading of scripture (and understanding of love) 'reveals' a passible God. Paul Fiddes, in discussing Barth and Moltmann, contends that divine emotion, suffering, and being are tied together along with the relationships of God, both as Trinity and with the creation. Moreover, these are all determined by God. For instance, he writes that:

> He determines that when he determines his own being. Our circles of relationship always interlock with those of the divine being or event, for God is at the centre of them all. But the circle of relationships which is the Father, Son, and Spirit is always deeper and more inexhaustible in personalness than our relationships are. The interweaving movements of his being are richer in suffering, giving, and joy, so that the mystery of God is not what we do not know of him, but what we do know.[146]

Fiddes' argument is that God's being is relational, and within the moments of His existence are the experiences or 'events' that we would describe as passible, whether it be suffering, joy, or

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[144] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 23.
[145] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 16. Indeed, the way Fretheim sets up his argument seems to suggest the analogical understanding of God that is propagated by Moltmann and Oord.
[146] Paul Fiddes, *The Creative Suffering Of God,* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 143.

something else. But this is natural to a God who is relational, and so for God to be passible is in fact a 'fitting' description. Thus, according to Fiddes and others, it is only when He is passible that God could be described in these relational terms. It is this argument that is employed to imply that passibility befits God, for it is necessary (under these definitions) in order to have a relational God.

Both of these positions are clearly drawing on both the fears and strengths of their 'traditions'. For the impassibilist, particularly early impassibilists, the threats of Yahweh being described like the gods of antiquity poses a problem. No less of a problem are the objections raised by Creel that passibility forces God to take on abhorrent characteristics or feelings. Equally, the strength of their argument allows for the immutability of God to come to the fore, for whilst passibilist thinkers such as Fretheim criticise impassibilists for their use of scripture,[147] the same argument could well be reversed when describing immutability, as discussed in the next chapter. Conversely, passibilists are concerned with the view of God traditionally presented that prevents God from being love, or even engaging relationally with creation. Moreover, as Rob Lister notes, there seems to be a perception that classical readings of scripture have distorted the text and provide a warped view of God.[148] As well as these concerns, there are the distinct benefits that Moltmann (and others) theological programme brings, such as the passible relational approach to God under their analogical reading of this, and the development of this schema in a number of directions such as Liberation Theology and Open Theism.

Additionally, as noted earlier, the question of fittingness is deeply tied to the subject of analogy and language, for at its heart is the desire to know what can be properly said of God and how these things can be said. As we have already seen, both passibilists and impassibilists employ analogical language in regard to God-talk but do so very differently. With regard to fittingness, one impassibilist approach would be to argue that because of the distinctions

[147] Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 16.
[148] Rob Lister*, God Is Impassible and Impassioned: Toward a Theology Of Divine Emotion* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2013), 130-131.

between us and God, what we know and what can be said is limited. One example of this is the way Pseudo-Dionysus describes God, as examined earlier.[149] Moreover, the classical use of analogy (as applied to our creaturely status) means we can claim to love 'like' God, but the converse is not true. This highlights and protects the creator-creature distinction by curtailing what can be said of God, and limiting how this is said. In this way, the impassible approach to analogy indicates that an impassible God is more fitting because creatures are radically different from the creator, as exposed by the divide between an impassible immutable God and passible mutable creation. These differences serve to highlight why classical analogy works the way it does, emphasising the differences between God and creation and striving to find a fitting way to describe this.

Conversely, the passible-mutable argument would be that although both God and creatures are passible and mutable, there is an analogical relationship at play when describing them as such. This concept of analogy assumes that the use of the word 'passible' in, on a basic level, is true for both God and the creature, yet is not univocal. This means that whilst both humans and God can be said to be passible, this is not in a univocal sense given that God may be said to experience differently to humans. Nevertheless, this is still 'experience' and so is not devoid of the similarity necessary for analogical predication. In fact, on this account, there must be a basic similarity that is true for both God and creatures, even if this does not fully articulate the meaning of the word (in this respect it cannot be said to be a univocal meaning). Through this usage, a passibilist can posit that God being passible does not compromise the creator-creature distinction and instead describes a 'fitting' way to talk about God, which is to predicate of God various emotions without reducing Him to a creaturely experience. In doing so, whilst simultaneously maintaining an understanding of the words that is bi-directional, the passibilist is

[149] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology,* Chapter One.

able to posit that God's passible experience is 'like' that of creation without eschewing the notion that God's experience is also different.

Finally, there remains the issue of what we usually expect of an impassible versus a passible 'thing'. In general, I believe it is fair to say that creatures or objects that are impassible are also inanimate objects. For example, the chair upon which I sit is impassible, and it is also inanimate. Conversely, creatures that are alive and who form relationships and connections such as dogs or humans can be said to be passible and animate. Thus, the question remains as to why one might claim that God is impassible, if all things that possess impassibility are also inanimate. This is not to detract from the other significant contributions of impassibilist thought on this question, nor does it solve the issues present within passible theologies. However, it does present an intriguing problem. One might follow Anselm and say that God is unlike both inanimate objects and other creaturely beings on account of the fact that He exists necessarily, and that God is 'that-than-which-a-greater-cannot-be-thought'.[150] And so one might say that impassibility, in the case of created things, is not necessarily how it ought to be understood when applying this term to God. Whilst this is not a reason to reject impassibility, it does highlight how different the impassibilist approach is from our ordinary understanding and use of language: that if all language is filtered through a specific analogical understanding, then all 'God-talk' must also be understood through this lens. Indeed, as noted earlier, divine impassibility has been traditionally qualified as an analogical term: that God's impassibility is not the same as the impassibility of the created chair.

However, if divine impassibility is an analogical and not univocal term, then one can also make the case for an analogical account of divine passibility, where God may be said to be passible, but passible in a way that is different from creaturely passibility. Consequently, we may question whether an inevitably analogical account of divine *impassibility* or a similarly analogical

[150] Anselm of Canterbury, 'Reply to Gaunilo', in *The Major Works*, eds., Brian Davies and G.R. Evans, (Oxford University Press, 2008), 111-112.

account of divine *passibility* is more appropriate for our construal of God's divine character.[151] This then is not a rejection of impassibility *per se*, rather it is the suggestion that it is more intuitive to qualify passibility than impassibility. From a passibilist perspective, if one is going to advocate the use of analogical qualifications to suggest that God is unlike other impassible objects, then it would seem to have once again resulted in their major concern of forcing God-talk into 'logical unclarity'.[152] Clearly, whether one thinks these sort of qualifications are an appropriate use of language is going to depend on how one views analogy (and language more broadly), and in which ways one seeks to qualify (im)passibility. Thus, the question of whether it is 'better' to say that God is impassible or not remains the subject of debate. That said, there are two key reasons why this thesis will suggest that analogical passibility is a more fitting use of language to use when describing God. Firstly, the word 'passibility' usually denotes affection and experience in a way that impassibility does not. This aligns with the way this thesis seeks to utilise the arguments from 20th century passibilist thinkers. Secondly, passibility implies a different use of language to traditional views, especially since impassibility is usually linked to traditional views on analogy (for example, as espoused by Aquinas). In particular, the bi-directional analogy proposed in this chapter provides more similarity to usual (lay or non-academic) uses of language (which are a concern of this thesis as outlined in the introduction), without collapsing language use into univocity. The account of bi-directional analogy developed in this chapter thus not only seeks to provide a more robust theological understanding of the predication of 'passibility' to God (especially in relation to biblical accounts of God), it also seeks to affirm and theoretically account for lay expressions of the Christian God as a passible God.

[151] In this sense, I am not suggesting that hat God *needs* to be 'passible' in order to experience emotions *per se*. Rather my suggestion is that, given how these terms are usually understood, it makes more sense to describe God's experience as passible, rather than as impassible. This is because there is some inaccuracy in both of these terms, due to the use of analogy, but it would seem that passibility is marginally more accurate given that we usually understand experience/ emotions as being passible rather than impassible.
[152] Johnson, 'The Right way to Speak About God', 684.

These reasons then underscore the value in using passibility rather than impassibility in an analogical sense to describe God. What this subsection demonstrates is that if one is to adopt a passibilist approach to divine being, this cannot be undertaken in isolation from the impassibilist concerns. Therefore, the final subsection presents a definition of passibility formed in the light of the concerns and strengths of the impassibilist position. Although not every concern can be addressed, this definition will provide some nuance to the debate as I continue forward.

Throughout this chapter I have elucidated some of the ways in which theologians treat the question of passibility. I have shown that some thinkers attempt to maintain some classical attributes, such as Oord's desire to maintain a form of divine simplicity.[153] When it comes to (im)mutability, most passibilists assert that God is in fact mutable and capable of change, therefore God is able to experience emotions and/or suffer. Anastasia Scrutton notes that 'the philosophical literature on the impassibility debate has defined "passibility" primarily in terms of emotion (or feelings or affects) and mutability'.[154] Whilst the topic of immutability will be a core concern of the following chapter, what has become apparent is that there is a distinct divide between passibilists and impassibilists on this issue. Despite this, clear contributions to the discourse are made by thinkers on both sides, so the aim here is to take on board some of those key considerations.

Firstly, I address the concern raised by Gavrilyuk that many of the church fathers fear passibility ties God to vices and morally dubious emotions and behaviours.[155] To some degree, this mirrors the concern of Creel that a passible God must feel the sadness of the sadist.[156] The issue with these two ideas is that it ties God's emotional responses to the act of creatures without admitting agency to God. To take Creel's example of God feeling with the sadist, I argue that this functions in a similar way to human compassion and empathy. We do not feel sadness with

[153] Oord, 'Strong Impassibility Response', 51.
[154] Anastasia Scrutton, 'Divine Passibility: God and Emotion', *Philosophy Compass*, 8, Issue 9 (2013): 867.
[155] Gavrilyuk, 'The Christian God v. Passionate Pagan Deities', 51.
[156] Creel, *Divine Impassibility,* 118.

the sadist at the death of his victim; instead, we feel sadness with the victim. Some perhaps may feel sadness that the sadist chose this path or question their mental state with pity, but we do not share the emotional response of the sadist**.** This, however, does not mean there is a lack of emotional response, and this is the key distinction. For God, there is a full range of emotional responses available if He has a relationship with humanity and with some humans specifically. However, this relationship does not require that He responds in the same way every time, but that He responds in consistency with His character. Where this concept is perhaps most obvious in theology is where we routinely make the distinction between God's hatred of sin and His love for the sinner. Here, one could argue that we have a clear indication that the emotional response of God is complicated, as it is not determined by the emotions of the human heart but is, nevertheless, formed in relation to the human heart. Additionally, this is the topic where qualified forms of both passibility and impassibility find themselves on similar ground. A helpful solution to this is provided by Gavrilyuk himself who, writing in favour of impassibility, says:

> The God of Christians is impassible, free from passions, in the sense that, unlike Dionysius, he is not prone to debauchery; unlike Apollo, he is not a woman-hunter; unlike Persephone and Aphrodite, he is not engaged in rivalry over the handsome Adonis; unlike Zeus, he neither corrupts young boys (Ganymede), nor shows partiality towards his illegitimate sons (Achilles). In this context divine impassibility means that God is above the passions of envy, lust, and all selfish desires.[157]

Thus, the impassibilist argument is to ensure that God is seen as different to all other beings or creatures. Impassibility in this sense places God above negative, evil, or sinful emotions or passions. However, I argue that a qualified form of passibility also seeks to prevent these forms of emotions being applied to God. It is precisely because God is passible that His emotional activity does not cause Him to become like the sadist. Because of this, we must first say that a

[157] Gavrilyuk, 'The Christian God v. Passionate Pagan Deities', 48-50.

passible God is one whose emotional response remains consistent with His character, much like ours does, but that God's character is not prone to the sinful desires of humans, because God has not ceased to be holy.

Secondly, whilst the idea of 'God as love' is generally taken to be understood in a passibilist reading, the importance of the critique levelled by impassibilists with regard to immutability should not be understated. Moreover, the impassibilist critique is that passibilist ideas of love have a tendency to admit the passive potency of God. Such a critique is often valid, and so a passible God must also be one who is immutable, for whilst passibilists wish to acknowledge the passages of scripture that seem to argue for a passible God, no less important are those passages that describe an immutable one. Indeed, I attempt to resolve this concern, along with that relating to divine simplicity, in Chapter Three.

Thirdly, this thesis also addresses the passibilist understanding of analogy and language. However, the need to recognise the difference between the creator and creatures should not be downplayed. Although I would not fully agree with the strength of sentiment described by Pseudo-Dionysius,[158] it needs to be recognised that passibility here maintains a sense of God as beyond what we can fully know and/or understand. In this way, analogy assists with our qualifying of passibility. God is not passible in the same way as us; rather, God's passibility is understood analogically, albeit according to a bi-directional understanding.

To conclude, a passible God is one who experiences emotions and suffers, is understood analogically, but does not cease to have certain characteristics, such as holiness, that might inform His responses. Additionally, both simplicity and immutability need to be shown to function with the idea of passibility, and as being important to a qualified understanding of passibility. This aim will form part of the purposes of chapters two and three. As a final point,

[158] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Mystical Theology*, Chapter One.

God remains distinctly the creator, beyond creation, and yet what we know and can say of God are revealed on His terms.

## (1.6) Conclusion

This chapter broadly outlined the two main camps of the (im)passibility debate. It also outlined McCormack's desire to situate himself somewhere between these camps, demonstrating a desire by some theologians to utilise what they see as the strengths of both passibilist and impassibilist schemas.

Furthermore, the chapter raised a number of topics and concerns, and aimed to illustrate how some of the disagreements between passibilists and impassibilists are formed. Although it has only addressed a select number of topics,[159] those which have been discussed have been used to show the ways in which the two broad camps of passibilists and impassibilists tend to disagree and for what reasons. This has highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, generating a number of considerations to further explore in this thesis.

This chapter has also illuminated some of the directions theologians are taking in this debate, particularly from the passibility camp. For instance, some key theologians exhibit a desire to reconcile some classical attributes with divine passibility, whether this is McCormack's desire to maintain immutability or Oord's desire to maintain simplicity.

This chapter concludes that the wide-ranging debate surrounding (im)passibility generates a number of key concerns with respect to the aims of this thesis. These include discussion of the intersection between classical divine attributes and passibility, and the use of theological language. In this regard, it is clear from the discussion that there are multiple accounts of analogy, and that these accounts are informed by one's understanding of certain theological issues such as passibility. For the purpose of this thesis, an account of analogy will be employed

[159] Scrutton presents a summary of issues, including some not addressed here, in 'Divine Passibility: God and Emotion', 866-874.

(rather than univocal or equivocal language), in a similar way to that suggested by Moltmann or Oord.

Finally, I believe important qualifying statements are required for a functioning doctrine of passibility, particularly as I aim to maintain a number of classical categories. It is to these classical categories that I now turn.

# Chapter Two: Divine Attributes

## (2.1) Introduction

Thus far, this thesis has highlighted how immutability and impassibility are often interlinked. One point that became clear in The Introduction and preceding chapter is that one's theological conclusions on divine (im)passibility are often driven and determined by other theological presuppositions. A key factor which determines one's position on divine (im)passibility is the subject of the other divine attributes. Indeed, in the classical theological tradition, impassibility is entwined with a number of other attributes. As I noted in The Introduction, classical divine attributes and classical thinking have been more broadly critiqued in much of twentieth and twenty-first-century theology, especially by those who seek to present an alternative theological outlook that centres on a link between mutability and passibility. Examples of such critics include theologians and biblical scholars like Jung Young Lee and Terrance Fretheim, who argue either that classical thinking is based on philosophical reasoning rather than biblical data or that its biblical reasoning is in some way deficient.[160] In light of such critiques, this chapter will note some of the biblical passages that are often employed in theological discussions of the divine attributes.

As I also noted in The Introduction, theologians such as Bruce McCormack have sought to develop an immutable-passibilist conception of God by abandoning the classical corpus of divine attributes. This chapter contends that it is not necessary to abandon the classical corpus to arrive at such a position. Instead, it seeks to argue that adhering to a form of divine simplicity can allow one to simultaneously affirm both divine immutability and divine passibility, whilst still upholding a number of the classical divine attributes. In particular, this chapter demonstrates

[160] Lee, *God Suffers For Us,* 46. See also, Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 16. Additionally, this thesis has noted proponents of more classical ways of thinking; Castelo provides a brief overview of this challenge in Daniel Castelo, 'Moltmann's Dismissal of Divine Impassibility: Warranted?' *Scottish Journal of Theology,* 61, no. 4 (2008): 398.

that maintaining attributes and qualifications such as divine simplicity or immutability strengthens rather than weakens the argument for an immutable-passible God.[161]

In Chapter One, I argued that a key divergence between the immutable-impassible and mutable-passible 'camps' is the use of language. I have shown thus far that analogy can enable us to discuss divine passibility in ways that could be said to be 'like' human passibility whilst also maintaining some irreducible distinction. This chapter moves from this discussion to focus on the possible ways some of the divine attributes can be held and why they have been upheld in the tradition. In this way, the chapter seeks to consider how 'classical' divine attributes such as divine simplicity and immutability—traditionally associated with 'classical' (which the previous chapter rendered 'asymmetrical' or 'uni-directional') construal of analogy—can also be maintained in a passibilist account of divine being. This is in keeping with the bi-directional analogy outlined in the previous chapter, as made clear towards the end of this chapter.

In what follows, I will engage with a variety of thinkers from various historical periods and traditions to identify core features of the 'classical' theological conception of divine immutability and show how the doctrine of divine immutability is undergirded by the concept of divine simplicity (which is often held as a definitive feature of 'classical' theology). However, I will also argue that, like the theological notion of 'analogy', the affirmation of divine simplicity—and by extension, divine immutability—need not be incompatible with divine passibility. Instead, as noted above, I will seek to show that, once understood through the bi-directional analogical framework sketched in the previous chapter, the traditional 'classical' doctrine of divine simplicity can in fact facilitate a new conception of a passible yet immutable God, thereby

[161] Whether divine simplicity is a divine attribute or a qualifying statement about the divine being (or something else) is a subject of debate. While simplicity is often used to qualify what can be said about the divine being, it is often grouped with with other divine attributes (in discussions and categorisation). For the purpose of this thesis, divine 'attributes' will include simplicity as a way of describing this discussion as a whole, while recognising that this is not necessarily the most accurate way of describing divine simplicity.

arriving at a reconciliation of divine immutability and divine passibility, that is often deemed incompatible.

## (2.2) Divine Immutability

### (2.2.1) Classical Immutability

The theological origins of divine immutability, and of the divine attributes in general, can be historically traced back to the Church Fathers. As noted above, these thinkers come from varying contexts and cultures, meaning there is a great deal of divergence as well as commonality. For example, Augustine is writing within the context of Manicheism being a popular worldview to be addressed, whereas John of Damascus is writing in Greek within the context of an Islamic caliphate. Such contexts are not prevalent in the minds of later thinkers such as Aquinas (who faces their contextual challenges). Despite this, there remain key similarities between the thinkers. Part of the theological defence and articulation of divine immutability arose out of early Christianity's close engagement with Platonism, which drew a sharp contrast between the unchanging, eternal, invisible realm of transcendent forms and the mutable, visible, immanent realm of finite temporal physical entities. This engagement with Platonism formed the philosophical basis for the ontological difference between an immutable God and mutable creation within subsequent Christian theology. Perhaps the most famous articulator of this Christian Platonic position is Augustine. The contrast between divine immutability and creaturely mutability is a strand that runs deeply through much of his thinking. For instance, at the outset of *Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans,* Augustine writes:

> The highest good, than which there is no higher, is God, and consequently He is unchangeable good, hence truly eternal and truly immortal…For what is of Him, is Himself. And consequently if He alone is unchangeable, all things that He has made, because He has made them out of nothing, are changeable. For He is so omnipotent, that

> even out of nothing…He is able to make good things both great and small, both celestial and terrestrial, both spiritual and corporeal.[162]

Augustine here ties the idea of immutability to divine goodness, immortality, eternality, and omnipotence, revealing just how central this attribute is to his wider conception of God. Because immutability is linked to these other ideas, it becomes a cornerstone of his doctrine of God, without which each element needs to be reformulated. Augustine uses divine immutability to uphold God's unchanging goodness and connects immutability to divine perfection, for 'there is no higher good' and God cannot be any less good than He already is. Therefore, for Augustine, immutability is a key doctrine not only for its interconnections with other divine attributes but also as a marker of God's divine perfection. This particular attribute stresses the wider importance of the immutability of all the other divine attributes in the doctrine of God.

Like Augustine, John of Damascus ties a number of ideas together in his work. In his *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, he writes:

> …unbegotten, imperishable and immortal, everlasting, infinite, uncircumscribed, boundless, of infinite power, simple, uncompound, incorporeal, without flux, passionless, unchangeable, unalterable, unseen…[163]

Here, John ties divine immutability to divine impassibility, simplicity, omnipotence, and other divine attributes. Indeed, in his discussion of the Trinity he proceeds to introduce the idea of timelessness to these ideas. He writes, 'For in God, Who is without time and beginning'.[164] The introduction of timelessness here will be of particular importance for our understanding of God's eternal being and God's relation to temporal entities, as we shall discuss in Chapter Three.

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[162] St. Augustine, *Concerning the Nature of Good, Against the Manichaeans,* Chap. 1, trans. Albert H. Newman, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Phillipe Schaff, taken from *New Advent*, accessed June 19, 2023, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1407.htm,.

[163] John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, Chap VIII, trans. S. D. F. Salmond in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Phillipe Schaff, taken from the Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed June 19, 2023, https://ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf209/npnf209.iii.iv.i.viii.html.

[164] Ibid.

For my proposal in this chapter, it suffices to observe that, much like Augustine, John interconnects immutability, impassability, and simplicity in his doctrine of God. For John, like Augustine, the use of immutability in particular appears to be of central importance. This is because, without immutability, it makes little sense to say that God is impassible or that God is 'without flux'. Moreover, immutability appears to protect John's affirmation of God's 'boundless power'. This is because if God's power is indeed 'boundless', then God's power has no temporal bounds—no starting- or end-point; God must have such 'boundless' power eternally and *immutably*. If God could lose or gain this power, then He would not be immutable. It is through the attribute of divine immutability that John can build a doctrine of God in which these claims are understood to be constant for God. Thus, immutability is key for John's other commitments to be upheld.

Divine immutability is also often linked to the doctrine of pure act in classical theology. This connection is made in relation to divine simplicity which, as we shall see, contends God is without parts. If God is without parts, then He cannot possess passive potency, as this would mean there were potential parts in God which could be actualized. Rather, God is simply and immutably *act*. This is most notably formulated in Thomas Aquinas' account of divine immutability, where he states:

> …this first being must be pure act, without the admixture of any potentiality, for the reason that, absolutely, potentiality is posterior to act. Now everything which is in any way changed, is in some way in potentiality. Hence it is evident that it is impossible for God to be in any way changeable.[165]

Aquinas argues that if God is pure act, then He must also be immutable in order to be a perfect being, and these two concepts are inherently intertwined. According to Aquinas, nothing can be both potentiality and actuality with regards to particular attributes or properties. For example, I

[165] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.9, A.1.

cannot be actually hot and have the potential to be hot at the same time; although I could be actually hot and potentially cold.[166] In the material world, 'things' act upon each other to bring items from potentiality into actuality. For instance, the flame acts on the wood to make it burn. In all of these examples, the 'thing' in question has the potency to change, should something else act upon it. In the material world, there is always an agent existing prior to an event that explains the causal sequence of events.

In Aquinas' view, God is unlike these examples for two main reasons. Firstly, in God there is no potential, that is to say, there is nothing lacking in God. For example, God cannot actually simultaneously know all things and have the potential to know all things. Nothing can be added to the being of God, be this knowledge or experience, precisely because there is nothing that is lacking. In this sense, God 'lacking' the ability to be sinful is not a 'lack' on the basis that the 'absence' of this attribution is a perfection not an imperfection. Thus, the idea is that what God is, is perfect, not that He is 'everything'. God can be said to exist without change, as pure act, to which no imperfection can be added. Because of this link between divine immutability and divine perfection, if God is now perfect then God will always be perfect. Michael Dodds writes that Aquinas' position is essentially that, 'Unlike generated things He [God] does not change from one thing into another but is always "the same existing being"'.[167] Secondly, in the material examples mentioned above, the objects under consideration are acted upon by something external, like a flame acting upon a candle. God cannot be forced into some action by any being that is not God.[168] Such a distinction is only possible for an immutable God, as a mutable one would be able to change, and thereby gain or lose attributes.[169] For Aquinas, pure act and divine

[166] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q2, A3.
[167]Michael J. Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love: Thomas Aquinas and Contemporary Theology on Divine Immutability* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 54.
[168] For this reason, Davison writes that 'Developed in the right way, this idea helps us to understand God's unchangeability not as a lack but as a fullness or plenitude of action'. Davison, *The Love of Wisdom,* 42.
[169] Aquinas*, Summa Theologica*, I, Q.9, A.1.

immutability are both philosophically and biblically rooted. He employs Exodus 3:14 in this manner in the *Summa,*[170] contending that God is 'actual' in a way that is unchanging.[171]

For Aquinas, pure act and immutability are mutually entailing. A God who is pure act must also be immutable, because a God who is pure act does not have passive potency.[172] This raises the importance of immutability in Aquinas' thought. For Aquinas, as for many others in the theological tradition, immutability is used to ground other divine attributes, but is also being used to ground the idea of divine perfection. As Jay Richards puts it, classical theism usually argues that 'since God is perfect and radically distinct from the world, any change He might undergo could only be a change for the worse'.[173] The basic premise remains that if God is perfect, then any change in God can only make Him less perfect.

### (2.2.2) Weak and Strong Immutability in Modern Thought

As explained previously, the classical formulation of divine immutability is closely connected to a number of interrelated ideas such as pure act and divine perfection. In modern theology, much attention has been dedicated to ask what exactly is meant by divine immutability, with a number of theologians developing diverging positions on immutability. Theologians who subscribe to some form of immutability can be described as holding either 'strong' or 'weak' forms of immutability.[174] This denotes whether God can be said to be immutable in every way or only in

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[170] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q2, A3.
[171] Exodus 3:14, (where God reveals His name) is usually translated as 'I am who I am' giving it an almost static interpretation in English. The Hebrew word 'ehyeh', from its root word 'hayah', is far more fluid (the word in exodus is 'ehyeh', which is the same verb as 'hayah' and is placed in the third-person masculine singular, rather than the common singular in Exodus 3:14). It could be read as both 'I am who I am' and 'I am who I will be'. Thus, in God's own name we see both a statement of immutability and action. One might argue that the idea that God 'will be' is a statement of mutability. See Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 224- 228.
[172] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q2, A3.
[173] Jay W. Richards, *The Untamed God: A Philosophical Exploration of Divine Perfection, Immutability and Simplicity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 197.
[174] Swinburne gives a brief overview of strong and weak immutability in Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism: Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 231-234.

some way regarding specific 'parts' of His nature or experience. It is usually understood that weak immutability might allow that God can change His mind but would maintain immutability in the sense that His character would be unchanging. Conversely, a strong form of immutability would deny most (or even any) sort of change.

The 'type' of immutability one employs is linked to the discussion on properties, as weak forms of immutability suggest God has properties that can change. For example, Swinburne proposes a weak form of divine immutability: 'To say of a free and omniscient creator that He is immutable is simply to say that, while He continues to exist, necessarily He remains fixed in His character'.[175] In other words, God's character must be immutable (fixed), but this does not necessarily preclude other sorts of change (e.g. that God might change His mind). A strong form of immutability, however, would deny that God could *change at all*. In this sense, God's character is constant as it is with the weak form, but God could not be said to change His mind. This discussion relates both to what one thinks *change* is, as well as types of properties and what God can be said to possess. I shall return to this discussion a little later. Whilst a large number of thinkers still adopt a classical approach (a strong form) to immutability, there are theologians who are adapting this idea and weakening immutability. One reason many thinkers maintain immutability to some degree is that they view the biblical narrative as articulating an idea of immutability.

This biblical basis is important because it is employed alongside philosophical arguments when developing the doctrine of immutability, and numerous biblical verses are referenced throughout the tradition to underscore the importance of immutability (e.g. Malachi 3:6, Psalm 102:2 and James 1:17). Additionally, there are also a number of verses that relate to the faithfulness of God, such claims (about God's faithfulness) are rooted in claims concerning immutability (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:9, Psalm 36:9, 1 Corinthians 1:9, and Hebrews 10:23). If God

[175] Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism,* 219.

becomes mutable, then a strong challenge can be mounted against the trustworthiness of God. For example, if one believes that God loves humanity, then divine mutability would seem to introduce the possibility that God could cease to love creatures. This is one of the reasons why Swinburne retains a form of immutability, despite this being what is known as a 'weak' form of immutability.[176] Similarly, McCormack draws on a number of passages (including Malachi 3:6, a verse also employed by Aquinas[177]) in his defence of divine immutability. McCormack states that 'such passages form the bedrock of the biblical case for classical theism'.[178] Despite arguing for differing forms of immutability (McCormack adopting a strong, albeit still non-classical version), these thinkers stress the importance of divine immutability, both for classical theist conceptions of God and for non-classical modern theology. Likewise, these thinkers demonstrate that it is the combination of biblical themes and texts with philosophical ideas that makes divine immutability such a potent concept in Christian theology. Indeed, one notable facet is that although both Swinburne and McCormack hold to immutability, they both reject impassibility, which suggests that the intertwining of these two positions is not an essential part of the doctrine of divine immutability (even if immutability is an essential part of the doctrine of impassibility).

What comes to the fore here is the importance of defining what constitutes a change. We cannot understand or argue whether God changes if we do not know what it means for something to change. One common definition of change is 'to make or to become different'.[179] In other words, 'change' refers to the gain or loss of attributes. For example, if I attend university, I will gain the attribute of having attended university and lose the attribute of not having attended university. One might also describe an attribute as a characteristic. What is important in this regard is that we are referring to the things that make something 'personal' to a

[176] Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism*, 233.
[177] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q.9, A.1.
[178] Bruce L. McCormack, *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic; Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2008), 193.
[179] Cambridge Dictionary, *Change,* https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/change.

being. In this case, we are considering what attributes God has, and whether they can be said to change, in other words, are these attributes essential. In the example above, my having attended university is a personal characteristic or attribute that affects who I am and what I have done, but this characteristic is not necessary, that is, it could have been otherwise. What this discussion raises is the philosophical idea of a distinction between properties.[180]

In terms of what can be predicated, it is usually said that there are three types of properties: essential properties, contingent properties, and Cambridge properties. An essential property is something that is essential to my being; for example, it is essential to who I am that I be characterised as a human. However, the colour of my hair is a contingent property; it does, to some degree, affect who I am (someone may describe me using this attribute), but it is not essential to my being. The final type of property is a Cambridge property. This is a property that causes a 'change' in someone because of external circumstances. For example, if you walk past me in the street then it could be said that I have changed, because my position has altered from being ahead of you to being behind you or vice versa. In this sense, something has changed. However, there is a discussion surrounding Cambridge properties as to whether they can be said to account for genuine change, although, as Robert Francescotti points out, at the very least they make a difference in having or lacking said property.[181] Ergo, it can be said that they do account for change, in that whilst nothing has changed about me intrinsically, I am nevertheless affected.

Therefore, we not only have the idea that certain things can be predicated of God, but also that things can be predicated to differing 'degrees'. What this means is that when we discuss God, we need to establish what it means for God to change, what sort of change we are discussing, and if it is possible for God to change in some ways but not others. This in turn affects what sort of immutability one holds to, namely, whether a weak or strong from of

[180] This is understood to mean that properties (or attributes) are those things which can be predicated of another thing or being.
[181] Robert Francescotti, 'Mere Cambridge Properties', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 36, 4 (October 1999): 296.

immutability. This is important because if we affirm that God really has essential, contingent, and Cambridge properties, then we might say that God is immutable with regard to His essential properties but not with regard to others. If, however, we say God only has essential properties, then any change in an essential property would result in a mutable God.

Jay Richards has argued that factors usually counted as Cambridge properties (such as one's act of praying) cannot be applied to God due to the fact that God is omniscient, as there could be no event of which God is not eternally aware and, consequently, that could affect God.[182] For example, my decision to pray or not to pray is necessarily known by God, perhaps even before I have made the decision.[183] Richards goes on to argue that prayer is a 'a fine example of a contingent property',[184] and not a Cambridge property. What is notable here is that Richards will allow for contingent properties but not Cambridge ones. Given that Richards has already argued that God is (essentially) omniscient, then it would seem that God should know my prayer essentially, not contingently. In the preceding example, Richards assumes God knows of prayer contingently, that is, on the basis of His knowledge and human freedom. If, however, one was to assume that this is essential not contingent, then the relationship between human will, divine knowledge/action, and divine attributes would compel us to reconceive this idea. For example, if God essentially knows, rather than contingently knows, this would seem to radically impugn human freedom, as a human cannot now act in a specific way if God knows (essentially) how they will act. This brief discussion on change and prayer will be examined further in Chapter Five. For now, what is apparent is that discussions around prayer and immutability are tied to what we consider to 'count' as a change, and what type of change we are referring to. With this

[182] Richards, *The Untamed God,* 208-211.
[183] Chapter Three will expand upon on how God experiences time and eternity. Chapter Five will discuss prayer and hence advances this debate in light of the discussion around God's relationship to time and eternity. Thus, this statement should not be taken as promoting either Calvinistic or Arminian theologies surrounding predestination and foreknowledge.
[184] Richards, *The Untamed God,* 211.

comes the important caveat that no matter what one claims regarding these relationships, a problem arises.

Returning to the idea of strong and weak forms of immutability, although some theologians such as Swinburne adopt a weak form of immutability, there remain a number of thinkers who adopt a stronger view. This is true for both proponents and adversaries of immutability. For example, Moltmann assumes a strong form of immutability when he seeks to abandon it in favour of divine mutability. In discussion of Moltmann and Jenson's theologies of God, Thomas Joseph White claims:

> We are very close here, not to a traditional Christian theology, but to a new form of post-metaphysical mythology that compromises any true realism about the divine nature and the reality of God as the transcendent Creator.
>
> Let us ask, then: if these theories are so novel, what is it about them that makes them attractive to so many of our theological contemporaries? Part of the answer, at least, is that they are attempts to find an alternative to the classical notion of divine immutability.[185]

As White elucidates, the arguments made by Moltmann and others (as discussed in the previous chapter) involve a conscious attempt to move away from the doctrine of divine immutability, at least as it is classically conceived. This is partly because Moltmann seems to assume (rightly) that the classical position is what we would now call a strong from of immutability. I have already noted the strengths of passibilist arguments, yet the implications of their conceptions, namely the rejection of divine immutability, are clear to see. That said, the desire by other modern non-classical thinkers to maintain immutability but reject impassibility reveals that the desire to reject

[185] Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity; On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 295-296.

immutability is certainly not uniform in non-classical thinkers; indeed, many of these thinkers raise issues with either immutability, impassibility, or both.

Many modern theologians adopt the classical position (as espoused by Aquinas), thereby maintaining a strong view of immutability. At the same time, we also see a move by some thinkers to adapt immutability and weaken the claim of immutability. What is apparent is that immutability is a key doctrine for a number of other widely held Christian doctrines and beliefs. This might be as minimal as maintaining God's character or divine faithfulness, or as maximal as using it to safeguard impassibility, pure act, and perfection.

### (2.3) Divine Simplicity

In late twentieth and twenty-first century theology, divine simplicity has received increased attention both from detractors and advocates. The rejection or affirmation of divine simplicity is often correlated with the rejection or affirmation of divine impassibility and immutability. Like divine immutability, divine simplicity can be understood in a number of ways which range in 'strength', leading to both strong and weak versions of divine simplicity. Given these diverging accounts, this subsection primarily focuses on the modern debate within the field, reflecting the recent resurgence of discussion. This naturally draws on the thoughts of other classical thinkers, but these figures do not form a central part of the discussion.

The most basic claim of divine simplicity is that God is without 'parts'.[186] This declaration can be formulated in different ways. One 'strong' approach is suggested by James Dolezal, who defines simplicity as follows:

[186] Jonathan M. Platter, *Divine Simplicity and the Triune Identity: A Critical Dialogue with the Theological Metaphysics of Robert W. Jenson* (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2021), 9.

> Divine simplicity teaches that (1) God is identical with his existence and essence and (2) that each of his attributes is ontologically identical with his existence and with every other one of his attributes.[187]

Put plainly, Dolezal's suggestion is that when we refer to God's attributes, such as love, mercy, or existence, these are distinctions we use to conceptualise the way God affects the world. In other words, this use of language explains what a certain action means in human terms. However, this should not be taken to articulate differences between these attributes in Godself. This is quite different to how we as (composite) creatures exist. For creatures, there is a distinction between our essence and existence: as contingent creature, it is not part of our essence to exist. This is unlike God whose essence is existence, and so the attributes self-subsist in God as His being.[188] For Dolezal, in God there is no difference ontologically between the attributes and God's essence, and these 'attributes' do not differ from each other, even if their effects differ. God is understood as simple rather than as composite.

The reverse is true for humans, who are composite rather than simple, because we, unlike God, *possess* these attributes. This theological principle is partly informed by the idea that if God's being was dependent upon any attribute, such as existence, then this attribute would be ontologically different from God himself, which would mean that God's essence is defined or even conditioned by some principle beyond Godself.[189] Such an argument is primarily about whether God is understood to be identical with his existence or not. In other words, if God is not simple then existence would have to be something 'outside' of God. This is one of the key differences between God and creatures. For the creature, existence is something which it possesses as given by God's act of creation and ongoing sustenance, meaning that existence must have 'existed' prior to the creature in order for it to possess the attribute of existing. For God,

[187] Dolezal, *God Without Parts,* 2.
[188] Dolezal, *God Without Parts*, 107-111.
[189] Dolezal, *God without Parts*, 1-2.

existence is an inherent quality that was not present prior to God. For this reason, simplicity affirms that God is identical with his existence, and that this attribute is also identical to any other of the attributes ascribed to God such as love, mercy, or justice. Otherwise, these would be properties that God 'possesses' (much in the same we that we, as created beings, possess these qualities) rather than being innate to God.[190] I have already noted that Dolezal's account is a particularly strong version.

By contrast, Jordan Barret's version marginally changes Dolezal's definition. Barret argues that 'the divine attributes and the divine essence are identical, whereas the divine attributes are distinct from one another'.[191] He goes on to contend that this means that the divine essence is identical to the divine attributes as a whole, not that each attribute is identical to the divine essence. This idea is what Barret suggests 'characterises God as God',[192] in that it highlights what is true for all three divine persons. Barret's formulation of divine simplicity would also define love and mercy as distinct from each other, but both would need to be considered identical to the divine essence. Thus, it would be true to say that love is identical with the divine essence or that mercy is identical with the divine essence, but not that love and mercy are identical with each other. The strength of this argument is that God's essence is still considered identical to his attributes (and so these attributes are not 'parts'), without collapsing the attributes into each other. Indeed, part of Barret's consideration is that if the attributes are identical to each other, then human language falls into meaninglessness.[193] This allows Barret to claim that the attributes

[190] It is worth noting that there is debate surrounding whether existence can be considered a real predicate. At this point we need to hold a view of simplicity that is viewed in tandem with the wider discussion on divine attributes. God is identical with His existence, but this involves His pure actuality; thus, existence means something rather different to a modern notion of what it is to exist. For God to exist also means to act. For a brief description of this, see Platter, *Divine Simplicity and the Triune Identity,* 14-15.
[191] Jordan Barret, *Divine Simplicity: A Biblical and Trinitarian Account,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 32
[192] Barret, *Divine Simplicity,* 31.
[193] Barret, *Divine Simplicity*, 181.

are diverse yet not divisible into parts, which is based on how he sees divine revelation through scripture.[194]

For both Dolezal and Barret, divine simplicity is in part tied to divine immutability in that they assume God's attributes are constant and unchanging. In turn, this is tied to the commitment to divine perfection in that because God is immutable and simple, God is unchangingly perfect. This perfection is true for all of whom God is and is always true of God. Such underlying claims draw attention to how these modern thinkers are drawing on the classical tradition, as the connection between immutability and simplicity was made by both John of Damascus and Augustine. Additionally, we see how the discussion on whether God has essential, contingent or Cambridge attributes, as discussed above, relates the question of divine simplicity. For the questions of change and attributes then affect what one understands divine simplicity to entail. In the case of Dolezal for example, it would seem that God is who He is essentially, and this this strong form of simplicity is also tied to a strong from of immutability.

Divine simplicity has been subjected to a number of critiques in modern theology, such as Moltmann's abandonment of simplicity along with the other attributes, or, more recently, William Hasker's critique that simplicity leads to a modalistic concept of God.[195] Alvin Plantinga has critiqued the classical formulation of simplicity through engagement with Aquinas' views.[196] His critique connects Aquinas' account of divine simplicity with other parts of his doctrine of God, as Plantinga asserts that the fundamental reason for accepting simplicity is aseity and sovereignty.[197] Barret sums up Plantinga's problem with Thomistic simplicity as follows:

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[194] Barret, *Divine Simplicity*, 182-183.
[195] William Hasker, 'One Divine Nature' in *Essays on the Trinity*, ed., Lincoln Harvey (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 93.
[196] Alvin Plantinga, *The Aquinas Lecture: Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee; Marquette University Press, 1980), 38-46.
[197] Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?*, 28.

> At best simplicity seems to create more problems than it solves. At worst divine simplicity seems to reduce God to an impersonal indistinguishable property who might lack agency and is therefore incapable of creating the world.[198]

For Plantinga, simplicity, and by extension aseity, actuality, and timelessness, all contribute to a view of God that cannot act within the world or is at least deeply problematic. This view effectively summarises the modern critiques of simplicity and the wider corpus of classical attributes. It is similar to the analysis espoused by Lee, that the classical way of thinking seems removed from the biblical data.[199] However, as noted earlier, particularly in the defence made by Barret, arguments for simplicity (and other attributes) often draw on biblical data. This includes employing the doctrine in ways which do not make God 'impersonal' or reduce His agency. Indeed, one of the concerns often raised by defenders of simplicity is how to talk about the Son and Spirit as distinct actors as the Bible seems to describe them, as evident in the thoughts of Dolezal, Barret, and Thomas Jay Oord. Indeed, in part these critiques have resulted in increased attention being paid to divine simplicity, and by extension a number of different ways in which simplicity might be formulated, as evidenced in the differences between Barret and Dolezal.[200]

Thinkers reject divine simplicity for a number of reasons. For those such as Hinlicky, it is rejected because of the restrictions he considers it places on God-talk.[201] For Moltmann, it is rejected due to the links it holds to immutability and, by extension, impassibility.[202] For Plantinga, it is rejected due to its restrictions on God's agency and the sort of God who is described. In part, this rejection of divine simplicity is related to the discussion on language that I examined in

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[198] Barret, *Divine Simplicity*, 8.
[199] Lee, *God Suffers For Us,* 46.
[200] It is possible to see how Barret's form of divine simplicity would avoid the critique levelled by Hasker. Barret contends that the divine relations, i.e. the language of spiration and generation, distinguish the divine persons from each other. But this does not distinguish divine attributes because they are identical to the divine essence, although this is not affected by the relations. In other words, the three divine persons have specific relations that distinguish them, yet are identical in essence, meaning each is love, mercy, holy, and so on. See Barret, *Divine Simplicity,* 183.
[201] Paul R. Hinlicky, *Divine simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016), XXI
[202] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 236-238.

the previous chapter. Whilst these thinkers have good reasons for their hostility towards simplicity, its rejection is in my view a mistake. Moreover, I believe divine simplicity could be used to aid the case for a passible God. For if God is simple, passible, and immutable, then (a) God must *always* be passible and (b) passibility would be identical with what it is to be God. Simplicity could be used to assert that passibility is essential to the divine nature, and hence true for all three trinitarian persons, rather than being considered only true of the human nature of the second person. I shall explicate this position further later in this chapter. What will become clear is that, while simplicity could support a theology of divine passibility, employing both these positions is difficult since passibility usually implies change, which is untenable with divine simplicity as traditionally conceived. This would seem to be an irreconcilable tension, much in the same way as holding to both immutability and passibility. In part, this is because divine simplicity entails that God is without parts, including *temporal* parts (where any difference or diversity within the divine experience may appear as a kind of 'change' and therefore division into temporal parts). However, as I will seek to show in Chapter Three, divine simplicity and an affirmation that God is without temporal parts can in fact present us with an account of God as being able to be 'affected without change'.

### (2.3.2) Nature and Experience

The doctrine of divine simplicity is inherently related to God's being and the way in which God experiences the world. The discussion on the latter, much like the debate on love in the previous chapter, involves a number of related subjects such as divine immutability. As already noted, divine immutability means that God cannot change. This could be understood in various ways, but is usually taken to mean that as God is perfect, any change could only be for the worse, and therefore any possibility of change is often denied.[203] Of course, whether this extends to actions

[203] Christoph Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation* (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1992), 53.

such as changing God's mind or is limited in various other ways is a live debate. Both immutability and simplicity matter for our conception of God's nature and experience, because they affect what we think is true both of God's nature and how this is understood: is it changeable and composite, or unchangeable and simple, and in what sense is it unchangeable and simple (e.g. strong or weak immutability or simplicity)? Much like the other subsections in this and the previous chapter, this debate generates diverging responses from passibilists and impassibilists. I proposed earlier that divine simplicity could be used to argue that God is passible. Given this claim, it seems important to examine the thoughts of Oord, who also argues that God can be both simple and passible. It is to this suggestion which I now turn.

Oord argues that one possible approach to the subject of divine passibility is to distinguish between God's nature and God's experience.[204] According to Oord, whereas God in His 'ousia' or being is utterly independent of humanity and in no way dependent upon creatures, God's experience is (at least partly) dependent upon creatures.[205] For Oord, God is independent from creation with regard to His nature, but when He chooses to create beings and engage with them, He must be passible in His experience as He enters into relationships with humans. But is Oord correct to hold that God's nature is distinct from His experience? Does such an acceptance or rejection of this distinction help either the passibilist or the impassibilist?

If one adheres to the account of divine simplicity put forward by Dolezal, one would have to reject Oord's conception. Oord's notion creates what Dolezal calls 'a duality in God'.[206] To quote Dolezal:

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[204] Thomas Jay Oord, 'Strong Impassibility Response' in *Divine Impassibility Four Views of God's Emotions and Suffering*, 49.
[205] Ibid.
[206] James E. Dolezal, 'Concluding Remarks in Defence of Strong Impassibility' in *Divine Impassibility Four Views of God's Emotions and Suffering*, 51.

> …such a God would be composed of really distinct principles of essential and accidental being. Oord's proposal renders God's own nature a cause of his being, a principle or part with which God is not strictly identical.[207]

Dolezal argues that Oord's position functionally rejects divine simplicity. This is because it relies on the idea that there can be 'parts' within God, that His experience is distinct from His nature. However, if God is identical with His existence, in the way Dolezal believes, then there can be no distinction between His nature and His experience. Of course, this is only an issue should one accept divine simplicity in the 'strong' form proposed by Dolezal. Oord, by contrast, seeks to preserve a much 'weaker' concept of divine simplicity by separating nature from experience.

Oord argues that we should include God's relationship with creatures in His experience. This means that whilst God may love because of His nature, the way He loves and the act of His loving are bound up in God's experience.[208] This is because Oord believes that there is a distinction between the two in God. A comparison here can be made with humanity. If we say that I am a human (an ontological claim), this might entail that I eat and sleep (an experiential claim). I eat and sleep because I am human, but eating and sleeping is not the same as being human. The important thing to note, however, is that I am not simple, and so the proposition makes complete sense. This is not the case with God, whose existence is identical with His nature and essence if one subscribes to a traditional account of divine simplicity. From this perspective, Oord's problem is that he has effectively created a 'part' of God that is dependent upon His own nature, and yet He is not to be considered identical with said nature.

Under a strong view of divine simplicity, experiencing is understood as identical with God's act (and action) and so any formulation of 'parts' is to be rejected. Thus, Oord's conception functions such that because God is loving in His nature, there is no moment in time where God is not 'dynamically' loving. However, he also believes God is able to show His love

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[207] Ibid.
[208] Oord, 'Strong Impassibility Response', 48.

in a passible sense due to the distinction between God's nature and experience.[209] Love then plays out functionally in His experience where He is passible, which is considered unlike how He is in His nature – in this sense there are two parts. God's experience is dependent upon His nature, yet the two are distinct from each other. This is why Oord can make the following claim: 'Because God's nature is abstract while God's experience concrete, I can affirm the simplicity of the divine nature'.[210] In so doing, Oord effectively argues that experience is not related to nature, in that what God experiences does not affects His nature. With this idea in place, Oord is able to posit a God who has passible experiences without this being something that affects His nature.

Despite Oord's desire to maintain divine simplicity, he appears to have generated a problem by creating a distinction in God between nature and experience. If one accepts that experience has no bearing on nature, then this weakened version of simplicity may well hold. However, if God is simple in a strong sense, then this distinction is problematic because it creates a distinction within God, meaning He is not truly simple, as His experience is not identical with His existence. Furthermore, one may question whether it makes sense to say that God can interact with creatures in a relational and caring way, if it is not in His nature to do so. One could frame relationality differently, but as a passibilist it would seem that Oord needs to define both relationality and 'care' in accordance with this theological position. This is because, for Oord, God's involvement with creation is a key theological commitment. It would seem, then, that divine nature and experience do relate to each other, because God would seem to act in part because of His passible nature. As a result, there seem to be distinct issues with how Oord formulates this weak form of simplicity. Oord does not believe that his position necessarily entails the rejection of divine simplicity. As he notes, 'God can necessarily exist without parts in essence while engaging experientially in relationship with creation moment by moment'.[211] I

[209] Ibid
[210] Oord, Analogies of Love between God and Creatures: A Response to Kevin Vanhoozer', 29.
[211] Oord, 'Strong Impassibility Response', 51.

agree with Oord that God can be both simple and passible, but I do not believe his solution achieves this. This is because Oord is not just talking about experience, but about the idea that God is relational by nature, which means Oord is making a distinction about the being of God (not just a claim about how God interacts with creation). Therefore, the claim that God is relational in His interactions with creation is in itself a claim about His nature. If this is the case, then Oord would seem to have left unaccounted how a being can interact independently of its nature. If God is impassible in His nature, then His experience will, in some way, be affected by this. An example of this would be the discussion about love. As I argued in the previous chapter, the love of God from a passible approach is quite different from the impassibilist approach, but both affect/are related to the discussion on God's nature and God's experience. God's loving nature and God's loving experience simply do not seem to be divisible in the way Oord wants them to be. Therefore, by this standard it is impossible to say God is impassible in nature but not in experience.

As opposed to Oord's commitment to weak simplicity, I believe that a strong version of divine simplicity can support the notion of a passible God in a way Oord's view cannot. If God is indeed both simple and passible, and God's experiences are understood to be identical to His essence (as either Barret's or Dolezal's formulation would suggest), then God's passibility is identical to who God is. If God's experiences are not distinct (in the way Oord wants) from His being, then one can say that experience is *who* and *what* God essentially is. Because Oord has separated experience from being, then who God is in His being cannot be said to be passible. This seems to be not only a weak form of simplicity but also a weak form of passibility, because *who* God is would appear to be impassible in terms of God's nature.

### (2.3.3) Summary

If it is indeed possible to argue for a passible (in some sense) yet simple God, as Oord would suggest,[212] then such a move is helpful for the articulation of divine passibilism because it situates divine passibility in closer contact with the predominant theological tradition. Indeed, it would seem to be the case that if one can make an argument for a passible yet immutable God, the claims of Barret would certainly be an option. This is because passibility would be construed in the same way divine love is considered, that God is not only love itself but also *passibility* itself: that God could be said to be identical with His essence which is identical with passibility, yet passibility would not be identical with love or mercy.[213]

That said, the discussion on divine simplicity highlights two key points. Firstly, as with divine immutability, there are various ways in which divine simplicity can be formulated and these range in 'strength'. Secondly, it again highlights the interconnected nature of these discussions, as manifested in the connection that is made between simplicity and divine perfection. These two points highlight both that the attributes are often intertwined and that they can be held in different ways, which in turn shapes how we understand the connections between attributes to work.

## (2.4) Conclusion

This chapter has briefly sketched how some of the early church fathers developed a theology of divine attributes, building on the references made to figures such as Novatian, Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius, Anselm, and Aquinas in Chapter One. I then outlined the concepts of immutability and simplicity, and how they function in the modern period. This, much like the previous chapter, involved describing some of the challenges these doctrines have faced in

[212] Oord, 'Analogies of Love between God and Creatures: A Response to Kevin Vanhoozer', 29.
[213] Barret, *Divine Simplicity,* 32.

modern philosophical and theological discourse. Additionally, this chapter has illuminated how some of these thinkers respond to the non-classical critique that such theological ideas are more metaphysical than biblical, citing how these thinkers use scripture as well as endeavouring to highlight other places in the biblical narrative that seem to support the classical divine attributes. Based on this, the broad claims of Lee and Fretheim seem unfair if applied to the entire selection of classical attributes.[214]

One of the functions of the divine attributes is that they provide a framework for understanding God's being and action. Because they usually presuppose other attributes (e.g. omniscience usually presupposes divine immutability),[215] describing God's being and action usually needs to take account of each attribute in turn. This is because any one attribute of God (justice, mercy, etc) is always involved in a discussion of immutability or aseity. That said, there are two notable exceptions to those holding this picture of God. The first is the full rejection of a classical model of God, which has led Moltmann and others to reconceive ideas of divine being entirely, hence the moves for a mutable as well as passible God. The second exception is the group of theologians who seek to maintain some of the divine attributes. We have already seen Oord's desire to maintain simplicity and McCormack's desire to maintain immutability. Such positions seek to fill the gaps left by the removal of attributes. For example, Oord's qualification that God's nature is impassible, immutable, and simple, whereas His experience is not simple or immutable.[216] This shift also reveals an important qualifier, namely that the strength of a particular view also has a significant effect on what is being described. As such, Oord's view of simplicity is significantly different from the view proposed by Dolezal (and also quite different from Barret's view). Thus, whilst two theologians might maintain all the classical attributes, their

[214] Lee, *God Suffers For Us,* 46. See also Fretheim, *The Suffering of God*, 16.
[215] The exception to this would be the way some open theists construe omniscience as being contingent on the present. However, such a view seems to differ markedly from usual understandings of divine omniscience. This will be discussed further in Chapter Five.
[216] Oord, 'Strong Impassibility Response', 50.

schemas could differ enormously depending on how strongly each attribute is held. What is clear is that there is no set method for understanding the various attributes, even though they often presuppose each other. Despite this, I have already described how a number of modern thinkers disregard these presuppositions and endeavour to keep some but not all of the attributes when formulating their theologies.

The fact that there is not one single theological perspective highlights an important challenge to the discussion: namely, what is meant by these terms is neither self-evident nor uniform across church history. However, while there are differences, there is broadly speaking a consensus that immutability is important in that it grounds the other divine attributes and that, for those who adhere to divine simplicity, the doctrine of divine simplicity is often used to defend and qualify immutability.[217] Consequently, we are left with a basic knowledge of the divine attributes, but their usage is dependent upon the theologian in question. Additionally, the way one approaches change and attribution affects these debates significantly. For example, one could argue, as indeed Aquinas does, that for an immutable God, all of His properties should be considered essential because there is no change – nothing can be added or taken away from God.[218] If this is the case then all of God's properties need to be considered essential as God does not change and is the perfect being; therefore, God is devoid of accidental and Cambridge properties. Indeed, one could take this view but reject the notion that a certain attribute is present in God at all. Furthermore, many of the doctrines in question are connected to the immutability of God. However, in most cases, divine impassibility is assumed to be a subset of divine immutability, as passibility is usually considered to presuppose change.[219] What this means is that most of these doctrines presuppose impassibility on the basis that this compromises immutability more broadly. The key goal of Chapter Three will be to demonstrate why

[217] Indeed, as noted, the way in which Moltmann and others characterise and attack what we might call the 'traditional' use of immutability assumes a consensus on the use and purpose of the attribute.
[218] Aquinas*, Summa Theologica*, I, Q.3, A.6.
[219] Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil,* 74.

immutability does not necessarily involve impassability. For the purpose of this chapter, however, the varying use of terms provides both difficulties in parcelling out exactly what is meant by the phrases employed, but also freedom in being able to draw from a rich tradition with varying interpretations. Thus, this chapter highlighted the places where these varying views agree, and, when describing divine immutability, this thesis contends that maintaining immutability in some form safeguards other theological positions (such as divine goodness, omniscience and so on).

The divine attributes have, at least from the late patristic period, been taken to work with each other as part of a cohesive system, and modern defenders of classical theism still adopt this approach. However, as argued in The Introduction, there are, in modern theological discussion, those who reject either some or part of the classical corpus, or redefine some or all of the attributes as part of their theological schemas. This has led to a number of intriguing and innovative proposals in modern theology, but also a re-emergence of classical thought that seeks to meet the challenges of modern theologians and philosophers alike.[220]

I argue that these challenges and responses make two key contributions to this thesis. The first is that it is a reasonably accepted practice to argue for some but not all of the classical corpus. This might be as mild a claim as only arguing for a weak form of immutability, or could involve the acceptance of divine simplicity or aseity in some form. Secondly, the tendency to re-define and question the way in which attributes are framed and defined is extremely important. In the previous chapter, I noted that maintaining immutability alongside passibility would be a core concern of this thesis. Whilst the argument for this will be presented in the next chapter, it is important to note at this point that this involves redefining passibility so that it does not entail mutability. This re-definition, as noted previously, is at least on the surface counterintuitive. It is counterintuitive because passibility usually involves some form of change; given that passibility

[220] Dolezal, *God without parts*, 11.

would seem to require that God experiences emotions (which are usually understood as changeable) and does so at different times, it would mean that God is being affected in time by creation. In Chapter Three, we shall see how describing the eternality of God in a specific way enables this re-definition such that God can be said to be passible yet immutable.

This marks the distinctive move of this thesis, which is to argue for a qualified form of passibility that can be held alongside divine simplicity and immutability. This differs from the work of McCormack in its desire to maintain these classical divine attributes. It also differs from Oord in how it sets up both passibility and simplicity. Finally, it differs from classical approaches in that it seeks to bring both passibility and some non-classical approaches into the discussion (such as a non-classical form of analogy and use of language). In the same way that qualified impassibility has been defended in recent years, the aim of this thesis is to posit the notion of a qualified passibility that will work with classical categories (as opposed to being a strictly classical theory).

What Chapters One and Two elucidate with regard to passibility and the classical divine attributes is that there are a number of ways of conceiving relationships. Naturally, these variations incur consequences, and that is no less true when substituting impassibility for passibility. Some of these consequences will become apparent later. This chapter has shown that all the divine attributes can be held in weaker or stronger forms. In conjunction with the idea of a qualified passibility, one could show this to function with certain forms of simplicity and immutability if there is a way to allow affectedness to function with immutability. It is to this aim that I now turn.

# Chapter Three: Time and Eternity

## (3.1) Introduction

As discussed in previous chapters, the passibility debate concerns claims and assumptions about the being of God. This includes assumptions about the interaction and relation between God and the world. Assumptions surrounding the eternal and immutable God's interaction with the temporal and mutable world naturally involve ideas about time and eternity and the very nature of God's existence. Drawing on Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann's philosophy, in this chapter I articulate an account of time and eternity that can sustain both divine immutability *and* divine passibility. Though Stump and Kreztmann defend traditional doctrines of divine immutability and *im*passibilty, I argue that their neo-Boethian conception of time and eternity can not only make room for an account of divine passibility but also an account of God as eternally passible.[221]

I begin by providing some working definitions of time and eternal duration, drawing on, *inter alia*, Augustine, Boethius, and Brian Leftow. Following this, I explicate Stump and Kretzmann's neo-Boethian account of 'eternally temporal simultaneity', considering some of its critiques, and alternative, recent accounts of time and eternity (such as those of Paul Fitzgerald and Leftow). This is followed by a concluding discussion of how Stump and Kretzmann's account can allow one to postulate a passible yet immutable God.[222] However, unlike the immutable passibility of Bruce McCormack's non-classical doctrine of God (noted in the introduction), and in line with Stump and Kretzmann's adherence to Classical Theism, the conception of God's immutable passibility developed in this chapter preserves many of the

[221] Leftow elucidates how Stump and Kretzmann's interpretation of Boethius is both one that is disputed and yet seems to have some backing in the tradition. For the purpose of this thesis, I will assume this interpretation is valid and proceed to assess this argument as presented. See, Brian Leftow, *Time and Eternity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 181-182.

[222] As shall be seen, the arguments presented here have key implications for christological and trinitarian discussions. These questions will be the primary focus of Chapter Four.

classical divine attributes, allowing it to sit more comfortably in relationship to, or even in conversation with, the majority theological tradition.

The purpose of this chapter, as noted above, is to provide an account of God as eternally passible (and thereby preserving immutability and passibility). In order to achieve this, the chapter begins with a series of technical discussions on, time and temporality, eternality, the concept of Duration (both temporal and eternal), in order to establish the working definitions of the key concepts and phrases and how they will be used and understood. This technical then highlights how different conceptions of these notions affect different theological positions, and so raises key questions to be addressed. The chapter then focusses on the view of divine eternity espoused by Stump and Kretzmann, highlighting some of its strengths while also addressing some of the challenges it has received. The chapter then applies this conceptual framework to the passibility debate and argues that key elements of Stump and Kretzmann's schema can resolve some of the perceived tensions between divine passibility and immutability elucidated in Chapters One and Two. Presenting the chapter in this way provides both the conceptual clarity of key terminology and an understanding of the key views discussed in order that the constructive work of this thesis can be achieved.

This is not to say that other views of divine eternity could not be employed to a similar end; rather, this move has been taken to allow a more detailed reading of a particular view as opposed to a broad overview of various treatments of the topic. For example, it might well be that the argument espoused in this chapter could (with modification) be applied to the views of Paul Helm or Bruce McCormack, both of whom also argue for an eternal immutable God.[223] As we saw in the introduction, McCormack's view of eternity suggests both an immutable and passible God.[224] The reason for focusing on Stump and Kretzmann's view instead of views such

[223] *Paul Helm, Eternal God: A Study of God Without Time (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). And* Pârvan and McCormack, 'Immutability, (Im)passibility and Suffering', 24.
[224] Pârvan and McCormack, 'Immutability, (Im)passibility and Suffering', 24.

as these is that, as we shall see, they are explicit defenders of a classical view of God. As we have already noted, McCormack is explicitly in favour of rejecting attributes such as divine simplicity, whereas Helm does not seek to engage with simplicity in any great detail—in his words, 'not offer[ing] a defence of divine simplicity, nor an attack upon it.'[225] This is quite different to the work of Stump and Kretzmann, who explicitly affirm and draw on simplicity. Thus, their work serves as a particular pertinent case for this thesis' aim to consider how divine simplicity can be employed to support divine passibility.[226]

Additionally, whilst this chapter does discuss temporality, it will not discuss theological attempts which seek to abandon the idea of God as timeless and eternal, for two reasons. Firstly, this is a significant discussion, beyond the scope of this thesis, which seeks to use divine eternity to reconcile divine attributes such as immutability and simplicity with divine passibility.[227] This is related to the second reason, which is that these thinkers often reject or alter classical immutability and/or simplicity (e.g., Richard Swinburne and Nicholas Wolterstorff).[228] For these reasons, theories that focus on divine temporality are not discussed in any depth.

### (3.2.1) Time and temporality

Notions of time and temporality are key to the way we comprehend being within the created order. As noted in the previous chapter, the Platonic distinction between eternity and time is

[225] Helm, *Eternal God, 25*.
[226] Helm for example seems to suggest that while divine eternity requires a strong form of immutability, an externalist may reject divine simplicity. See, Paul Helm, 'Divine Timeless Eternity' in, *God and Time: Four Views*, ed Gregory E. Ganssle (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 34–35.
[227] Such thinkers include Richard Swinburne, in both *The Coherence of Theism: Second Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) and *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Inquiring about God: Selected Essays, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
[228] For example, Nicholas Wolterstorff asserts that 'God described by the biblical writers is a being who changes' and has questioned the tenability of divine simplicity. Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Divine Simplicity', *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 531–552.

adapted by Augustine to articulate the ontological difference between God and creation. As Augustine speaks of God as the eternal creator in the *Confessions*:

> although you are the author and founder of all ages! What spans of time could have existed unless you had established them? And how could such times have elapsed, if they never existed? Because you are the maker of all times, if there was some sort of time before you created heaven and earth, why is it said that you were not spending your time working? For you were the maker of time itself, so time could not pass before you had created time.[229]

For Augustine, and the majority Christian tradition after him, God is creator of time: God does not create *in* time but creates time itself. Thus, time begins with creation. God's creation of time is also an act of creating and giving order: It gives rise to what we might refer to as 'order', in that the ability to order events, or to at least imply that an order exists, means that there is some form of time, or, more specifically, what we might refer to as 'tensed' time. In other words, the suggestion that there can be past, present, and future, which occurs in a linear framework, is a suggestion of tensed time.

At this point it is important to note that much of what is claimed is a matter of debate. Those who adhere to a 'B-Theory' of time would assert that what makes ideas of past, present, and future 'true' is a tenseless concept of reality, in which the past, present, and future have equal value. This is often contrasted with an 'A-theory' linear and 'tensed' account of time which asserts that only the present is ontologically real. These theories are not all identical in essence or composition.[230] For now, it is helpful to assume that time works in a linear fashion, allowing for tensed time, whilst not asserting that only the present is real. This is because, although I am not

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[229] Saint Augustine, *Confessions Book XI*, ed., and trans. Carolyn J.-B. Hammond (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 215.

[230] An overview of this discussion can be found in 'The Experience and Perception of Time', *The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/time-experience/#Dura, Section 7. See also, J.M. McTaggart, 'The Unreality of Time', *Mind* Vol. 17, No. 68, (1908), 457-474.

following McTaggart's framework, the conceptual tools he outlines are helpful when considering how creation experiences time, compared with how God experiences time. In addition, time implies the idea of change, whether that be movement from past into present or, more simply, the idea that in a world without succession or measurement, there is simply no ability to change (as will become clear when I examine eternality). Therefore, time and change may not be synonymous, but change entails time, and whilst time does not necessarily mean change under a Christian framework, the act of creation is usually taken to be the beginning of time, as there is, properly speaking, no 'before' creation (at least in temporal terms).

### (3.2.2) Temporal Duration and Perception

The notion of 'duration' in our understanding of time is particularly important for our analysis of eternity and temporality. Indeed, the very conception of duration is key to Augustine's consideration of time in the *Confessions*, where he makes the important point that what is 'past' cannot be characterised in terms of duration for it has ceased to be. The present can have no duration for it exists only in the moment and the future does not yet exist and thus does not have properties.

This form of presentism in Augustine may initially seem to conflict with the position sketched above, which seeks to affirm the linear as well as tensed nature of time whilst maintaining that not only the present is real. It is possible, however, to bind these seemingly tensive positions together by reconsidering the role of perspective in constituting what is 'real'. For although it is the case that from a temporal perspective the past does not appear to exist, it is not necessarily the case that from a temporal perspective the past is not real. On the contrary, it could be taken to mean that what is not current anymore (that is to say the past) is simply not present and so does not *currently* exist. If duration is neither the past nor simply the present moment, then what is it? Augustine contends that the answer is memory:

> What is now patently clear is that neither future nor past events exist, and it is incorrect to say, 'there are three times, past, present, and future'. Perhaps it would be appropriate to say, 'There are three times: the present respecting things past, the present respecting things present, and the present respecting things future'. These three things do somehow exist in the soul, and I do not perceive them anywhere else: for the present of things past is memory; the present of things present is paying attention; and the present of things future is expectation.[231]

Augustine argues that in temporal terms, duration is heavily connected with memory. Thus, as we make distinctions about time, such distinctions only occur based upon our own experience, recalled through memory. Thus, when speaking temporally, we understand duration epistemically, that is to say we understand it based upon our experience of duration. This is not to say that there is no ontological underpinning, but that we do not understand temporal duration as independent of our experiences.

Our perception of time is linked to our location in the temporal world and our understanding of duration. This emphasis on temporal specificity and situatedness is well-articulated by Boethius' classic definition of temporal existence: 'Nothing situated in time can at the one moment grasp the entire duration of its life'.[232] What Boethius claims is that which marks out a temporal being (as opposed to an eternal being) is existence in a single 'point' or 'moment' of its life. As temporal beings, we only have experience at the 'point' or 'moment' we call 'now' or 'the present', which is distinct from the past that is behind us and the future that is before us. Therefore, as a finite temporal being I do not exist in a manner where the writing of these words this morning is experienced simultaneously with my playing football later tonight. Instead, I exist in the now, remembering the past and anticipating the future. As will become clear, this is

[231] St. Augustine, *Confessions*, Book 11, Chapter 20, Heading 26, 231.
[232] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. P.G Walsh (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), 110.

different to the experience of an eternal being which possesses all of its illimitable life simultaneously.

### (3.3.1) Eternity and the Atemporal

Boethius' definition of temporal existence has impacted most modern and contemporary discussions of time and eternity. He writes that eternity is 'the total and perfect possession of life without end'[233] (sometimes translated as the 'total possession of illimitable life'[234]). For something to be eternal, it must experience or possess all that occurs to it as the same point/duration/moment. This means that it cannot possess a past or future, but only a present – or, more accurately, an *eternal* present. This is because the demarcation of past and future allows for some form of measure, meaning that to have a past or future results in something being within time. This does not make the said measure formal. In other words, we do not necessarily have to use some form of unit to describe this demarcation of past and present. Nevertheless, the fact we can say one thing was past and another is present implies the idea of movement (and thus, succession) which established the existence of time in the previous subsection. It is already apparent how this fits with the classical doctrines outlined in the previous chapter, namely pure act. If God possesses all of His 'illimitable life' at once, this means there is no sort of potency in God, and so God can be said to be perfectly 'in act'. Therefore, God does not recall past or simply know the future; rather, the past, present, and future are all 'present' for God.

Because that which is eternal is not situated within time, eternity entails everlastingness. Accordingly, that which is eternal holds the entirety of its life, or, as Boethius puts it, an eternal being 'possesses simultaneously the entire fullness of life without end; no part of the future is lacking to it, and no part of the past has escaped it'.[235] According to this Boethian view, for an

[233] Ibid.
[234] Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 113-114.
[235] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, 111.

eternal being, there is no future or past that could allow for independent 'parts' of life; instead, it experiences all of its existence as present. One might argue that Boethius' commitment to Christianity is evident here as he defines eternity as a 'being' and the discussion of eternity concerns this being's 'life'. Furthermore, Boethius' account of eternity is also concerned with the 'fullness' of life. This is because an eternal being cannot gain new knowledge or experience as this would not be the 'entire fullness of life'.[236] Thus, if one presumes that Boethius has in mind the God of Christianity, then it would also follow that we are discussing a God with whom humans have a relationship.[237] In other words, the eternal God is in complete possession of His life and all that touches His life rather than simply being an abstract conception of existence.

Like Augustine before him, Boethius' distinction between time and eternity upholds the ontological difference between the temporal world and the eternal God. This is reflected in Boethius' critique of Aristotle's idea of the eternal existence of the world. For Boethius, an examination of Aristotle's thinking reveals the need to separate eternality from everlastingness. For instance, Aristotle writes that 'the heaven as a whole neither came into being nor admits of destruction, as some assert, but is one and eternal with no end or beginning of its total duration.'[238] According to the Boethian definition of eternality, such a being would be everlasting. However, for Boethius, something that is everlasting is not necessarily eternal for the very reason that it does not simultaneously possess its entire life.[239] Based on these definitions, Aristotle propagates an everlasting world but not an eternal one, one that may exist for all of time but is not, at least in this schema, eternal.[240] This small but important distinction helps separate eternity from atemporality. Atemporality could be defined as being unaffected or

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[236] Ibid.
[237] As noted in Chapter One, the passible and impassible relationship is formulated quite differently. In using this phrase I do not mean to imply that Boethius acts like a modern passibilist; it simply indicates that in the Christian tradition, it is usual to suggest creatures have a relationship with God.
[238] Aristotle, 'De Caelo' in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Greek and English Facing Pages. Electronic Edition, ed., and trans Jonathan Barnes (Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: InteLex Corporation, 2015), Book ii, 283b26.
[239] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, 110.
[240] It is important to note that the way these two philosophers conceive of eternality is different, but this serves to show how eternality is being understood in this thesis.

independent of time. However, as this thesis is approaching the divine with the assumption that God actively engages with creation, this definition does not fully satisfy my requirements. Instead, I consider atemporality to mean existing, at least partially (if not fully), beyond the constraints of time (what this means will become clear later).

The reason for this definition is that an eternal being must be considered to be atemporal in some way, as it must come 'before' and exist 'beyond' time. This is assuming that to exist beyond time is indeed possible and that time is a created thing. Some, such as the Oxford School of Divine Temporality[241] would instead argue that time is an essential part of God's being.[242] This is because tensed time would constrain an eternal being, as they would cease to operate 'beyond' time.

At this point it is also worth noting that 'beyond time' is not the most accurate way to describe God's eternal existence. To say that God, as eternal, exists 'before and beyond' implies that God could be measured, contained, or indeed constrained by time. Therefore, it is more accurate to describe God as *always* existing, both before and after the finite temporal existence of the universe and our experiences.[243]

Thus, although Boethius' definition is applied to a specific monotheistic being, who we would probably name Yahweh, we cannot say that Yahweh becomes purely temporal (as this would prevent Him from being eternal). Yet to deny His temporality would seem to be

[241] In referring to the Oxford school, Mullins notes that 'It is somewhat misleading to refer to the Oxford school as a unified theory since its alleged adherents differ on various issues. For instance, Alan Padgett holds that God's life cannot be measured after the moment of creation, whereas Richard Swinburne and Dean Zimmerman hold that God's life can be measured after creation'. See Ryan Mullins, 'Divine Temporality, the Trinity, and the Charge of Arianism', *Journal of Analytic Theology*, 4, (May 2016): 268, Footnote 8.
[242]Ryan Mullins, 'From Divine Timemaker to Divine Watchmaker' in *Temporality and Eternity; Nine Perspectives on God and Time*, eds., Marcus Schmücker, Michael T. Williams and Florian Fischer (De Gruyter, 2022), 45-46.
[243] If the universe was to cease to exist then it may be possible to conceptualise an 'after time' (at least if one sees space and time as synonymous instead of connected), but what we are really describing is a God that exists always.

problematic for most Christian claims (such as the incarnation). These issues are examined in greater detail later in this chapter.

### (3.3.2) Eternal Duration

Commenting on Boethius' attribution of 'life' to an eternal being, Stump and Kretzmann argue that any concept of life that can be reasonably called such entails some idea of duration – eternal life, in this sense, is no different.[244] However, precisely what duration is in this eternal sense is different. This is because duration is no longer (and cannot be) tied to memory, as for an eternal being there is no past and thus nothing to remember.

This is not to say that the eternal being can have no 'relationship' with temporal duration. Rather, the eternal possesses what Stump and Kretzmann call 'fully realised duration'.[245] Stump and Kretzmann are not the only theorists who seek to provide an atemporal account of duration. For instance, in *Time and Eternity,* Brian Leftow describes existence as 'point-like', where it is understood as being free from succession and thus 'points' of existence can all exist at the same 'moment' (whilst allowing for 'earlier' and 'later' in some sense).[246] However, unlike Leftow, Stump and Kretzmann speak of 'present existence'. They elaborate on this as follows:

> But the existing of an eternal entity is a duration without succession, and, because eternity excludes succession, no eternal entity has existed or will exist; it only exists. It is in this sense that an eternal entity is said to have present existence.[247]

Such eternal present existence in this sense is what we might call atemporal duration. It is an alternative way of imagining how an eternal entity like God exists. Stump and Kretzmann use the

[244] Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, 'Eternity', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 78, no. 8 (Aug., 1981), 433.
[245] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 445.
[246] Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 120.
[247] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 434.

Boethian definition that describes duration as 'extension' which in this sense refers to the ever-existing atemporal reality of the eternal life, allowing us to conceptualise eternity as infinite possession of life. This debate on the concept of duration is discussed further in later subsections.

It would seem that the discussion on whether atemporal existence is either 'point-like' (as Leftow contends) or 'extension' (as Stump and Kretzmann argue) could be considered a semantic one. This is because the two ideas of time, namely 'eternally temporal simultaneity' (hereafter ET-simultaneity) and 'quasi-temporal eternality', differ on this issue. However, this is a differentiation in language as both are naming an unmeasurable type of existence. Both theories argue for a untensed eternality, which is experienced simultaneously by the divine, in an existence which is an eternal present.[248] Nevertheless, the two theories do offer accounts that differ on some key aspects, but whether it is fair to say that duration is 'present-existence' or 'point-like' and whether this is indeed a semantic discussion is discussed later in this chapter.

What is clear, then, is that although discussions of temporality and of eternity both use the term 'duration', these are neither fully different nor are their meanings synonymous. Nor is it the case that those who argue for eternal duration do so using the same descriptive language (even if this is only a semantic change). However, the idea of 'fully realised duration'[249] allows there to be some relation between temporal duration and eternal duration without conflating the two.

[248] That said, Leftow's belief that eternity is 'point-like' is crucial to his argument, but questions must be asked as to how coherent this differentiation is. This is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.
[249] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 445.

### (3.4) Initial summary

It is important to note that different philosophers approach the idea of God's relationship with time and eternity in different ways. Some consider God to be purely eternal; in myriad ways separate from the temporal universe. Others argue that once God created time, He stepped into it and became temporal, but 'was' atemporal prior to this point. This is evident in the thoughts of William Lane Craig, according to whom: 'Given God's real relation to the world, God must, subsequent to creation, be temporal.'[250] Others, such as Garret DeWeese, argue that God exists in His own 'metaphysical time' which corresponds in some sense to the time of the physical world yet is distinct from it.[251] DeWeese claims that:

> Stating that an entity is metaphysically temporal is to say that it is a temporal entity, but the temporal properties and relations that belong to it are defined with reference to metaphysical and not physical time.[252]

DeWeese elucidates the proposed problem of how one might show that God, who is active in the world, is an actual entity rather than an abstract one, whilst maintaining that He is atemporal and immutable.[253] DeWeese thus rejects the classical divine attributes and construes God's relationship to time differently to the classical conception of God; that is to say, DeWeese denies

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[250] William Lane Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity: The Coherence of Theism II: Eternity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001), 268.
[251] DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time*, 253.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Thus, a theistic account that wishes to maintain God exists necessarily and is also creator and sustainer means that God must be more than just a 'distant' being, i.e. more than just a God that is outside of time and thus not involved in creation. If God is atemporal, He must also be without change, but according to DeWeese that would make God an abstract entity (such as a number), which is a claim that almost all defenders of theistic atemporality would seek to deny. DeWeese writes, 'Given that atemporal entities are necessary, changeless things, it is clear why many philosophical theologians have wanted to say that God is atemporal. An atemporal God would be immutable, immaterial, and necessary. All seem to be attributes of God that a traditional theist would want to maintain. The tradition, as we saw in Chapters 1 and 6, has a fine historical pedigree. But surely no theistic philosopher or theologian would want to say that God was an abstract entity! So if my argument is correct, there is good reason to suspect that God is not atemporal, or if He is, then the defender of atemporality must make plausible the claim that God is the unique atemporal concrete entity'. See DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time,* 249. Because of this, DeWeese moves to posit that God is both metaphysically temporal and metaphysically necessary. See DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time,* 249-253.

that God is atemporal.[254] In this way we see that discussions on divine eternity or temporality can be mirrored in questions of divine immutability or mutability. Because temporality (at least as it is usually understood in relation to creation) would seem to imply some kind of mutability (creation once wasn't, but now is), the questions surrounding divine eternity become pressing.[255]

This reflects the fact that throughout history, various philosophers and theologians have differently defined the concepts outlined in this chapter, such as eternity. The discussion of time and eternity is wide-ranging and thus requires me to limit the scope of discussion somewhat. In what follows, I focus on the arguments from Stump and Kretzmann (and, to a lesser extent, from Leftow). Both positions argue that God is eternal, and that all of temporal existence is eternally present to God by virtue of God's eternal present existence. It is my contention that such a position can have a significant impact on the way we view various theological debates. It is, moreover, one which sits comfortably within the Christian tradition, as Stump and Kretzmann approach this topic from a classical perspective which affirms the classical corpus of divine attributes noted in the previous chapter.

### (3.5) Stump, Kretzmann, and ET-Simultaneity

In a 1981 article in the *Journal of Philosophy* entitled 'Eternity', Stump and Kretzmann argue that a being who exists eternally is one who has an eternal frame of reference. As such, an eternal being would have as present to it every distinct temporal frame of reference (eternally). These temporal frames may, as we shall see, exhibit the action of God, but this action is from eternity rather than beginning in a temporal frame. In contrast to common conceptions of eternity and temporality

[254] As will become clear, DeWeese's position is not one which I share, both in his assessment of whether atemporality necessarily makes God to be a 'distant' being, and in his wider critique of the classical corpus. That said, DeWeese's position shows some of the perceived problems surrounding accounts of divine atemporality and the ways in which thinkers have attempted to resolve these apparent problems with radically different results. Moreover, I believe DeWeese is correct to argue that God should not be considered an 'abstract entity', however I disagree that this is the natural outworking of classical views of divine atemporality.
[255] These questions include, what eternity means for the being of God and how this affects the divine-human relationship. These questions will be addressed over the following two chapters.

as being in opposition with each other, Stump and Kretzmann's thesis presents a formulation of God's existence that overcomes this conceptual contrast through the concept of 'simultaneity'. Their formulation is not that there is opposition between the temporal and eternal, but that the temporal can be present to God who is eternal (even if humanity cannot be eternal). In this sense they are not 'opposed', even if they are different.

Through 'simultaneity', Stump and Kretzmann argue that God can exist or occur at one and the same time (temporally), or in one and the same eternal present (eternally).[256] That is, temporal events (T) are simultaneous with each other in an eternal frame (E) of reference. This is what Stump and Kretzmann call 'ET-Simultaneity.'[257] According to Stump and Kretzmann, rational perceiving subjects have certain 'frames of references' depending on their position and location in space and time. For instance, subjects living (and writing doctoral dissertations) in the year 2020 would have a temporal frame of reference with '2020' as their present. Conversely, subjects living (and reading this dissertation) sometime after 2021 will have a different 'present time' and thus a different 'frame of reference' from the subjects of 2020. However, the temporal frames of reference for the subjects of 2020 and 2021 would both be different from that of an eternal subject, whose reference point is not constrained by time.

According to Stump and Kretzmann's account, the same event can be observed as simultaneous in one frame of reference but not in another, depending on the perspective of the observer. They explain this thus:

> Imagine a train traveling very fast, at 6/10ths the speed of light. One observer (the 'ground observer') is stationed on the embankment beside the track; another observer (the 'train observer') is stationed on the train. Suppose that two lightning bolts strike the train, one at each end, and suppose that the ground observer sees those two lightning

[256] Stump, Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 435.
[257] Stump, Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 436.

> bolts simultaneously. The train observer also sees the two lightning bolts, but, since he is traveling toward the light ray emanating from the bolt that strikes the front of the train and away from the bolt that strikes the rear of the train, he will see the lightning bolt strike the front of the train before he sees the other strike the rear of the train. This, then, is the fundamental result: events occurring at different places which are simultaneous in one frame of reference will not be simultaneous in another frame of reference which is moving with respect to the first. This is known as the relativity of simultaneity.[258]

What Stump and Kretzmann are saying is that the same event(s) can be viewed entirely differently depending on the frame of reference. This allows them to make two significant claims. Firstly, the frame of reference for the observer affects what statements can be said to be true. For example, the lightning flashes could be said to be simultaneous in that they occur at the same time in the view of the 'ground observer', even though they were not simultaneous in the experience of the train observer. This is what Stump and Kretzmann refer to as RT-simultaneous: 'RT-simultaneity = existence or occurrence at the same time within the reference frame of a given observer'.[259] Secondly, the same event can be viewed significantly differently depending on one's perspective. Similar to the account of language outlined in Chapter One, this difference is both epistemic and ontological. Our knowledge (in this case, our 'perspective') differs both from other people's and from God's. Our experiences differ from God's because there is an ontological difference between us as creatures and God as creator. Moreover, there is an epistemic difference between individual humans because our human perspectives are tied to who we are as finite beings. Thus, our personal experiences are relative to who we are and when and where we are situated within space and time, although this does not mean that there is no objective ontological reality to time. The reality of how time and eternity function does not

[258] Stump, Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 437.
[259] Stump, Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 438.

change based upon one's perspective, but the way we experience events is different. What is being described here is that there is a creaturely experience and understanding of time that is different to the divine experience and understanding, on the basis that God is eternal and we are temporal.[260] It is this idea (the relativity of simultaneity) that forms the basis for Stump and Kretzmann's theory of eternity, that eternal and temporal beings have different frames of reference.

Assuming that eternity and temporality are two distinct orders which involve two distinct frames of reference held by two different observers, Stump and Kretzmann formulate their argument in the following way:

> (ET) For every x and for every y, x and y are ET-simultaneous iff
>
> (i) either x is eternal and y is temporal, or vice versa; and
>
> (ii) for some observer, A, in the unique eternal reference frame, x and y are both present - i.e., either x is eternally present and y is observed as temporally present, or vice versa; and
>
> (iii) for some observer, B, in one of the infinitely many temporal reference frames, x and y are both present - i.e., either x is observed as eternally present and y is temporally present, or vice versa.

Given the concept of eternity, condition (ii) provides that a temporal entity or event observed as temporally present by some eternal observer A is ET-simultaneous with every eternal entity or event; and condition (iii) provides that an eternal entity or event

[260] As we shall see, while time is not 'foreign' to God, He not a temporal being and so does not experience the world temporally.

> observed as eternally present (or simply as eternal) by some temporal observer B is ET-simultaneous with every temporal entity or event.[261]

This argument holds that an eternal being ('observer A') could be considered to have both an eternal and temporal frame of reference. Given that an eternal being exists with atemporal duration, then all moments in time would be considered as simultaneous with the life of an eternal being. For such a being, there is no moment of time that is not simultaneous with its life. Accordingly, we can imagine the co-existence of temporal and eternal entities. If God exists as an eternal being, this theory proposes that the eternal God holds all of His life in a single moment or extended duration, meaning that He experiences every instance of time simultaneously in the eternal frame of reference. Such a claim could have significant implications for several theological issues, including the passibility debate as well as both christological and trinitarian concerns. However, before delving into its implications for divine (im)passibility (and, later in this thesis, Christology and Trinity), I consider some of the criticisms of Stump and Kretzmann's proposal and how they have sought to further develop their position.

In 1985, Paul Fitzgerald wrote a response to Stump and Kretzmann's concept of eternity, setting out what he saw as several problems with their formulation based upon a set of criteria that he himself drew up. Stump and Kretzmann then responded to this article, which laid out and developed their argument even further.[262] Brian Leftow neatly summarises this to and fro between Stump, Kretzmann, and Fitzgerald: 'Stump and Kretzmann grant that eternity as they conceive it fails Fitzgerald's conditions but contend that this just doesn't matter'.[263] Like the aforementioned explanation of why works by Swinburne and Wolterstorff are not analysed in this current chapter, I will not examine much of Fitzgerald's critique here in detail, as his

[261] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 439.
[262] Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzmann, 'Atemporal Duration', *The Journal of Philosophy*, 84, no. 4 (April 1987), 214-219.
[263] Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 125.

approach ofttimes makes points that are easily defended by Stump and Kretzmann, given that his own starting point disregards key parts of Stump and Kretzmann's theological tradition.[264] Fitzgerald, however, does provide a major critique that Stump and Kretzmann needed to address. This critique could be split into two interrelated parts. The first part arises out of Fitzgerald's discussion on the meaningfulness of the idea of 'atemporal duration'. Although Fitzgerald reaches this point by way of a series of critiques that miss the mark, he undoubtably hits his target with this one. Specifically, he argues:

> We do not really have an extensive mode in eternality at all, given not only that past and future and earlier and later are inapplicable, but that there is no analogue of them... I do not see how there can be infinitely extended duration with no finite parts.[265]

This is the crux of the matter. If we are referring to the present moment that continues and changes when we allude to the notion of 'duration' in a temporal sense, the 'duration' can be viewed looking back into the past, or experienced as the very present moment. For example, your reading of this chapter involves some duration – duration that you may not be aware of at the time, but that can be clearly identified when half an hour has passed, and you have advanced through the pages. 'Duration' is a phrase which implies time and noticeable change. The 'and' in this sentence is important, as time and noticeable change are not necessarily synonymous. Stump and Kretzmann's position, however, is that eternal duration is without past or future; unlike temporal duration, it is without measurement. In response to this, Fitzgerald questions whether 'eternal duration' can be called duration if there is no finite measure. He contends that there is no good reason to suppose that 'eternal duration' or 'E-duration', if it exists, cannot be divided

[264] Fitzgerald writes that 'Divine simplicity never had much to recommend it anyhow', Paul Fitzgerald, *Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity*, 262.
[265] Fitzgerald, 'Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity', 263.

into measurable finite parts –into what Fitzgerald hypothetically calls 'subphases of E-duration.'[266]

Stump and Kretzmann respond to Fitzgerald's challenges in several ways. The first is to reject the notion that duration involves real finite parts. Instead, they contend that whilst it may be conceptually possible to imagine this, that is not necessarily how duration exists in actuality. They write:

> Neither Aristotle nor anyone else who takes time to be essentially continuous would characterize its divisibility by describing it as 'composed . . . of potential parts.' It is not made up of components at all, actual or potential; instead, it is potentially divisible conceptually.[267]

I suggested earlier that we can view time as divided into distinct units (e.g. year 2021 and year 2020) that we look back on, but the important thing is that we have made a division which enables us to say when such events begin or end; for example, we have decided that 31st December is the last day of the year. That does not necessarily mean that time itself is objectively divided, it is divided conceptually by us in order to give clarity to our speech or understanding. Being able to conceive that duration could have subphases is an altogether different claim to saying that duration in itself is actually composed of subphases. Stump and Kretzmann believe the claim that eternal duration is 'potentially divisible conceptually'.[268] However, as eternal duration 'is not made up of components at all' then in it is not actually divisible.[269] As already noted, Stump and Kretzmann's model is supposed to be part of a classical schema of divine attributes; as a result they presuppose pure act, which in turn means they presuppose that eternal

[266] Fitzgerald, 'Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity', 262.
[267] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Atemporal Duration', 216.
[268] Ibid.
[269] Ibid.

duration is 'actually' indivisible.[270] If this was not the case, as Fitzgerald argues, 'subphases at which distinct particulars of the divine life have their locations and E-duration',[271] on the basis that infinitely extended duration requires finite parts,[272] then eternal duration would actually be composed of parts and so would not be a fully actualised existence. So long as we can conceive that duration is not composed of finite parts, we can make the allowance and submit that their argument holds up in this instance. Stump and Kretzmann's defence of this first prong is rooted in the idea that God is pure act. This will be used as a springboard to move on to the next argument raised by Fitzgerald.

The second part of Fitzgerald's critique is that Stump and Kretzmann's account of eternal duration cannot be meaningfully termed duration. Even if duration could be divided into conceptual rather than actual subphases, this still does not account for believing eternal existence is duration in any meaningful sense of the word. As Fitzgerald puts it, 'E-duration, like spatial extension and temporal duration, would be an extensive mode of being. It is not point-like but involves a limitless stretch of some kind'.[273] However, how can you have a limitless stretch if there is no succession, order, or sequence? This would seem to imply that Stump and Kretzmann's idea of eternity is not 'infinitely extended' but instead becomes 'point-like'; one might say this seems to be a reduced rather than an extended form of existence.

The move to make eternity a 'reduced' form of existence is certainly not the one Stump and Kretzmann seek to make. They claim that:

[270] While the presupposition that God is pure act requires them to suggest that e-duration is indivisible, the indivisibility of e-duration does not necessarily entail that God is pure act. For Stump and Kretzmann, the classical underpinning of their argument is fundamental to a number of their core claims.
[271] Fitzgerald, 'Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity', 264.
[272] Fitzgerald, 'Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity', 263.
[273] Fitzgerald, 'Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity', 262.

> successiveness essential to temporal duration cannot be a feature of eternity in itself. And, as our use of the phrase 'a duration without succession' shows, we do not take that claim to reduce eternity to a nonextensive mode of existence.[274]

They clearly believe that the idea of duration adds something to the debate that 'point-like' existence does not. Furthermore, they evidently think it is possible to subscribe to non-successive forms of eternity whilst maintaining the concept of eternity being atemporal duration. It is also crucial to note that the idea of non-successiveness in eternity is an important position to hold, because, as argued earlier in this chapter, successiveness would allow us to measure the passing of events. If this is true, then successiveness in eternity would make eternity a different 'type' of temporality, as opposed to Boethius' account of eternity as a mode of being where one 'possesses simultaneously the entire fullness of life without end'.[275] Stump and Kretzmann's solution to this apparent problem is to invert the question. Rather than asking how eternal duration maps onto temporal duration, they argue that it is eternal duration that is the truest form of duration, whereas temporal duration only aims to mirror the eternal. To put it in their own words:

> On the doctrine of eternity, atemporal duration is existence possessed completely, all at once, present entirely to its possessor, whereas temporal duration is existence possessed with radical in-completeness, a bit at a time, mostly already lost to its possessor or not yet possessed. Atemporal duration is the genuine, paradigmatic duration of which temporal duration is only the moving image. God's illimitable atemporal duration is the basis of all temporal duration, any instance of which is correctly called duration only analogically

[274] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Atemporal Duration', 217.
[275] Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, 111.

since it is only a partial manifestation of the paradigmatic, genuine duration which is 'the complete possession all at once of illimitable life'.[276]

Such a position is true to the theological convictions to which Stump and Kretzmann adhere, and which can be found relatively often in the thought of classical theologians;I have already shown that such thought is key to the philosophy at hand. However, in a similar vein, Leftow critiques Stump and Kretzmann's proposal, contending that they are forced to give up too much. He argues that because Stump and Kretzmann concede that temporal duration is drastically unlike eternal duration, one struggles to make sense of the true meaning of duration: either eternal duration is a true duration or temporal duration is a true duration, not both. Leftow contends that because our understanding of duration is a temporal one, it is this experience that allows us to talk about duration as a concept. Consequently, we would have to deny eternal duration as being true duration, which is problematic for the scheme propagated by Stump and Kretzmann.[277]

What Leftow elucidates is that the entire discussion surrounding duration is based on our temporal understanding of it. Stump and Kretzmann's argument that the temporal form of duration is simply an image of true (eternal) duration renders the very notion of duration meaningless because all we can comprehend is temporal duration, which ultimately turns out not to be 'duration'. Accepting Stump and Kretzmann's proposals then comes at a significantly higher cost.

Whilst Leftow's critique highlights some of the potential weaknesses of Stump and Kretzmann's proposal, I believe Leftow's critique goes slightly beyond the capacity of the evidence he provides and that he reaches beyond what he can successfully argue for. He

[276] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Atemporal Duration', 219.
[277] Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 125.

supposes that Stump and Kretzmann's position means we can no longer understand temporal duration because temporal duration turns out not to be 'duration' in the end. However, Stump and Kretzmann argue that temporal duration is a 'moving image' of atemporal duration.[278] Stump and Kretzmann's language here is obviously a reference to Plato's account of time as the moving image of eternity,[279] an account of time and eternity which has provided the Christian traditional with the metaphysical framework for the analogical conception of creaturely and divine existence.[280] What we find in Stump and Kretzmann's theory of time and eternity is thus an analogy of duration.

As opposed to Stump and Kretzmann, Leftow's critique assumes a univocity of language rather than an analogical one, that there could only be one sense – one univocal meaning of – duration. Ergo, if there is only one way of being durational, then there can only be one true duration between temporal and eternal duration. However, if, as I have described above, temporal duration and eternal duration are understood to be analogical, then the analogous use of language (in the sense that the words map onto each other without being strictly identical, as argued for in Chapter One) avoids the critique Leftow makes against it. Furthermore, eternal duration here is being qualified by an analogical use of language to make sense of how one can talk of both eternal and temporal duration, which resembles a number of other moves made by this thesis. For example, it resembles the way passibility can be qualified by suggesting the relationship between human and divine passibility is analogical. Thus, the analogical framework of Stump and Kretzmann potentially opens one path towards affirming a qualified form of divine passibility. This is because the same conceptual tools are being employed to describe

[278] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Atemporal Duration', 219.
[279] Plato *Timaeus,* Translated by Donald J. Zeyl, 37d., In *Plato: Complete Works*. ed., John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, (Havertown: Hackett Publishing Company, Incorporated, 1997), 1623.
[280] See David B. Burrell, 'Analogy, Creation, and Theological Language', *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 74 (2000): 36–52, especially 42.

God's being and existence, both with regard to passibility (analogical with human passibility) and duration (analogical with creaturely duration).[281]

Indeed, there are a few aspects of eternal duration that are also somewhat true of temporal duration. Firstly, we might claim that the idea that eternal existence is extended, rather than point-like, reflects the reality that we inhabit. Secondly, we might assert that eternal duration involves possessing all moments of life at once. Temporal duration involves possessing at least some of your life as present, and so there is at least some colouration. It is precisely because these features of temporal duration do not map perfectly yet are analogous that the concept of eternal duration works. This is because eternal duration is not an 'othering', that is to say, it is not using the same language to describe eternal duration as completely different from temporal duration. We can at least recognise some truth of our own experience in the conception presented.

To accept the view of Stump and Kretzmann, we are forced to accept a number of propositions that may seem both strange and costly. Whilst these positions seem defendable, they do require one to reorientate how one thinks about key concepts such as eternity and duration. Some of the critics already mentioned in this chapter present their own accounts of eternity, and it is to Leftow's account that we now turn.

### (3.6) Quasi-temporal Eternality

In his constructive account of eternity, Leftow adopts a similar position to that of Stump and Kretzmann, but with some notable differences. Before I examine the ways in which his account differs, it is helpful to consider the similarities between his account and that of Stump and

[281] Curiously, Helm wonders if such qualifications actually help, and asks 'Indeed, what is left except the bare claim?', see Helm, *Eternal God,* 35. However, as we can see, at least in terms of this project, the qualifications could in fact be said to be very important.

Kretzmann. Like the latter, Leftow argues for a God who is eternal but whose works and actions can be seen and experienced in the temporal creation, by created beings (for example, God 'speaking'). Moreover, like Stump and Kretzmann, Leftow founds his argument on Boethian concepts (albeit from a reading that differs from Stump and Kretzmann's). These similarities are important because they reveal the common ground in their thoughts. Nevertheless, there are some notable points where Leftow departs from the thoughts of Stump and Kretzmann.

For instance, Leftow argues that an eternal being could have earlier and later points within its life, provided there was no succession between them. He writes that:

> If this is so, then an eternal being could be one that somehow lives at once ('*tota simul*') all moments of a life whose moments are ordered as earlier and later. This second concept of eternal life renders it a bit more like life in time, by asserting that it contains earlier and later positions. [282]

Unlike Stump and Kretzmann, who argue for an eternal being who experiences all its life at once and simultaneously with every other event, Leftow asserts that God still experiences events as being 'earlier' or 'later', whilst denying that said events are sequential. He does this by positing that an eternal being may exist at one eternal point (point A) and also at another eternal point (A+1). Whilst it might seem that A+1 is 'later' than A, if an eternal being simultaneously experiences these two points as a result of possessing all of its illimitable life at once, then it can be said to experience both earlier and later events. A+1 is not 'temporally' after A as eternal events do not occur as temporal events. Because there is no sequential movement between A and A+1, A+1 is understood to be a 'later' event for an eternal being whilst still denying sequentially in its life.[283] Thus, we can say that an event is 'later', but not that it comes 'after' another event.

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[282] Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 120.
[283] Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 121.

Leftow arrives at this position to meet the challenge made by Fitzgerald. As explained earlier, Fitzgerald argues that eternal duration would be expected to have genuine extension, as well as parts or subphases that would be considered to have different amounts of e-duration.[284] Leftow contends that there are genuine points in the concept of eternal duration (even though these are not sequential), but these are not the same as creating a metaphysical distinction in God – in other words, God remains simple (in a certain sense of simplicity). This marks a significant shift from the idea of eternity as extended duration to a point-like concept of duration. Even if eternal duration does contain subphases, as Fitzgerald and Leftow would allow, there is, at least in Leftow's account, no movement between events because they lack a sequential property. For Leftow, every existing temporal event is present to God with each event existing somewhat independently of others. Yet because each event is equally present to God, events do not exist as an ordered series. This means that events exist all at once under a tenseless theory of time.[285]

But does Leftow's theory differ from that of Stump and Kretzmann in an intelligible way? Stump and Kretzmann argue for God's experience of every temporal event as simultaneous with its eternal duration, whereas Leftow argues that eternal duration is point-like, in which space every temporal event is available to God. Both parties contend that God experiences all of time (as eternally present). And both argue that God is eternal. Although Leftow's position may allow him to meet the conditions set by Fitzgerald, it is unclear how his theory differs in any practical sense from that of Stump and Kretzmann. William Lane Craig critiques Leftow on this point, arguing:

> But such a theory seems altogether implausible. It requires us to break loose the *earlier/later than* relation from pastness, presentness and futurity…But if two events are objectively present how can one be earlier than the other?[286]

[284] Fitzgerald, 'Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity', 262.
[285] Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity*, 37.
[286] Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity,* 38.

If Craig is correct, then the argument from Leftow seems to make little sense. If this critique of using earlier/later language holds, then rather than articulating a nuanced reading of Boethius that differs from Stump and Kretzmann, it would instead appear to argue the same position, given that the point-like distinction Leftow wishes to make would become the eternal present of Stump and Kretzmann. Craig goes on to suggest that these views (of Leftow, Stump, and Kretzmann) on time and eternity are 'altogether implausible',[287] which in my view is also incorrect.

However, a key difference may lie in their fundamental conceptions of time. The earlier subsection on time largely focused on philosophical understandings of time and eternity, which remain important for the arguments at play. Moreover, such arguments also borrow concepts from physics to help ground their theories, and there are some notable differences in this scientific grounding. For instance, Stump and Kretzmann draw on both Einsteinian and Newtonian trains of thought, paying specific attention to discussions of special relativity.[288] This approach understands time as connected to special entities and observers; in other words, occurrences are linked with the place in which they occur. Special relativity in turn shapes Stump and Kretzmann's view on simultaneity. According to this view, temporal events follow on from one another and time could be considered to occur like a process in a linear framework.

Unlike Stump and Kretzmann, Leftow links his own theory to quantum mechanics and so does not have the same views on simultaneity. Instead, his theory allows for the idea of a chronon, which is a distinct unit of time.[289] This concept lends itself to the theory that time itself is not continuous but is composed of distinct units. This is evident in Leftow's theory of a point-like eternal duration in which events are earlier or later but are not sequentially ordered. It should be noted that there are multiple understandings of the philosophical effect of quantum

[287] Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity,* 38.
[288] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 436-437.
[289] Craig, *God, Time, and Eternity,* 37.

mechanics on the world. Therefore, Leftow's philosophical propositions may not be universally held by other philosophers who draw on quantum mechanics. Nevertheless, this conceptual grounding is why Leftow's concepts do not become a differently worded theory of eternal duration. Instead, they represent a very real differentiation based on two differing theories of the universe. Thus, it would seem that Stump and Kretzmann and Leftow differ in the presuppositions they hold regarding the physical operations of the world.

A key question for Leftow's theory, in regard to this thesis, is whether his model of time and eternity can act in tandem with classical doctrines such as simplicity and immutability. Firstly I believe his theory is in fact compatible with divine immutability.[290] This is because God's existence outside of time, and His knowledge of time as entirely present to Him, allows for this discussion. Secondly however, I explained earlier that Fitzgerald sets up his conditions for duration in a manner that could be problematic for those who want to affirm divine simplicity.[291] Given that Leftow seeks to uphold these conditions, simplicity may well be indefensible given this account. That said, it seems to me that whilst a particularly strong from of divine simplicity (Such as Dolezal's view) might be rejected, it may be possible to maintain simplicity in a weakened form, such as Barret's view.[292] That said, if we accept that Leftow satisfies the critique of Fitzgerald, an outright critic of divine simplicity, then we are able to present an account that allows for an immutable and passible God, and potentially a simple God. In this sense, Leftow might provide one way of achieving the core aim of this thesis whilst potentially overcoming some of the critiques levelled at Stump and Kretzmann's position.

Leftow, as well as Stump and Kretzmann, argues that God exists outside time and that every temporal event is present to God in this atemporal existence. Accordingly, all temporal

[290] That said, as noted in Chapter Two, how the relationship between immutability and change can be described in different ways. I would suggest that Leftow's account could work with both weak and strong immutability accounts (thereby potentially precluding most if not all change).
[291] Fitzgerald, 'Stump and Kretzmann on Time and Eternity', 262.
[292] Leftow, *Time and Eternity*, 121.

experiences, which are eternally present to God, are ones that He experiences eternally: these experiences do not have a beginning, nor do they have an end. They could include the pain of Jesus's crucifixion, the experience of creation, or my joy at Liverpool being crowned Premier League champions. All these experiences and events are equally and eternally present to the eternal God. In this way, the passibility of God is able to function along with divine immutability, because God is never experiencing anything 'new', nor is anything being added to His knowledge or experience. God can be said to eternally have an emotional affectedness due to the fact that this is not a new experience for Him. It would seem to be the case that Leftow's theory also serves the main goal of this thesis (although, unlike Stump and Kretzmann, his position does not reconcile some of the key concerns raised in Chapter 2 around divine simplicity). This is because the most significant gap between the classical corpus of the divine attributes and the modern passibility debate concerns how to adhere to both passibility and immutability. Leftow's schema provides an alternative means of reconciling both, similar to how Stump and Kretzmann's work can be used. This is helpful because it becomes possible to maintain two key theological principles (namely, passibility and immutability) whilst not necessarily tying oneself to other doctrines that one may view as problematic (such as a particularly strong form of simplicity).

### (3.7) Implications for divine passibility

Stump and Kretzmann's argument provides an initial framework for considering how God could be eternal and affect (and be affected *by*) the temporal, and what this might mean for ensuing theological and philosophical debates. This becomes clear when considering the question of passibility. At the end of Chapter Two I argued that much of classical theology could be utilised by passibilists to affirm that God can remain unchanging whilst being able to suffer. Stump and

Kretzmann provide one potential solution to this quandary. Let us re-examine the initial argument from Stump and Kretzmann:

> (ET) For every x and for every y, x and y are ET-simultaneous iff
>
> (i) either x is eternal and y is temporal, or vice versa; and
>
> (ii) for some observer, A, in the unique eternal reference frame, x and y are both present - i.e., either x is eternally present and y is observed as temporally present, or vice versa; and
>
> (iii) for some observer, B, in one of the infinitely many temporal reference frames, x and y are both present - i.e., either x is observed as eternally present and y is temporally present, or vice versa.
>
> Given the concept of eternity, condition (ii) provides that a temporal entity or event observed as temporally present by some eternal observer A is ET-simultaneous with every eternal entity or event; and condition (iii) provides that an eternal entity or event observed as eternally present (or simply as eternal) by some temporal observer B is ET-simultaneous with every temporal entity or event.[293]

Within this theory are several key points. The first is that the temporal genuinely exists and that the temporal human observer is recognised as having a single frame of reference. It is also acknowledged that, whilst each temporal entity may only understand and experience one temporal reference point at a time, there are in fact numerous other temporal reference points, each held only by unique individuals.

Next, an eternal being who is in essence everlasting and atemporal, containing all of its life without lacking any of it, would have to experience all of these temporal events

[293] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Eternity', 439.

simultaneously in the eternal frame of reference. As we saw earlier, Stump and Kretzmann argue that an atemporal eternal being is without change. For them, an eternal being is without past or future, but such an eternal being's existence can still be called 'duration'.[294] However, that such an eternal being can somehow eternally experience 'duration' does not imply that this being 'changes'. In 3.2.1, all change entails time (even if time does not necessarily require change). And since eternal duration is without past or future, there is no change for an eternal being or for such a being's experience of duration.[295] This might be considered an 'all or nothing' approach: for if an eternal being could be simultaneous with one temporal event or entity, then it would need to be simultaneous with *all* temporal events/entities or else it fails to encapsulate all of time and would thus become no longer properly eternal. At the end of Chapter Two I suggested that we ought to re-define passibility so that it does not entail mutability. The proposal by Stump and Kretzmann provides one way of enabling such a definition to work. According to this definition, God is constantly affected as an eternal being, but He is not changing because of His capacity to experience or to be affected. Rather, God could be said to eternally 'possess' (or to experience) the fullness of divine experiences as a constant in Godself—in God's eternal frame of reference.[296]

One might argue that because God is not temporally located, He cannot have any experiences *per se* because experiences must always be temporal in nature. Accordingly, an eternal and indeed atemporal God cannot have any experiences – which is why Stump and Kretzmann

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[294] Stump and Kretzmann, 'Atemporal Duration', 216.

[295] As we saw in Chapter Two, there are different types of properties (essential, contingent, Cambridge). Depending on what we think God has/is essentially then affects which of these properties could be said to change in some sense. Because I am arguing that God is both simple and immutable, then these properties are predicated of God essentially, thus, all forms of change are precluded here. This is in part due to the way immutability is conceived, since a strong immutability account usually precludes all three types of change. There is some debate about whether a Cambridge property can be properly account for a change, but as Robert Francescotti points out, it makes a difference just by having or lacking such a property, See., Robert Francescotti, 'Mere Cambridge Properties', 296. Moreover, Given the way this thesis has discussed the divine attributes, all of God's properties should be considered essential because there is no change, nothing can be added to or taken away from God.

[296] As noted previously, This does not mean that God experiences *all* experiences, rather that every experience God could (and does) have is constantly experienced

uphold divine impassibility. However, I believe that this is not an inevitable conclusion of Stump and Kretzmann's construal of time and eternality. If Stump and Kretzmann can allow or even affirm an analogical account of temporal and eternal duration, one could extend their framework to make the case for an analogy of temporal and eternal experience, such that creaturely temporal durational experience is a 'moving image' of God's eternal durational experience.[297]

For instance, in her work *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*, Stump pays considerable attention to the biblical account of God's interaction with Jonah:

> God is ET-simultaneous with every moment of Jonah's life. And in one and the same eternal now, God can will that He make one speech to Jonah which Jonah apprehends at time $t_1$ and another speech to Jonah which Jonah apprehends at time $t_2$. God's one act of will in one and the same eternal now can be for effects in different temporal locations. Furthermore, it is entirely possible and compatible with the doctrine of divine eternity that the speech God wills to introduce into time at $t_2$ is a function of what God in the eternal now knows that Jonah says at some time prior to $t_2$. Finally, on Aquinas's views, in a conversation between an eternal, immutable God and a temporal person such as Jonah, shared attention is possible; so that real personal presence between God and that human person is possible as well.[298]

Stump goes on to write that such a God is more personally present than in other views because an eternal God is present at once to every time in Jonah's life.[299] Here, Stump is arguing that God can be personally involved and responsive in the eternal now, because every moment of Jonah's life is present to God. Likewise, in His eternal now, God is experiencing all of that which God will ever experience and has ever experienced. If we accept the premise of this thesis – that God can have passible experiences – then the suggestion is that although we experience this display of

[297] Cf. Stump and Kretzmann, 'Atemporal Duration', 219.
[298] Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*, 74-75.
[299] Ibid.

emotion in distinct temporal frames, this does not mean that God's experience is located temporally.

Chapters One and Two discussed a number of topics which can be employed here. Firstly, the idea that God's relationships with humans are bi-directional – that both parties have some influence on the other. The assumption here is that this necessitates each party being located in the same temporal space. However, as argued earlier, Stump rejects this requirement on the basis that God can act at any moment of time from the eternal present, and every moment is present to God In eternity, allowing for an 'engaged' and 'personally present' God.[300] Thus, one can allow for a bi-directional relationship between humans and God (even if this would likely be rejected by Stump). Secondly, Stump assumes a number of divine attributes in her schema, linking eternity to immutability, pure act, simplicity, and aseity. Given how she formulates the doctrine of eternity, this presents a new edge to the way these other doctrines are held, particularly immutability, as she seeks to maintain the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and personal presence of God.[301] Stump's desire is to effectively formulate a way of discussing God's eternality that does not impugn His ability to be engaged and responsive to creation, whilst also remaining faithful to the traditional articulation of the church regarding divine being. Stump's argument therefore, provides the basis for the aim of this thesis: formulating a view of God that is largely (albeit not entirely) in keeping with the tradition, one that allows for the responsive, engaged God many passibilists argue for, and one that makes sense of petitionary prayer (as we shall see in Chapter Five).

The compatibility between the idea of an eternal being and said eternal being's 'relationship' with temporality has a number of important implications for our understanding of the possibility of affirming divine passibility. Firstly, Stump and Kretzmann's theory of ET-

[300] Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*, 74.
[301] Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*, 74-75, 40-45.

simultaneity was developed to be compatible with the classical corpus of divine attributes such as simplicity, pure act, immutability, and aseity. It assumes that God has an eternal frame of reference to which every other temporal frame of reference is simultaneously present. However, though temporal events are *eternally* simultaneous in the eternal experience of God, they are not *temporally* simultaneous in temporal frames, such that – for temporal beings – the temporal event of creation is not temporally simultaneous with the event of final judgment. The doctrine of pure act here becomes essential, because if one assumes that God is pure act then an eternal God does not have any potency, in that His being is fully actualised. This is a key reason as to why passibility is being considered an eternal effect, that is to say, it does not have a beginning in God. Further, there is not one moment within all simultaneous reference points that is to be considered outside of God's act.[302] For example, when I pray, God hears my prayer and answers it – from a temporal standpoint this could be considered to take place on a linear framework spanning minutes, days, or decades. By contrast, for God, all of this is simultaneous in the eternal now: God hears and answers *simultaneously* in one undivided act and experience because He holds all of His illimitable life in the same present as an eternal being. If God is pure act, then God does not have any potency to hear or answer my prayers. Rather, God is always already *actually*—and eternally—listening to and answering my prayers. In this way, while it may appear to us that God's passible experience entails temporal mutability, this is not and cannot be the case for divine experience.[303]

This leads to the main consideration of whether God can be immutable yet passible. I believe Stump and Kretzmann's contention that God is ET-Simultaneous allows me to sustain this very point, even though they would likely reject this notion because they do not hold that God is passible, given their broad adherence to classical Thomist theology. Assuming that God's

[302] God as pure act is not only an external designation of the way He acts but is primarily a statement that God in God's self is fully actualised.
[303] This clearly has an impact on trinitarian theology, and this will be explored in Chapter Four.

eternal being does not exist in opposition to the temporal world, but exists ET-simultaneously with temporality, then every action that we would attribute in light of eternal duration is in fact still happening. If this is the case, then every act that has occurred in the temporal world has, in the life of God, been simultaneous with every other action and event. When God is troubled by the wickedness of humanity,[304] this is simultaneous with the God who 'will take great delight in you; in His love He will no longer rebuke you but will rejoice over you with singing'.[305] This means that when we see the emotional life of God, or even the physical suffering of Jesus, these events have been eternally experienced by God, because in His atemporal nature He experiences all of His illimitable life at once. As Stump writes of Christ's emotional response to the death of Lazarus:

> The person who wept over Lazarus was God – God in His human nature but still God. And the grief that gave vent to those tears is also always present to God. If it were not so, there would be succession in God; and then God would be temporal, not eternal.[306]

The key difference here is that this is the experience of a passible God rather than that of an impassible God. Yet the notion remains of divine experience as one that takes place eternally.

The passible God does not change: it only appears that way to those of us who have a temporal nature, for we events and experiences occurring successively. If we accept that God experiences some sort of emotional occurrence, for example, from a state of righteous anger to this anger being abated, we might categorise this as a 'change', but that does not mean that there is a change in the divine nature. This is because our view is limited by our temporal nature, whereas this 'emotional experience' has been experienced by God eternally and therefore simultaneously in a non-temporal manner. If God is pure act, then Stump and Kretzmann's

[304] Genesis 6, Numbers 32:13, Deuteronomy 9:8, Ezekiel 7:8.
[305] Zephaniah 3:17.
[306] Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*, 101.

theory (construed in this way) can be taken to apply to every event that has already occurred and every event that will occur in the temporal universe.[307] Thus, everything that has ever or will ever happen is experienced simultaneously by God in His eternal reference frame, in His so-called 'eternal now'. God in this schema is not impassible but omniscient, omnibenevolent and, indeed, omnipassible: the all-knowing and all-loving God who is Love itself is also the fullness of experience.

Passibility should not be understood as a deficiency in God, nor should immutability or any of the other divine attributes. Instead, when coupled with this theory of time and eternity, we see how all our knowledge and our experience is first found in the creator. This idea of fullness was noted by Stump when she writes:

> The result of God's eternity is that in respect of time God can be more present with regard to a human person Paula, than her contemporary human person Jerome could be…eternal God is present at once to every time of Paula's life; none of Paula's life is ever absent or unavailable for God.[308]

God is the one who is present to every human at every moment. His existence when termed such reveals the vastness of the power and the fullness of His life; nothing is absent from God.

It is this God, the God who becomes incarnate, the God who suffers, who has these experiences for all time, just as God has, in His eternal frame, always experienced the resurrection and every other divine experience that we could name. God does not change, but He does 'feel' and does so throughout His eternal life. Thus, we may say that God is affected without change. Thus, although we may see the effect of God's response to humanity in temporal space with a temporal beginning and end, this is experienced by God in the eternal

[307] For this reason, the ways in which we define passibility and immutability are very important, as what we mean by these words affects our understanding of events. In this case, my argument in Chapter Two that passibility should be understood as not necessarily entailing mutability allows for the claims in this subsection.
[308] Stump, *Atonement*, 121.

now, constantly without beginning or end. Thus, God is eternally affected, eternally passible, but remains immutable. Here we see that the distinctions made concerning divine eternity and passibility have trinitarian and christological implications; this will be explored further in the next chapter.

This view leads to the claim that God possesses the fullness of time; He is truly, as Revelation 22:13 states, the 'Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End'. This is because all of time is held simultaneously with God's eternal life. His being the beginning and the end is simultaneously held in God's divine life as part of the eternal now. Utilising ET-Simultaneity allows us to maintain much of the classical corpus whilst still accepting the passibility of God.

## (3.8) Conclusion

This chapter sought to lay out a way of understanding eternity and temporality as co-existent in the life and experience of God, and examined how this is utilised in the work of Stump and Kretzmann as well as Leftow. This revealed that there are logically consistent ways of maintaining that God is eternal, whilst not reducing this to a form of atemporality which requires divine absence from creation, or reducing God to an abstract metaphysical principle as DeWeese suggests.[309] Both of these theories on time and eternity can be employed to help us conceive of a God who is 'simultaneously' immutable and passible. As long as God's experiences are conceived as occurring in the eternal present, which holds every temporal frame as simultaneous, then all events are 'present to God'. This has crucial implications for the doctrine of Incarnation, which will be further considered in the next chapter on christological and trinitarian theology. But for now it is important to note that, according to the framework described in this chapter, it is possible to claim that God is both immutable and passible. According to this schema, God

[309] DeWeese, *God and the Nature of Time,* 249.

does not need to change in order to know and experience 'events', because these 'events' are eternally experienced by God. However, thus far I have mostly focused on *de deo uno* and not *de deo trino*. Chapter Four moves on to discuss how these views of time and eternity are to be seen to apply to the Trinity.

# Chapter Four: Christology and the Trinity

## (4.1) Introduction

In the previous chapter, I considered God's relationship to time and eternity as well as one way of articulating an account of God who is both passible and immutable. Chapter Three suggested that if one follows an account of time and eternity similar to that proposed by Stump and Kretzmann, then it is possible to conceive that God is both passible and immutable (with some qualification). My discussion so far has focused primarily on the one God (or the divine substance), however, as we know, scripture reveals God as triune. Consequently, this chapter now focuses on how God as Father, Son, and Spirit may exist in relation to time and eternity, and how the triune nature of God coheres with the divine attributes of the classical corpus, as examined in Chapter Two. The aim here is to apply the conceptual positions of Chapters One, Two and Three to the three persons of the Trinity, as worshipped and experienced in Christian life and *praxis*.

This significant discussion enables me to present a practical outworking in theology for the 'concrete' experience of believers. It is important to establish how what was said of God in previous chapters might actually affect the way we worship or understand the triune persons. For instance, Christoph Schwoebel writes:

> With regard to the understanding of eternity and its relationships to time, the biblical traditions present us with a puzzling picture. There is neither a fully worked out concept of eternity nor of time.[310]

Whilst I have expressed one way in which God's relationship to time and eternity could be envisaged, it is important to examine how these ideas work with the revelation of God in scripture. This will help establish the applications of what I have said regarding God's

[310] Christoph Schwoebel, 'The Eternity of the Triune God: Preliminary Considerations on the Relationship Between the Trinity and the Time of Creation', *Modern Theology* 34, no. 3 (2018): 345.

relationship to time and eternity to the church, especially in the lived-out daily experience of faith. These applications will constitute the aim of Chapter Five in the discussion on prayer.

This chapter examines Christology and Trinity because they are part of the unique features of the Christian faith, which are revealed by God and disclose to us something true of the divine, as Rowan Williams writes:

> [T]he Christian doctrine of God as Trinity permits us to see 'revelation' occurring in this way - through Son and Spirit together - and to see the structure of revelation itself as in a manner corresponding to God's own being.[311]

Williams articulates that revelation is inseparably tied to the Trinity – that is, to understand revelation is to understand more of God's own nature. In order to align the findings of this thesis with revelation, any assumptions made thus far in this thesis which are incompatible with the doctrine of the Trinity ought to be rejected. This is not to claim that the immanent and economic Trinity are identical, but that we understand more of the divine being through the revelation of the Trinity in its economic activity. However, this understanding will never allow us to know *everything* about the divine being. In the account that follows, I make use of the discussion on divine attributes to examine how they might be applied to each trinitarian person.

Although this chapter examines the trinitarian persons one-by-one, this should not be taken to imply that the missions of the three persons are quite distinct; rather, it is merely a tool for describing actions that are (for us) primarily associated with a trinitarian person. As Adonis Vidu puts it: 'From a human angle, from below, it is true that what we appear to encounter are three sets of personal operations: those of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.'[312] Humans usually encounter the operations of the three persons as belonging only to a specific person, but this should not be taken to mean that this is in fact the case: God's divine missions

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311 Williams, *The Trinity and Revelation*, 205-206.

312 Adonis Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things: Inseparable Operations in Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 91.

*ad extra* and processions *ad intra* are essentially related. It is on this topic that we see how some of the discussion in Chapter Three is especially pertinent. Arguing that God can engage in a temporal world whilst remaining eternal can show us how God can be intimately engaged with His temporal creation in His missions but also remain eternal and unchanging in His immanent processions. And so, while the discussion in this chapter is focused on how God is seen acting in temporal space (usually as a specific person), it remains in continuation with the conclusions of previous chapters. In particular, the content of this chapter is focused on addressing two core concerns that arise out of the previous three chapters. Firstly, can the conception of God as both immutable and passible sit comfortably within an orthodox Christian account of God as Trinity? And, secondly, can immutability and passibility be applied to each distinct trinitarian person (and not just true of the human nature of Christ)?[313] As we shall see, it is my contention that these concerns can be addressed in this chapter. It is this combination that is the distinct contribution of this thesis to modern theological discourse.

### (4.2.1) The Second Person of the Trinity

I begin my consideration with the second person of the Trinity, the Son. I then move on to discuss the Spirit, followed by the Father. This is more easily achieved once I have already established how the other persons of the Trinity (co)exist. I have chosen this order because the revelation of God as Trinity in the New Testament significantly affects our understanding of God when compared with a purely monotheistic conception of divine being. This is not to say that God has somehow *changed* in the witness of the New Testament compared to His revelation in the Old Testament. Instead, it is to indicate that the revelation of Trinity changes what we know about God's being, such that we might submit that the Jewish conception of God and the Christian conception of God are significantly different. Because the debates addressed by this

[313] I am not suggesting that the argument of this thesis is the only way to argue that God is immutable and passible, but that this is one possible way of making this claim.

thesis are about God's being, any change in our ontological conceptions (and their sources) should cause a genuine change in our understanding of whom we worship. In this sense, divine revelation drives ontological accounts. Therefore, for my current purposes, when I discuss the Old Testament, I do so in light of the revelation in the New Testament. Through the latter, we develop a further understanding of God as Trinity; consequently, our understanding of who God is changes. Jörg Frey puts it like this:

> …God cannot be imagined without a reference to the exalted crucified One. In Christian perspective, after Good Friday and Easter morning God can only be spoken of as a God who has definitely adopted the human life of Jesus and his death, who has entered into a connection with human history, and even death. Such could not have been said before the Christ-event, but after Christ's exaltation God cannot be considered any more *etsi crux non daretur* ('as if the cross had not happened').[314]

Therefore, as Frey argues, the incarnation of the second person radically affects how we understand everything that comes before that point in time. I am not suggesting that through the incarnation, God's being is different (that is to say, God has not changed); on the contrary, I am acknowledging that our understanding of God's being is different by way of the incarnation. God has not changed, we have.

In Chapter Three I demonstrated that Stump, Kretzmann and Leftow's conceptions of eternity work well with regard to what I call a 'nonconcrete' monotheistic divine being. How such ideas apply to a trinitarian God at this point needs elucidation. As Schwoebel writes, 'the Christian concept of God always requires a Christological and pneumatological exposition in the

[314] Jörg Frey, 'How did the Spirit become a Person?' in *The Holy Spirit, Inspiration, and the Cultures of Antiquity*, eds., Jörg Frey and John Levison (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 345. Frey goes on to discuss why such a statement should be considered in relation to mutability, but as this thesis has already shown, such claims do not necessarily entail a mutable God.

context of the doctrine of the Trinity.'[315] The latter is foundational to understanding God both in terms of ontology and God's action in the world. Thus, if we understand God in trinitarian terms, then 'non-concrete' notions of 'God' are insufficient.[316] Consequently, in seeking to understand the Christological and pneumatological dynamics at work in the Godhead, we will concomitantly develop a fuller picture of the understanding God. Therefore, understanding who Jesus, the Spirit or the Father is, properly situates our understanding of the other trinitarian members and their relationships to one another. Implicit in this approach are two key ideas. Firstly, as we have already discussed, the concept of divine revelation, that all we know of God is revealed by God. And secondly, the relation of opposition. That is to say that the divine persons are distinguished by the fact that they are not the other persons. An example of this idea is seen in Athanasius, who writes, 'the Father is Father and is not also Son, and the Son is Son and not also Father; but the nature is one.'[317] The combination of these two ideas is that we know the Father, Son and Spirit via revelation and we know that they are distinct from each other, for the Son cannot be the Spirit or vice versa.

As this chapter unfolds, I will show that the view of time and eternity established in Chapter Three does indeed fit with a trinitarian understanding of God as revealed in the scriptural witness. As a result, my discussion of the second person of the Trinity covers the following topics: eternal generation, the incarnation, the ministry of Christ, the cross and resurrection. The aim is to begin at 'the beginning' and work systematically in chronological order. This enables the discussion to develop in a logical way, taking into account the diverse work and appearances of the second person.

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[315] Christoph Schwoebel, 'God', in *Religion Past & Present: Encyclopaedia of Theology and Religion*, vol. 5, (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2009), 469.

[316] Moreover, the aim here is also to utilise the discussions of language, passibility, immutability and simplicity in developing a trinitarian understanding in keeping with the view elucidated in Chapter Three. This not only develops for us a trinitarian position but also utilises much of traditional theology (which as we saw particularly in the introduction and Chapter Two provide significant critique and insight to the modern dialogue), thereby interweaving the modern discussions with the diverse discussions of the tradition.

[317] St. Athanasius, *Discourse III Against the Arians*, Point 4, Translated by John Henry Newman and Archibald Robertson, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/28161.htm.

I begin with the prologue of John so that I might develop – right from the beginning – an understanding of Christological and trinitarian relationships. The Gospel of John begins:

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through Him, and without Him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in Him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. [NRSV]

John starts his gospel with the formative idea of the Logos who existed with God (the Father) in the beginning, such that one can say that it is the Word who 'was' and is 'before' the creation of time.

We cannot, on this understanding, specify 'when' the Logos comes into being, because for all of time, He has *been*. The eternal existence of the Logos is notably expressed in Origen's influential conception of eternal generation. For instance, in *De Principiis,* Origen writes:

> And who that is capable of entertaining reverential thoughts or feelings regarding God, can suppose or believe that God the Father ever existed, even for a moment of time, without having generated this Wisdom?[318]

Origen here articulates that there is not a time when the Logos – named synonymously here with 'Wisdom' – exists without the Father. According to Austin Stevenson, Origen 'does not distinguish clearly between categories of being and will, so that the actualization of potentialities such as goodness or authority is understood in ontological terms'.[319] Thus, Origen links the action of generation to the being of God, which is unchanging. For Origen, eternal generation is why there is not a moment *of* or *in* time when the Son is not being generated by the Father. Moreover, because there is no disambiguation between categories of being and will, God's action

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[318] Origen, 'De Principiis', 1.2.2*,* trans. Frederick Crombie from *Ante-Nicene Fathers,* vol. 4, eds., Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).
[319] Austin Stevenson, 'The Eternal Generation of the Son: The Christological Significance for Origen and Nicaea', *Crux,* 51, no 3 (2015): 16.

is always tied to His will. When God acts, it is because He wills to do so; conversely, when God wills something, He acts.

When we consider again the claims made about eternality in Chapter Three, it becomes apparent how they apply to the doctrine of generation. For instance, the Father generates the Son throughout all of His illimitable life. As such, it is impossible for there to be a moment when the Father 'begins' to generate the Son because the latter is tied to the very being of the Father. If it is the case that the Father exists eternally, then the Son eternally co-exists with the Father who generates him. When we consider Origen's thought in light of the Neo-Boethian understanding of eternity, it becomes apparent that the Son has no beginning. This is a theological position essential to Christian orthodoxy, as made clear through the Christological debates and conciliar definitions of the fourth century that occurred after Origen.

The affirmation of the doctrine of divine immutability therefore becomes important when we consider the concept of eternal generation because the Father must always – and unchangingly – be begetting the Son, otherwise He would not always have been the Father.[320] If the Son comes into being at a point in time, then this would account for the substantial claim that God changes radically. Therefore, the eternal existence of the Word is essential to the claim of the immutability of God.[321] In addition to the doctrine of eternal generation, the Christian tradition has also interpreted John 1 to teach that it is the Logos who brings creation into existence, which suggests that God is active and involved in the world. God's active involvement with the world is further articulated in John 1:14: that the Logos became incarnate.
This is perhaps the central claim of Christianity and the revelation that has defined Christianity. Jesus is central to Christian doctrine, practice, and soteriology; as the old joke goes, 'if you take Christ out of the Christian all you have is Ian and Ian cannot save you.' Christianity without

[320] Stephen R. Holmes, *The Holy Trinity: Understanding Gods Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012), 76.
[321] It is also possible for God to be understood as Father in a different sense; God is named as Father in the Old Testament, such as in Deuteronomy 32:6 and Jeremiah 31:9.

Christ falls apart, precisely because the incarnation of the Son is a fundamental event. But how does the incarnation differ from theophany? Firstly, the Christian understanding of theophany is understood in the light of the incarnation. The fact that God became incarnate and remained so after his resurrection provides us with the impetus to assert that the appearances of God as man in the Old Testament are appearances of the second person. Secondly, unlike theophanies, the incarnation is permanent. That is to say, Christ comes and lives out his whole life; he dies, resurrects, and returns. Christ's entire life is categorically different from an appearance at a specific moment appearing as a human. As such, the incarnation marks a distinct difference from theophany.

Yet the question we need to begin with is: 'why does the second person become incarnate?' And this question ought to be followed by 'what does the incarnation mean for our doctrine of God?' As Luther said, 'crux probat omnia'[322] or 'the cross tests everything.' If we agree with Luther, then our doctrine of God will be shaped by the revelation of Jesus. The cross for Luther is central to Christianity, but the cross does not occur without incarnation, and lacks meaning and power without resurrection. If we take Luther's principle regarding the cross to be a guiding one, then we must also discuss both incarnation and the resurrection. These three core Christian claims are central to what Christians call 'good news'. Therefore, a Christology or doctrine of God that does not fit with the incarnation, cross, and resurrection becomes redundant as the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus forms the central revelation of the Christian faith. As Vanhoozer puts it, the cross is at the 'climax of redemptive history.'[323] Therefore, it is the intersection of these doctrines that define the core of our theology.

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[322] This well-known phrase by Luther is taken from his commentary on Psalm 5 (verse 12), see Martin Luther, *'Operationes in Psalmos'* (1519-1521): vol. 5 in *Luthers Werke: Kritische Gesamtasugabe [Schriften],* 73 vols. (Weimar: H. Böhlau, 1883–2009), 5:179, 31.

[323] K. J. Vanhoozer, in *Mapping Modern Theology: A Thematic and Historical Introduction*, eds. Kelly M. Kapic and Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academy, 2012), 38.

The question of 'why' with regard to the incarnation can broadly work according to two views. The first is summed up neatly by Paul Tillich's argument that 'Christology is a function of soteriology.'[324] Tillich effectively posits that the incarnation occurs in order that God might save. Therefore, we might say that the incarnation is 'contingent upon sin'.[325] It is uncontroversial to claim that the incarnation is essential to any orthodox doctrine of the atonement. However, this is different to arguing that the fundamental – and perhaps only – purpose of the incarnation is salvation. The second view is what is sometimes called 'incarnation anyway'. These are supralapsarian accounts of the incarnation, which argue that the event is not some 'plan B' God developed in order to deal with sin. Instead, it happened because of an eternal divine intention to become incarnate, of which soteriology then becomes part.[326]

It is my contention that 'incarnation anyway' is a stronger position that fits better with the discussion on divine attributes, passibility, time and eternity as laid out in Chapters One, Two, and Three. First, if God is immutable in the strong sense, then we must resist any theology of the incarnation that renders the eternal divine intention to become incarnate a change of mind or a contingent decision (and therefore not an eternal decision). Instead, it must be assumed that God's foreknowing the fall was simultaneous with his decision to become incarnate. I argue that if God makes this decision to become incarnate simultaneously with the foreknowledge of the fall, then He does so simultaneously with all other knowledge and intentions He has. This would include God's intention to bring salvation from sin, and thus a suggestion that the incarnation is a function of soteriology is, in my view, confusingly reductionist.

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[324] Paul Tillich*, Systematic Theology 2: existence and the Christ* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; London: Nisbet, 1957), 150.

[325] Edwin Chr. Van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway: Arguments for Supralapsarian Christology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

[326] The early arguments between infralapsarian and supralapsarian are taken up by a number of prominent scholastic thinkers; notably, Aquinas and Bonaventure for an infralapsarian account and Duns Scotus and Albert the great defending supralapsarianism. See Van Driel, *Incarnation Anyway*, 171-173.

Secondly, the incarnation is more than a means or instrument of salvation. It is an actual intentional engagement of God with humanity, regardless of whether sin is in the frame or not. The incarnation is both a revelatory action and a relational engagement with creation. According to the model of eternity laid out in Chapter Three, if God is simultaneously experiencing all temporal events as eternally present, then the incarnation must be held as 'simultaneous' for God throughout the entirety of His life. Thus, the incarnation is intrinsic to His eternal existence, even though it occurs temporally at a specific time. I must also point out that an 'incarnation anyway' account does not mean that the incarnation is a kind of mutation to the divine being. On the contrary, it ensures that the incarnation is 'rooted' in the eternal existence of the divine being.[327] In other words, God is eternally passible and eternally experiencing the incarnation.

### (4.2.2) Christ prior to the cross

The fact that the incarnation is a divine trinitarian act not reducible to salvation should not distract from the importance of the incarnation as a specific act of the second person of the Trinity. In the words of Williams:

> Belief in the incarnation is the belief that the specific concrete and historical agent that is Jesus of Nazareth simply is the act of God the Word in a unique sense, quite distinct from the way in which divine agency is universally the ultimate activator of any and every finite substance.[328]

As noted previously, the second person exists – and actively so – prior to the event of the incarnation. God becoming incarnate is categorically distinct from theophanic activity attributed

[327] Here the earlier reference to the relation of opposite is important. Because even though we are discussing the eternal existence of the divine being (or God), this is to be understood as Trinity. Meaning that the Father, Son and Spirit, exist eternally and distinctly. Thus, to say the 'the incarnation is 'rooted' in the eternal existence of the divine being', is to say that this is relating explicitly to the second person (in that the second person is not the others) and so is an experience of God.
[328] Rowan Williams, *Christ the Heart of Creation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 36.

to the second person. That is to say, theophanies are manifestations without permanence. As such, God is seen to be active in creation; however, this theophanic activity is distinct from God *becoming* incarnate in time.

All types of revelation (in this case the incarnation), however, can only be *new* to humanity. Jesus's very birth and life continually mark the fulfilment of messianic prophecy. One may list dozens of prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament and show how they map onto the life of Jesus.[329] From such a list we can make two observations. Firstly, the incarnation is part of the continual and eternal purpose of God, it is not an eccentric event from the first century. Secondly, the incarnation maps on to the eternity of God's life. If the incarnation and the foretelling of the incarnation are simultaneous in God's eternal present, then the fulfilments of prophecy in the life of Jesus are experienced simultaneously by God with His revelation of said prophecy. In other words, the divine knows what will, in temporal terms, occur precisely because God is experiencing it as an eternal being.

Whilst it can be said that the incarnation is a distinct event, and that it comes as a fulfilment of messianic prophecy, this does not necessarily tell us much about the God-man. Here, one might ask: 'what does it mean to say God became man?' This question must be accompanied by the question: 'who is the God who became man?' The answer to this second question is clearly apparent – the Logos. Whilst such an answer might seem relatively obvious, it is nevertheless essential to know that when we talk about Jesus as God incarnate (his sense of self and his words and deeds) we are discussing the God-man; the one who is both fully God and fully human. In this vein, we are discussing not only that God simply became man, but that God became a specific man. As described previously, this means that the second person existed prior to becoming man. Such an assertion (that the second person existed prior to the incarnation) is important because the incarnation does not mark the beginning of the second

[329] For example, Micah 5:2, Isaiah 11:1, Genesis 49:10, Zechariah 9:9, Zechariah 12:10, Isaiah 53:9.

person; rather, it marks the physical revelation of the second person, specifically in a way that is permanent and hence unlike the temporary revelation of theophanies. Thus, for God to become a specific man requires Him to unite to flesh in a permanent way; and in the incarnation, the second person exists physically in a temporal location as human.

Because God has become a man (Jesus), the claims that Jesus makes about himself reveal something of the overall Godhead and help to elucidate trinitarian relationships. Let us consider John 8:58, which reads, "'Very truly I tell you", Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!'". Jesus here gives a clear statement about his identity. It not only indicates who Jesus is, it tells us who Jesus knows himself to be. Jesus has a self-assurance in his life and ministry, in that he identifies himself with God and as God. Moreover, in this passage from John's Gospel we read of the culmination of several statements made by Jesus with regard to his self-identification.[330] These assorted passages in John 8 present us with two complementary theological ideas, as Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda explains:

> Two complementary ideas are present here, on the one hand the oneness of the Son and the Father in the testimony and judgement declared by the Son, and the other their distinction. The agreement between two different persons, the Father and the Son, is an absolute necessity and the condition for a logical revelatory structure. The Father who sent the Son is with him to reveal to him what to say in judgment and testimony.[331]

Sadananda elucidates Jesus' self-identity as both God and man; present here is the idea of oneness and also the distinction from the Father and the differentiation between the trinitarian persons, despite their shared divine nature. All of this is consistent with the notion of divine

[330] The passage from John 8 records a programme of statements of Christ's self-identification. For example, v23, 'You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world', following which v27 reads, 'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me'. Finally, v38 reads, 'I am telling you what I have seen in the Father's presence, and you are doing what you have heard from your father'.

[331] Daniel Rathnakara Sadananda, *The Johannine Exegesis of God (*Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 88.

simplicity and immutability described in Chapter Two. Origen's concept of eternal generation also corresponds with this narrative because Jesus' self-identification makes sense if he is the one who is divine and human – the who-is and was-before Abraham and indeed the world. Christ's self-identification is therefore a self-identification as God, specifically, as the second person of the Trinity. Consider Colin Gunton's view: 'the Father, Son and Spirit are all essential to the being of God'.[332] It is not only that we can discuss the Father and thus have discussed God, but that all three are essential to any theology of the being of God.[333] What this means is that discussion of Jesus' life is discussion of the revelation of God. If the Trinitarian persons exist in communion and are always related, then Jesus does not just reveal something about the second person but also the first and third persons.

However, it is not enough to say that Jesus reveals something about God without articulating what this revelation might be. As we saw in the previous chapters, theologians such as Moltmann argued that the person of Christ reveals the passibility of God.[334] In addition to the suggestions of divine passibility found in the Old Testament, New Testament accounts of Jesus' emotions and suffering strongly add to the case for passibility. Accordingly, Jesus' self-disclosure as God reveals the Trinity to us, as witnessed in the early Church. Commenting on 1 Thessalonians 1:1-5, Anne Hunt writes, 'What is remarkable is that even at this early stage, the community is clearly well acquainted with this triadic pattern. No explanation is offered; clearly none is necessary'.[335] Hunt draws attention to several important markers of the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit, as seen throughout the gospels (for example, 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the

[332]Collin E. Gunton, *The Christian Faith: an Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Oxford; Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2002), 186.

[333] Ibid.

[334] Indeed, as we saw in the Introduction, Moltmann has three interrelated principles (1. Relationships involve passible experiences. 2. The Christian God, who is Love, is a relational God. 3. Love involves relationship and requires passibility) which can be seen through the primary revelation of the cross.

[335] Anne Hunt, 'Trinity, Christology and Pneumatology', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed., Peter C. Phan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 365.

Holy Spirit', Matthew 28:19).[336] Hunt reveals the trinitarian relationship that is continually evident in the life of Jesus. Hunt's suggestion is quite similar to some of Moltmann's arguments for divine passibility, in that all God-talk is understood through the lens of Christ who reveals God. Gerald O' Collins notes, that the biblical language leaves two essentially extreme options available, either the radical humanness or the God-ness of Jesus.[337] Thus, whilst the triadic pattern is readily seen, and worship of Jesus as God is common, the question of how this works, and the theological language employed to articulate it, remains to be properly described. That said, humanness and God-ness are not competitive descriptions; as we see at Chalcedon, Jesus is both human and divine. Thus, the biblical and early church narratives that claim Jesus as man but also God are accurately describing the second person of the Trinity who has become incarnate. As already noted, passibilists and impassibilists are engaging with the same witness, and so while both positions discuss revelation, how revelation is understood and interpreted is quite different. If we take Moltmann's argument, that Jesus reveals the Trinity, then the passibility of Jesus can interpreted as suggesting that the entire Godhead is passible. Yet this raises the following question: when Jesus' actions involve what appears to be a passible nature (for example, when he weeps at the death of his friend Lazarus in John 11), what does this mean for the overall Godhead?

Here, we must first address the hypostatic union as laid out in conciliar discussion. Conciliar theology tends to opt for what Oliver Crisp calls 'dogmatic minimalism'.[338] According to Crisp, such a position is 'minimalist because the definition says as little as doctrinally possible about the hypostatic union whilst making clear that certain ways of thinking about the person of Christ are off-limits or unorthodox'.[339] Accordingly, there can be different ways of approaching

[336] Hunt, 'Trinity, Christology and Pneumatology', 367.
[337] Gerald O' Collins, *Christology: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Study of Jesus* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 113.
[338] Oliver D. Crisp, *The Word Enfleshed: Exploring the Person and Work of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 80.
[339] Ibid.

Christology that remain within the boundaries of orthodoxy precisely because the councils are more concerned with ruling out that which is unorthodox, rather than making comprehensive prescriptions regarding what is orthodox. Thus, we need to first affirm that Christ has both a human and a divine nature that are different but bound together in the person of Jesus. One orthodox response is to say that Jesus' emotional life is part of his human nature that is not shared with the divine nature. This is precisely the argument put forward by Weinandy:

> Because contemporary theology has focused almost exclusively on God suffering within His divine nature, the true Christological and soteriological import of Jesus' suffering is thus either misconceived or neglected, and so enfeebled.[340]

Weinandy believes that divine passibility undercuts the importance of Jesus' suffering by subsuming it in the divine nature, and hence underscores that it must only be the human nature of Christ that suffers in order to do justice to the reality of Christ's suffering the cross.

However, I contend that Weinandy's argument here has difficulties. He suggests that a focus on divine suffering rather than Christ's suffering is problematic because it fails to do justice to the incarnation. Weinandy makes the case that emphasising the divine suffering leads to a relegation of Christ's suffering. However, it would seem then that the issue is with incorrectly emphasising divine suffering over and above what he calls the 'Christological and soteriological import of Jesus' suffering.'[341] This is why no arguments as to why Christ's suffering is not divine suffering have actually been made; it is not self-evident that such claims necessarily lead to an enfeebling of Christology and soteriology.[342] One could agree that the cross, as a specific event, and the specific suffering of the second person are of essential importance, but most passibilist arguments begin with the event of the cross not the doctrine of God. Passibilists

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[340] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?,* 173.

[341] Ibid.

[342] Of course, as already shown in the Introduction to the thesis, this is not the only argument Weinandy makes regarding impassibility, but his specific critique is worth mentioning with respect to the incarnation.

often use Jesus as a clear example of why passibility can be applied to the Father and Spirit, and hence arguments moving from Jesus to the entire Godhead have been made repeatedly.[343] Despite these examples, Weinandy's argument that believing that Jesus suffers not only as human but *also* as God 'relegates all human suffering to insignificance' is an important one.[344] This is because it highlights that a passibilist theology needs to avoid the pitfall of relegating either human suffering, or the importance of the incarnation. To this critique, I suggest that this thesis can provide one solution to the problem raised by Weinandy by articulating a way to maintain divine passibility that does not make divine suffering identical with human suffering. As we have seen, this is achieved by adopting a qualified form of passibility, a two-nature distinction and by drawing on the eternality of God. These key developments, that the first three chapters of this thesis advanced, suggest a way of maintaining immutability and passibility, remaining within the orthodox tradition whilst avoiding the critique Weinandy raises against passibilism.

Arguments for impassibility that exclusively root suffering in the human nature of the incarnate Christ are generally traced back to Cyril of Alexandria's incarnational theology. In his second letter of Nestorius, Cyril writes:

> …not as though the diverseness of the natures were done away by this union, but rather Godhead and Manhood completed for us the one Lord and Christ and Son by their unutterable and unspeakable cooccurrence in unity.[345]

Here, Cyril elucidates the mystery of the incarnation: that there are two natures unified in the one person, and that these are complete.[346] He goes on to state:

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[343] For example, see *The Crucified God* by Jürgen Moltmann or *God of the Oppressed* by James Cone.
[344] Thomas Weinandy, 'Does God Suffer?', *First Things*, 117 (2001), 41.
[345]Cyril of Alexandria, 'The second letter of Cyril to Nestorius', (February, 430), in *Creeds Council and Controversies*, ed., J. Stevenson (London: SPCK, 1989), 296.
[346] Weinandy also leans heavily on the arguments made by Cyril to argue for impassibility; see Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?,* 182

> In like manner we say he 'suffered' and 'rose again'. Not as though God the Word suffered in his own divine nature either stripes or the piercing of nails, or the wounds inflicted on him, for the Godhead is impassible because it is incorporeal.[347]

Cyril begins with the mysterious unspeakable union of Godhead to humanity and goes on to say that because the Godhead is incorporeal, the divine cannot therefore suffer. As explained in the Introduction, Weinandy espouses Cyril's Christology, in which assertions of passibility are tied to Christ's human nature and not his divine nature.[348] In this regard, the impassibility of Christ's divine nature also safeguards the immutability of the divine nature, because there is no suffering or emotional experience that would entail a changeable nature. In this way, the seemingly passible actions of Jesus in the gospels are passible acts, but pertain only to the human nature of the second person, not the divine nature.

Weinandy is a key modern proponent of this patristic position. It allows one to claim that God is impassible whilst also affirming the seemingly passible actions of the second person. Such a move serves to protect both the doctrines of immutability and impassibility with regard to the divine nature, yet also permit a Christological claim that Jesus is fully human. It is with this statement that Moltmann takes issue in *The Crucified God*, where he writes:

> If one considers the event on the cross between Jesus and his God in the framework of the doctrine of the two natures, then the Platonic axiom of the essential apatheia of God sets up an intellectual barrier against the recognition of the suffering of Christ, for a God who is subject to suffering like all other creatures cannot be 'God'. Therefore the God-man Christ can only have suffered 'according to the flesh' and 'in the flesh', that is in his human nature. Granted, the much disputed theopaschite formula asserted that 'One of the holy Trinity suffered in the flesh', but the christological attack on the predominance of the axiom of apatheia in Christology did not go further. This theopaschite formula

[347] Cyril of Alexandria, 'The second letter of Cyril to Nestorius', 296.
[348] Weinandy, 'Cyril and the Mystery of the Incarnation', 28.

> was rejected. Even Cyril of Alexandria, who more than any one else stressed the personal unity of Christ against those who pressed for the differentiation of the two natures, was not able to remedy the 'error' which the whole of early Christian theology demonstrates at this point.[349]

Moltmann's point is that by explicitly denying passibility to the divine nature, and claiming the Son has two natures in which he suffers as a person, the impassibilist position holds that only the human nature suffers. The further, more worrying suggestion is that this impassibilist position inadvertently permits a Nestorian Christology.[350]

The worry for a form of inadvertent Nestorianism pertains not only to suffering, but to every action and/or attribute of Jesus. The concern here is that if one can say that when Christ does or feels 'x' which is human, and only does or feels 'y' which is divine (given we would accept certain things as innately human or divine), then how might one avoid this analysis with every action and attribute of Jesus? I believe such an approach would break down the carefully crafted argument by Cyril that all actions are to be predicated of the incarnate person. This is not to collapse the distinctions of divine and human; on the contrary, it is arguing that theologians do not have the tools to declare which actions are divine and which are human. In this way, the claim of passibility can be used to safeguard the person of Christ, as one who is fully human and fully divine and is united as one person (assuming passibility is understood as proper to divine nature). As I demonstrated in the previous chapters, it is perfectly possible to argue for a passible God without involving a Christological debate. Indeed, Gavrilyuk notes how scripture appears to align itself with the passibilist position.[351] Thus, we see how the argument can be inverted: if God is considered to be passible, then there is no reason to propose such a disambiguation between the Son's divine and human natures with respect to passibility.

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[349] Moltmann, *The Crucified God,* 236.

[350] Moltmann, however, takes the argument further than I have in order to introduce mutability into the Godhead.

[351] Gavrilyuk, 'The Christian God v. Passionate Pagan Deities', 61.

However, taken at face value, the worry of permitting Nestorianism sketched above may seem to make the argument veer too much in the other direction and reduces any difference between the human and divine natures. This is where divine revelation again becomes central. To claim that an action of the Son is a purely human action ought to be a claim based on revelation; it is not self-evident that passibility pertains only to Jesus' humanity and not his divinity according to scriptural revelation. Instead, such a claim is often made to make sense of divine and human action according to assumed metaphysical constraints.

If, however, revelation is the guiding principle for statements one makes about the Godhead, Jesus' life ought then to be taken to reveal God. This certainly appears to be the sort of claim Moltmann wishes to make in formulating a crucicentric view (as explained in Chapter One). However, I have also argued that the relationship between divine and creaturely passibility can be understood analogically. That is to say, the passibility of the human Jesus can be understood as a revelation of the passibility of divine God. This does not mean that this act of revelation reveals human and divine passibility to be the same (in a univocal sense). Instead, the combination of passages that suggest passibility of both the Father and Spirit and the revelation of Christ could be understood to demonstrate that God is passible, but the way in which the human Jesus is passible ought to be understood as analogical to the divine nature shared by all three persons of the triune Godhead.

As I argued above, what is revealed in the incarnation is inherently trinitarian. When Jesus acts, he acts as empowered by the Spirit with the blessing of the Father. He does not act as one divine person in isolation. In his thoughts and actions, Christ is always part of the triune communication. If it is indeed the case that Jesus' life reveals the other trinitarian persons, then one may also say that a passible Jesus illuminates a passible Godhead. Take, for example, Jesus weeping at the death of Lazarus (John 11:35). According to the Christology I explicated above, in this story we see the intimacy between God and humanity. It is true that Jesus has a relationship with Lazarus in a human sense, but it is also true that Jesus is God, meaning the

divine nature of Jesus has a relationship with Lazarus in a divine sense. Whilst this may illuminate the passibility of both humanity and God, it does not mean that God literally 'weeps', although it could be taken to mean that God is upset by such suffering.

Earlier in this chapter, I argued that God's intent to become incarnate is rooted in a desire for a relationship rather than an exclusively soteriological concern. As Stump contends in her book *Atonement*, the soteriological concern is a relational concern.[352] It is unfair to assert that soteriology exists apart from God's relational desire. Furthermore, if God is simple (as articulated in Chapter Two), God's desire for salvation and relation must be one and the same. In this vein, the cross helps us see how His actions can be characterised in several ways, yet remain indivisible in the life of God. However, the cross, like the incarnation, has a distinctly temporal location. Chapter Three established that all temporal activity is simultaneously experienced by God in His eternal existence. Therefore, my argument here is not that God merely foreknew the events of the incarnation, cross, and resurrection, but that He actually experiences them eternally. Such an understanding is only possible with both a strong trinitarian theology and a strong Christology. Because we have the distinction between trinitarian persons that allows for the temporal experience of the second person (in the human nature) and a two-nature distinction that further allows for God in human form to suffer and die on the cross, we understand that God experiences these events eternally (because of the relationship between the two natures). While Stump denies the passibility of God, she formulates the temporal relationship between an eternal God and the incarnate son by espousing the two-nature distinction.[353]

The everlastingness and eternity of God means that a) the second person existed 'before' the world and b) when the second person comes to exist physically in time, it remains true to say that God is atemporal, and that the temporal frame of reference of the incarnate Son

[352] Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 340–42.
[353] Eleonore Stump, *Aquinas* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 343.

is experienced atemporally by God in the eternal present. Accordingly, the resurrection which frames our view of the cross is simultaneous with the events of the cross in the eternal life of God.

### (4.3) The Holy Spirit

Similar to the idea of the eternal generation of the Son, the eternal procession of the Spirit is central to the Christian tradition. John of Damascus wrote that the trinitarian persons differ in 'being unbegotten, the begotten, and the procession'.[354] Whilst they are distinct in the way they exist and relate, that they all exist eternally is the crucial point; for in that case one person does not exist prior to the other two.[355] Thus, the Spirit is no less God or any less worthy of worship than the Father and the Son. Rather, the Spirit has a different personal to the other two trinitarian persons. The Spirit is, in part, outward-facing.[356] The Spirit works in us, allowing us to affirm that there is one God who is three persons, that we are made righteous by the salvific work of Jesus, and that when we stand before the Father in judgement, we do so justified by the Son who is the mediator of salvation.[357] This affirmation of faith is made possible by the Spirit who works in the lives of believers.[358]

As with the Son, the Spirit always works in relation to the other trinitarian persons. As Gunton writes:

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[354] St. John of Damascus, *Orthodox Faith: Book One*, trans. Frederic H. Chase, Jr, in *The Fathers of the Church volume 37* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1999), 167.

[355] This discussion is part of the filioque controversy; however, that discussion is not essential to this thesis, so I will not address it here.

[356] Calvin writes on the distinction between the persons and elucidates what he sees as the role of the Spirit, 'This distinction [between the three persons] is, that to the Father is attributed the beginning of action, the fountain and source of all things; to the Son, wisdom, counsel, and arrangement in action, while the energy and efficacy of action is assigned to the Spirit'. See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Devoted Publishing. Kindle Edition), Location 2506.

[357] Colin E. Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Toward a Fully Trinitarian Theology* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2003), 172-173.

[358] See 1 Corinthians 2:10 or John 14:16-17.

> From one point of view, there seems to be very little difficulty, if we listen to Scripture, of concluding that the Spirit of God is divine. All the things the Spirit does are things done by God: he breathes over the waters of creation, inspires the prophets and the Church, raises Jesus from the dead and is poured out on the Church at Pentecost…[359]

Whilst all the things the Spirit does are 'things done by God', the examples Gunton lists often explicitly involve at least one other trinitarian person acting in time: creation (Genesis 1, John 1), the inspiration of the prophets and the church (Judges 13, Acts 9), the raising of Jesus from the dead (Mark 16), and the outpouring on the church after Jesus ascends to the Father with the sending of the Spirit (John 14:26). All these divine acts seem to imply some aspect of temporality to the trinitarian persons acting economically. For example, if it is the case that Jesus sends the Spirit at a particular point in time, this might also seem to limit the Spirit's action within time itself. However, if the Spirit is with the Father (atemporally) 'in' eternity, then it would initially seem to be the case that the Spirit is existing both temporally and atemporally. If every action of God is triune action, and the three persons are eternally and essentially in communion with one another, then it must also be the case that the Spirit's actions involve both the Son and the Father implicitly or explicitly in time and space. Yet this seems incoherent with the view presented thus far. Further, if the Spirit dwells in humans yet is atemporal, how is this problem to be resolved?

When we consider the economic mission of the Spirit, we often say that He is the one sent by the Father. This is not meant to imply that the Spirit is a created entity. Although the Spirit exists *as* eternal procession, scripture also bears witness to the Spirit's temporally located actions.[360] There are at least two ways of approaching the scriptural witness concerning the

[359]Gunton, *Father, Son and Holy Spirit*, 76.

[360] As noted at the outset of this chapter, there is an intrinsic connection between the temporal missions and eternal processions. What we can see here is that while we understand the Spirit's work via the Spirit's mission, this in turn reveals something of the Spirit's processions. This discussion is also linked to the discussion in Chapter Two on the relationship between the epistemic and metaphysical. It is through epistemic categories that God's nature is revealed.

Spirit's temporal action. The first is to observe that such action may imply a sense of time in the divine life: the Father decides, then sends, and the Spirit arrives. However, such an account is unsatisfactory given the arguments presented in Chapters Two and Three. It not only implies a change in God that would contradict the doctrine of divine immutability defended in Chapter Two, it also runs against the account of God's relationship to time and eternity submitted in Chapter Three. Instead, we must affirm that the Spirit has the same divine attributes as the Father and Son.

Whilst the actions of the Spirit in creation are most apparent, the Spirit is with the Father atemporally (just as the Spirit is with the Son). If it is the case that God is eternal and simultaneously experiences all that is temporal (in the eternal frame of reference), then how can we conceive of the Spirit as personally present? Stump uses Erwin Abbott's 'flatland' metaphor to conceptualise her desire for a personally present God. She argues that the metaphysically distinct mode of being that is eternity encompasses the experience of time, in the same sort of way that the 3D shape engages with the 2D shapes in flatland.[361] As such, the Spirit remains eternal, with specific acts being experienced by us as temporal, yet there is still scope for the sort of relationship that Stump argues for elsewhere.[362]

As has been argued, if God is simple and passible then one would expect this to be true of the Spirit also. Such a claim would make sense of Ephesians 4:30, which states 'and do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God'. Although what it is to grieve the Holy Spirit may be unclear, this phrase, 'to grieve', can be taken as an attribution of passibility to the third person of the Trinity. The language of 'grieving' suggests biblical support for passibility regarding each person of the Trinity. For example, just as the temporal suffering of the Son is experienced eternally, so too is the apparent temporal grieving of the Spirit. It is only by maintaining this that we can claim that

[361] Eleonore Stump, 'The Openness of God: Eternity and Free Will', in *Ontology of Theistic Beliefs* (De Gruyter: 2018), 139-141.
[362] Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*, 74-75.

the activity of the third person of the Trinity is understood as eternal. As Stump argues, it is not true 'that being directly aware of something temporal or being directly present to something temporal requires being temporal oneself'.[363] Whilst the Spirit appears to be acting temporally, and is indeed present to those who are temporal, this apparently temporal manifestation does not mean the Spirit *is* temporal. On the contrary, the Spirit's existence as an eternal being is quite distinct from how creatures exist.

Unlike the Son, the Spirit is not 'hypostatically united' with a distinctly temporal figure, namely, Jesus. Nevertheless, the Spirit operates in the life of all believers. The Spirit works continually in the world at multiple locations *and* at the same point in time with respect to to these locations. When we consider the significant number of persons who – in whatever way – experience the Holy Spirit, we observe the vastness of God's action in the world and his ability to act in a myriad of ways that are unconstrained by time and place. For example, the twentieth century saw significant growth in charismatic and Pentecostal movements; from Azusa Street in 1906 to the Hebridean revival in the 1940s/1950s and the Toronto blessing of the 1990s (these are but a few examples of such activity in the West). Notably, these movements underscore the fullness of the Spirit's action in the world. Moreover, they are arguably further evidenced by the renewed interest in the Spirit's work, which was taken up in academic and liturgical contexts throughout the twentieth and now twenty-first centuries. Although these movements vary in character, the common denominator is the renewed focus on the transformative power of the Spirit in the world.[364] These examples reveal that a significant aspect of the Spirit's activity is to work through and with people in multiple locations *and* at the same temporal moment.[365]

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[363] Stump, *Aquinas*, 341.

[364] Jack W. Hayford and David Moore, *The Charismatic Century* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2006), 4.

[365] For example, if the Spirit is moving in the congregation on a Sunday morning, then we would want to say that a) this is not limited to a single person within the congregation (as with Acts 2) and b) that this is true for multiple churches at the 'same time'.

If it is true to say that God created and sustains the world, that He is omnipresent, and that nothing escapes His sight, it is therefore not a radical suggestion to advance the notion that every temporal moment is present to God. Furthermore, if the particular and personal mission of the Spirit is to be active in creation (as argued above), to unite people to Jesus and the Father, and to be present in prayer, then the claim that every temporal location is present to God, is logically consistent with the arguments made in Chapter Three. This is because the Spirit is already existing and working 'in' several locations simultaneously. As such, to claim that the Spirit has an eternal location, simultaneously experiences all that is temporal (in the eternal frame of reference), and is directly present to temporal creatures is a) consistent with the arguments made about God in Chapters One and Three; b) makes sense of the trinitarian relationship; and c) makes sense of the Spirit's presence in the life of the believer (i.e. every believer (2 Timothy 1:14)).[366]

Thus far, I have discussed the Spirit's work and its implications for temporal and eternal frameworks. Let us now turn to how the Spirit's work relates to the Son's work according to these frameworks. In John 14:26, Jesus says 'the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you'. In addition, in Acts 5, the Spirit is a witness to the resurrection, which as Frey claims reveals '…tendencies towards a personalization of the Spirit'.[367] Frey's claim could be taken to imply that the Spirit can work in a way that is distinct from the Son,[368] but does not imply that the Spirit always does so. As Frey argues:

> In some passages the relationship between the exalted Christ and the Holy Spirit is expressed even more precisely. In Rom 15:14–22, Paul stresses that it is Christ himself who has accomplished the Apostle's work 'by the power of signs and wonders, by the

[366] Stump, *Aquinas*, 341.
[367] Frey, 'How did the Spirit Become a Person?', 363.
[368] Distinct but not separate.

> power of the Spirit of God' (Rom 15:19). In other words, Christ himself is present and effective in the Spirit and through the Spirit.[369]

Thus, at times the work of the Son and Spirit are clearly interrelated, whereas at other times there emerges a greater distinction between these persons according to their actions. This interrelation would seem to make sense of passages such as Hebrews 9:14 which reads,

> How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Following Stump, one might interpret this as a clarification of the eternal relationship between the three persons, and how the economic missions of the three persons are experienced by temporal beings: As it is through the 'eternal Spirit' that Christ's blood is poured out for us all,[370] the temporal moment of Christ's death and resurrection is made manifest (specifically) to each believer at specific temporal moments through the eternal God. It is here where Stump's analogical use of 'flatland' is key.[371] As we saw previously, in 'flatland', the 2D shape interacts with the 3D shape as though it also is 2D. But what the 2D shape is able to perceive does not affect *what* the 3D shape is, it mealy dictates what the 2D shape is *able* to understand. In the same way, the three persons remain eternal, and yet the actions of God (be it Father, Son or Spirit) are experienced by temporal actors at specific temporal times. This observation is not necessarily problematic; every trinitarian action occurs in relation to the other persons of the Trinity. It would be a categorical error to assert that divine persons act in isolation. If one holds to inseparable operations, then to discuss the presence of God entails a discussion of the Spirit. To make a strong claim that the external works of God are divided runs the risk of concluding that

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[369] Frey, 'How did the Spirit Become a Person?', 360.

[370] Once again, the relation of opposition is important because we in once sense 'see' God working as to two distinct persons, who are not to be confused (they are not the other) and yet are equally God.

[371] Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*, 74-75.

God is divided internally.[372] Consequently, it can be said that it is through the Spirit that God is made known to believers and believers are united with God. However, this is inherently connected to the other trinitarian persons, consequently we cannot help but speak of the Trinity; all we can do is make these connections more or less explicit.[373]

The Spirit, therefore, is critical to God's triune work in the world. He is the one who works in the hearts of humanity and moves supernaturally in the world. As Simeon Zahl writes:

> […] there is a very close connection in New Testament thought between three themes: the presence of God in general, the presence of the risen Christ among Christians, and early Christian experiences of the Holy Spirit. It is because of this connection that theologians like Rogers speak about 'pneumatologies of presence', and it is because of this network of associations that Christian religious experience has long tended to be understood in primarily pneumatological terms. When we speak of God being made known in the experiences of his people, the natural mode of speech is that of pneumatology.[374]

When we consider, as Zahl puts it, 'God being made known in the experiences of people', I believe we should assume that such temporally experienced actions occur from the Spirit's atemporal, eternal location, meaning there is no change in God – or God's experience – when an action takes place within time. The Spirit shows that God is not constrained by spatial categories, and His presence and gifts are an economic manifestation of God in the temporal world. Thus, the way in which God exists, as explored in chapter three, is compatible with the doctrine of the Trinity.

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[372] Mathew Barret, *Simply Trinity: The Unmanipulated Father, Son, and Spirit* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 291–2.

[373] Indeed, this is one of the discussions in which we see how the temporal missions and eternal processions differ in this account. For, while the missions are experienced by creation in a temporal framework (and often as related to one of the Trinitarian persons), God acts as an eternal being, distinct and yet inseparable.

[374] Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 55.

## (4.4) God the Father

I now examine the place of the Father in my account of the relationship between temporal and eternal frames of reference according to God's being and action. I have already explained that the Father eternally generates the Son and that the Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father. Such relations are premised on the eternality and everlastingness of the Father. The first person of the Trinity, like the other two persons, is revealed in specific and particular ways. Unlike the Spirit, the Father does not explicitly point to the other two persons. This is not to say that the Father does not also reveal the other persons of the Trinity, but that the Father Lords over creation in a unique way. Consider Origen's claim: 'The God and Father, who holds the universe together, is superior to every being that exists…'[375] Origen's claim is often said to introduce a form of subordinationism into the Trinity, which I do not wish to endorse.[376] Nevertheless, what Origen elucidates is the status given to the Father. He who is the King upon the throne points to the superiority of what we might describe as the whole of God over creation. Further, this also illuminates the problem of discussing the Father in isolation: the danger of subordinating the second and third persons of the Trinity. Therefore it is important to make clear that, once again, I am discussing the Father's mission in the economic Trinity, rather than something that would make Him 'more' divine. This is where the importance of divine attributes is necessary to the conversation: although God is simple, there is a distinction within the immanent Trinity in terms of how each person exists.

It is here where we see how the account of eternity outlined in Chapter Three reinforces the doctrine of divine simplicity (and thereby ties into the discussion of Chapter Two). Understanding God's eternality as the possession of His illimitable life at once (as presented in Chapter Three) prevents us from falling into positions such as Arianism. We cannot say that the Father is temporally prior to the Son and Spirit, because generation and procession are eternally

[375] Origen, 'De Principiis' 1.3.5., 202.
[376] Ibid.

occurring in the Godhead. Similarly, because of divine simplicity, we can assert with confidence that to see the Son is to see the Father (John 14:9). For whilst they differ in the manner of existence – that is to say, begetting or being begotten – they *are* both what is essential to God, namely, indivisible. As the one God, the three persons are equally and indivisibly love, just, merciful, immutable, passible, and eternal.

A significant aim of this chapter is to examine in what manner God can be said to exist and the implications of such *existence* for the trinitarian persons actions *in* time. The Father, like the Son and Spirit, is a distinct person. Like the Son and Spirit, the Father is also made visible in specific 'locations' and/or at specific times. What is particularly noteworthy is the diversity with which the scriptural revelation conceptualises the Father. For instance, God the Father is at times described in ethereal terms, not unlike how the Spirit is described – consider Exodus 33 and the account of God's *glory* passing by Moses. However, we also see anthropomorphic language used to describe God the Father in scripture; for example, when Jesus is described as ascending to the right hand of God (Mark 16:19). If Jesus goes to the right hand of the Father, this implies a kind of ethereal existence or presence of the Father in a location.[377] The seeming location of the Father could be either omnipresence or presence in a more specific location.[378] This discussion raises some important questions. If we want to emphasise the ethereal nature, then how do we distinguish the Father from the Spirit? Likewise, we would normally claim that when God is revealed in human form, this is the second person; how then does the Father exist? Here I think we need to recognise that both might be true of the Father.

The Father seems to have a distinct appearance. The Father's appearance is not necessarily human, and is certainly not the same as the Son. Nevertheless, this makes sense of the idea of the Father who speaks (Matthew 3:17); the Father who sits upon the throne

[377] By ethereal, I do not mean to imply phantasmal or ghostly (or similar); my intention is to disambiguate the Father from the Spirit and Son as words such as corporeal may imply bodily (potentially giving the impression of incarnation), and words such as spiritual do not reveal the disambiguation between Father and Spirit.
[378] It is here that the Lutheran and Reformed accounts of the Eucharist find their most potent disagreement.

(Revelation 3:21); the God in the heavenly court (Job 1:6); and the God who will dwell among the people (Revelation 21:3).[379] Yet there is also a distinct impression that the Father is more than just the form we see. Scripture speaks of God appearing in cloud and fire (Exodus 13); of the Father who is unseen (Matthew 6:6); of the Lord who sees all mankind (Psalm 33) and who fills heaven and Earth (Jeremiah 23:24). Thus, we are left with a variety of images that describe a God who has form yet seems to be far greater than such images. As I consider this in light of the account of eternity and temporality outlined in Chapter Three, I observe how the Father who is immeasurable – as these verses seem to imply – and certainly has an eternal frame of reference, is also seen working in temporal creation, in much the same way as the Spirit. If we wish to say that the Father appears sometimes in one way, and at other times in another way, then the assertion that these times of appearance are held in the eternal experience of God means that we can conceive of a God who does not change despite His different appearances. Moreover, it is that these appearances are due to the eternal God acting, and this act is experienced at different temporal moments; but this is *not* to say that the Father *is* temporal.

What this provides for, is a stimulating set of discussions and points to a God who is truly beyond what we could ever fully comprehend. That said, it is clear how a discussion of divine attributes and the discussion on time and eternity can illuminate our conception of the Father.

## (4.5) Conclusion

This chapter elucidated the distinct trinitarian members' relationship to time, eternity, and divine attributes. It demonstrated that the discussion that surrounds each trinitarian person is compatible with the discussions from the first three chapters. Every action of a person of the

[379] These verses could also be seen to apply to the entire Godhead, but even if this is the case, they would still seem to locate the Father in some sense. Despite this, it is not self-evident that such a statement requires actual temporal existence; instead, it requires that God can act at a specific temporal moment – such an act, Stump argues, does not necessarily mean God is temporal.

Trinity concerns the comprehensive will of God. This means that all persons of the Trinity are involved in His actions. Whilst we might initially attribute an action to a specific person, for example the Spirit's presence in the life of the believer (2 Timothy 1:14), because God's actions are inseparable, it would be erroneous to claim such attributions do not involve the other trinitarian persons. Moreover, as each person is fully God, it is also true to say that the said action is the action of the fullness of God.

What I have established in this chapter is that the divine attributes can be seen among the trinitarian persons. In addition, these persons are always in communion with the entire Godhead. The combination of trinitarian communion and divine attributes is of particular importance when it comes to the incarnation and the cross because it means the Godhead has eternally experienced these events, either as part of the communion or as it actually is with the second person.

Thus, the Holy Spirit exists across the breadth of creation, emphasising God's omnipresence, and is continually active in said creation whilst being eternal (and therefore atemporal). The Holy Spirit is with both the Father and the Son, and can be said to be eternal, but can also be present to those in the created order.[380] Indeed, Ephesians 4:30 also seems to allude to passibility being applied to the Spirit.

Moreover, I have shown that whilst the Father speaks and acts in temporal moments, He remains an eternal and atemporal being. As such, the acts of the Father are experienced in temporal creation, but this does not make Him temporal. As noted in Chapter Three, Stump believes that her view of an eternal God allows for personal presence and engagement without making God temporal.[381]

[380] Stump, *Aquinas*, 341

[381] Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*, 74-75.

Therefore, the view of time and eternity established in Chapter Three helps to elucidate the existence and action of the Trinity, or at least show that the existence and action of the Trinity does not contradict the account presented in Chapter Three. Indeed, what we see in this chapter is that there is a functioning trinitarian account that allows for eternity, passibility and immutability. This matters for two key reasons: (1) it means the conception of God as both immutable and passible can sit comfortably within an orthodox Christian account of God; and, (2) it means that immutability and passibility can be applied to not only to the one God, but also to each distinct trinitarian person (and not just true of the human nature of Christ). We can see that immutability and passibility are both apparent through the way in which God is revealed in temporal space (through the Trinity's temporal missions) and, following the arguments in Chapter Three, can also be applied to the eternal trinitarian God who is immutable and yet passible and indeed active within creation. This combination is the distinct contribution of this thesis to modern theological discourse.

Whilst this chapter examined each trinitarian person in turn, the aim was not to suggest that God's actions are distinct in the way a Social Trinitarian view would argue. Rather, this move was made so that the Godhead could be examined in as in-depth a manner as possible. In so doing, the attempt to allow theological reflection marks what Vidu calls a 'creative tension'[382], in that discussion of the immanent and economic trinity is inherently linked. Hence, the importance of inseparable operations is hard to understate, because otherwise the view presented above would by necessity indicate that the three persons are at best distinct centres of will and action, and at worst slips into tri-theistic notions. Both are problematic for the view of God presented in Chapters One through Three.

The final issue I wish to address is how the argument of this thesis influences the way we approach practical issues in theology. It to this I turn in Chapter Five.

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[382] Vidu, *The Same God Who Works All Things,* 88.

# Chapter Five, Prayer

## (5.1) Introduction

This thesis set out to show how God might be understood to be both passible and immutable. This was undertaken with the understanding that many of the theological commitments of the classical corpus could be maintained whilst reconciling passibility and immutability according to the divine being. It also posited that significant aspects of the classical corpus can actually facilitate an understanding of a passible and immutable God. As I have progressed through this thesis, I have discussed ideas pertaining to time and eternity that suggest a solution to the 'immutability problem'. I have submitted that God experiences all temporal frames of reference simultaneously in the eternal frame of reference, and is as such atemporal. And I have demonstrated how these fit with a trinitarian understanding of divine being. The word 'experience' should be understood in light of Chapter One and the discussion on analogy; that is, divine and human experience should be understood analogically, and that divine and human experience are bi-directionally analogous to each other. In other words, while we may not understand exactly (it is not a univocal understanding) what it is for God to 'experience' (particularly given the concept of eternity outlined in Chapter Three), this nevertheless bears some resemblance to creaturely experience.

Because this thesis strives to reconcile the contemporary lay belief in the passible character of God with the classical doctrinal formulations of academic theology, it remains important to illustrate how systematic theological insights relate to the concrete practices of the Church beyond academic concerns. Thus, Chapter Five discusses the implications of the theoretical conclusions of preceding chapters for one fundamental area of Christian practice: prayer. Prayer is one of the few acts that all Christians engage in without question. In this sense, applying the theoretical insights to analyse the unifying Christian phenomenon and practice of prayer can demonstrate how this research could influence the way we address topics that extend

beyond the academy into the practice of the entire Church. However, I do not discuss in any great detail how we should pray, when we should pray, or the differences between corporate liturgical prayer and individual practices of prayer.[383] This chapter begins by surveying a range of voices (both lay and academic) in order to lay out the varied types of prayer used in Christian praxis and then to use these 'types' to discuss the key ways in which the underpinning of prayer has been conceived. After this, the chapter will offer a constructive account of prayer following the theological framework developed in previous chapters, particularly the relation between eternity and temporality sketched in Chapter Three. I will examine 'types' of prayer and underpinnings of prayer as understood by key voices in the tradition (and the various assorted issues and debates) at the outset of this chapter; the latter part of this chapter will engage with how these 'types' and underpinnings could be re-imagined in light of bi-directional analogy and eternity (whilst drawing on some of the ideas present in the discussions surrounding both divine attributes and Trinity).

Although I do not wish to discuss the mechanics or setting for prayer (which are beyond the scope and aims of this thesis). I explore how the Christian belief that God answers prayers is associated with our understanding of God's being and nature, particularly of God as a being who *experiences*. In line with the framework sketched in Chapter One, in what follows, 'experience' should be understood analogically, and particularly in a bi-directional manner. In other words, while we may not understand exactly what it is for God to 'experience' (particularly given the concept of eternity outlined in Chapter Three), God's divine eternal experience nevertheless bears some resemblance to creaturely experience.

Building on this analogical understanding of divine 'experience', in this chapter I want to develop a theological notion of 'affectedness' which can contribute to our understanding of

[383] Indeed, one may even note that this break between corporate and individual prayer seems to be a modern shift; Barth, when discussing the reformers, writes, 'for the reformers there is no "liturgical question": one prays in church and at home. They are not concerned to draw a distinction between private prayer and corporate prayer; what does concern them is the necessity of praying and praying well'. See Karl Barth, *Prayer and Preaching*, trans. Sara S. Terrien (SCM Press: London, 1964), 11.

Christian prayer.[384] Following my account in the previous chapters, affectedness here is taken to mean being 'influenced' by things other than God. In the theological tradition, the notion of 'affected' is understood to denote a mutable God. However – and in keeping with previous chapters' arguments for a passible God who remains immutable – this chapter submits that in hearing (and answering) prayers, God is affected but not changed. Although such a statement may seem paradoxical, the view of eternity presented in Chapter Three allows for such a claim: that God is constantly (in the Eternal present), affected (or influenced) by every temporal moment, but this does not mean that God changes as a result, rather that God is dynamically immutable. This is because God constantly, simultaneously experiences all temporal moments, and these experiences do affect God (in the eternal present). As understood in this schema, God is not static but rather constantly experiencing and so in relation to prayer is constantly aware of what we ask and the results of His response to prayer.

In what follows, I firstly offer a fivefold typology of prayer by considering different classifications of prayer (e.g. petitionary, intercessory and thanksgiving) and how prayer has been understood by selected theologians. The survey present in this chapter is not an exhaustive overview of all possible ways of conceiving a theology of prayer. Rather, it highlights three major ways of viewing prayer in the tradition, and what such views mean for theological praxis.[385] It then draws attention to the way in which the account of divine passibility, immutability and eternity as outlined in this thesis specifically informs our understanding of prayer.

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[384] As previously noted, affectedness is taken to mean 'influenced' by things other than God, but in keeping with the account of simultaneity sketched in Chapter Three, this affectedness does not mean changed. Rather, God is constantly (in the Eternal present), affected (or influenced) by every temporal moment, but this does not mean God changes as a result, rather God is dynamically immutable.

[385] There are alternative views of how to conceive of prayer; for example, James Gordon examines Friedrich Schleiermacher's account of prayer, 'Praying in the Name of Christ: Friedrich Schleiermacher's "Mystical" Account of Prayer' in *Analyzing Prayer: Theological and Philosophical Essays*, ed., Oliver D. Crisp, James M. Arcadi, and Jordan Wessling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022). Gordon's contention is that this offers a third way for describing prayer. Whilst it is certainly true that Schleiermacher's account of prayer is in many ways distinct from others, I will not examine it for two key reasons. Firstly, the outworking of this view seems to be quite similar to the outworking of the two schools of thought examined in this thesis (as noted by Gordon, 'Praying in the Name of Christ', 77). Secondly, Schleiermacher's view is based on a number of contentious ideas (such as his Christology and view of the supernatural), and hence is far from a mainstream view.

### (5.2.1) What is prayer?

Prayer is perhaps the most common factor in the lives of Christians. As Evelyn Underhill writes:

> Of course all Christians pray, some more, and some less; yet hardly any of us come near the level that Christian prayer ought to reach, and a great many go through life without even suspecting all that it is and can be, and what it ought to achieve.[386]

Underhill's contention is that although the practice and significance of prayer may be more or less important depending on the specific Christian in question, it nevertheless exists in their lives in some form. Underhill's view is reflected in the wide selection of sources used in this chapter, for prayer crosses denominational lines and has been consistent in the life of the Church from the very beginning. Thus, this chapter draws on theologians and lay Christians from across theological divides and different time periods to present a full picture of what prayer is and why it matters. Accordingly, the mix of views will, to some degree, involve a mismatched use of language. Thus, there will be a lack of consistency because of the spectrum of positions being drawn upon, generating a somewhat unavoidable irregularity. Nevertheless, this chapter aims to bring clarity to the overarching discussions and various applications of language regarding the practice of prayer. To bring clarity, this chapter will draw on analogical use of language, as described in Chapter One, divine being theology as described in Chapter Two as well as Christological and Trinitarian concepts from Chapter Four in order to describe what prayer is.[387]

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[386] Evelyn Underhill, *Prayer* (London, Y.W.C.A. of Great Britain), 1.

[387] Much of this Chapter will use the phrase 'God' rather than referring to specific persons within the Trinity. This is for three key reasons. 1. This thesis is not seeking to address all the mechanics of prayer, and so questions such as 'do we pray to Father, Son or Spirit?' are beyond the scope of this chapter. 2. While I have discussed the trinitarian persons specifically in Chapter Four, the purpose of this was to show how the ideas present in Chapters One to Three function with trinitarian theology, and how this relates to each person. Chapter Five however, seeks to relate the concepts of Chapters One to Three to the topic of Prayer, and so assumes the trinitarian underpinning of Chapter Four. 3. Addressing the ways in which this thesis could affect christological and trinitarian study is important, but beyond the current scope, and so this chapter will focus on prayer to God, and thereby assume a trinitarian view of God.

It will then also employ the ideas of ET=Simultaneity to show how the constructive work of Chapter Three can be applied to questions of Practical theology.

Returning to Underhill's quote, she clearly believes that whilst prayer may be practised by all in some form, there is a depth to prayer that is undiscovered by most. The notion that prayer is central to the work of theology, and that Christian life and practice must involve prayer, is not in any sense a new approach. Evagrius Ponticus wrote that 'If you are a theologian, you truly pray. If you truly pray, you are a theologian.'[388] Along with Underhill's observations, Evagrius also contends that the work of theology is undertaken and enacted in a state of prayer – as Katherine Sonderegger says, 'on bended knee', something in which all Christians engage.[389] In discussing Evagrius' *The Praktikos,* Ashley Cocksworth writes:

> Prayer provides the requisite practices of attention and the 'desired conditions' for the mind to receive the revelation of the triune God, which orders and structures all knowledge of God and without which the task of theology is impossible.[390]

Thus, the practice of prayer and the practice of theology are uniquely intertwined, in part due to the revelatory nature of both. Indeed, the topic of prayer can be a key place where academic theology interacts with Christian practice. Sarah Coakley observes that there is a tradition of mystical theologians using a 'prayer-based logic'.[391] As Coakley points out, it is through the medium of prayer, with an emphasis on the Spirit's indwelling, that other theological issues (such as the Trinity) are addressed in this tradition.[392] The key example from this tradition is Pseudo-Dionysius, who we discussed in Chapter One, connecting prayer with both the divine names and the doctrine of the Trinity. As he writes:

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388 Evagrius Ponticus, *The Praktikos; Chapters on Prayer*, trans. John Eudes Bamberger (Spencer: Cistercian Publications, 1970), 65.
389 Katherine Sonderegger, *Systematic Theology: Systematic Theology: The Doctrine of God, Volume 1* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 24.
390 Ashley Cocksworth, *Prayer: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2018), 29.
391 Sarah Coakley, *The New Asceticism: Sexuality, Gender and the Quest for God* (London: Continuum, 2015), 143.
392 Ibid.

> And first of all, if it like thee, let us consider the highest Name, even "Goodness," by which all the Emanations of God are conjointly revealed. And let us begin with an invocation of the Trinity…For we must first lift up our minds in prayer unto the Primal Goodness, and by drawing nearer Thereunto, we must thus be initiated into the mystery of those good gifts which are rooted in Its being.[393]

In this passage we see how Pseudo-Dionysius believes there is a key connection between divine being theology, trinitarian theology and the practice of prayer.[394]

We might say that the reason prayer and theology are uniquely associated is because prayer is at its core concerned with relationships. Balthasar (who was very much influenced by Pseudo-Dionysius) begins his work on prayer with the following observation:

> Prayer is something more than an exterior act performed out of a sense of Duty, an act in which we tell God various things he already knows, a kind of daily attendance in the presence of the sovereign who awaits, morning and evening, the submission of his subjects.[395]

Balthasar elucidates that prayer is about meeting with God and entering into His presence, hence it is more than just part of the routine of Christian life. The very idea that the sovereign God 'waits' for us to come to Him speaks of the relational character of the act of prayer and of the God who attends to our prayers and 'waits'. The idea of divine waiting is not meant to imply a temporal aspect: it does not mean God is waiting for us to catch up with Him. On the contrary, it illustrates that prayer is essential to our relationship with God. It suggests that God is always listening when we pray, nothing we do escapes His sight, and prayer is what brings us into closer relationship with Him.

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[393] Pseudo-Dionysius, *The Divine Names,* Chapter Three, trans. C.E. Rolt, https://ccel.org/ccel/rolt/dionysius/dionysius.iv.iv.html.
[394] Moreover, this shows how connecting a discussion on prayer to both Trinity (Chapter Four) and Divine Being (Chapter Two) is a well-worn path in theological discourse.
[395] Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. A. V. Littledale (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1961), 11.

Although Balthasar's view on the communication between God and humanity might not be representative of the entire tradition, his emphasis on prayer as a communication centred on relationship with God provides a starting point for this chapter. Similarly to Balthasar, John Bunyan writes that 'prayer is (1) a sincere; (2) a sensible; (3) an affectionate, pouring out of the soul to God, through Christ; (4) by the strength or assistance of the Spirit'.[396] Bunyan's language emphasises the fact that prayer involves a communicative relationship with God, which is an inherently trinitarian action, involving Father, Son, and Spirit (as seen in points 3 and 4). Commenting on Romans 8, Sarah Coakley remarks:

> [W]hat is being described by Paul is one experience of an activity of prayer that is nonetheless ineluctably, though obscurely, triadic. It is one experience of God, but God as simultaneously (i) doing the praying in me, (ii) receiving that prayer, and (iii) in that exchange, consented to in me, inviting me into the Christic life of redeemed son- ship. Or to put it another way: the 'Father' (so-called here) is both source and ultimate object of divine longing in us; the 'Spirit' is that irreducibly, though obscurely, distinct enabler and incorporator of that longing in creation (that which makes the creation divine); and the 'Son' is that divine and perfected creation, into whose life I, as pray-er, am caught up. In this sense, despite all the unclarity and doctrinal fuzziness of Romans 8, the prayer described here seems to be at least 'proto-trinitarian' in its implications.[397]

Coakley points out that the way Paul describes prayer is at least 'proto-trinitarian'. Thus, discussion on prayer is not merely about the practical implications for the Church, it is also inherently tied to discussions regarding God's being. According to Coakley, prayer not only pertains to the intra-trinitarian relations between the three divine persons, but it is also intrinsically bound up with the extra-trinitarian relation between God and creature whereby, through prayer, the person praying is gathered into the divine.

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[396] John Bunyan, *Praying in the Spirit* (1662), republished by Banner of Truth (1991), 13.
[397] Coakley, *The New* Asceticism, 90.

Prayer is, therefore, not just a dutiful action (although it is undoubtedly dutiful) taken on the part of humanity to appease a God who knows all. Rather, it is a means to deepen our relationship with God. Consequently, prayer at its core must come from a place of honesty and sincerity. If it does not, then we are simply attempting to fool a God who knows all, which, given this thesis commitment to omniscience, is an illogical undertaking. Prayer is powerful because we admit to God the deepest desires of our heart, and admit them to the one who has power to do something about them. Radical honesty is good for us. Prayer does not necessarily change what we believe to be true (though what we believe, might change through continually drawing close to God) or what God knows to be true (which could, of course, be different things). At its heart, prayer is about communication and relationship: it means propelling ourselves into the presence of a God who cares for us.

Here it is worth noting that this view of prayer, as described above, is sometimes categorised as one of two modern approaches. As Timothy Keller puts it:

> Recent writers on the subject of prayer have one of two views on the subject. Most now emphasize prayer as a means to experience God's love and to know oneness with him. They promise a life of peace and continual resting in God…Other books, however, see the essence of prayer as not an inward resting but as a calling on God to bring his kingdom. Prayer is viewed as a wrestling match, often – or perhaps ordinarily – without a clear sense of God's immediate presence. [398]

One might be inclined to argue that the account of prayer outlined above fits broadly into the first view offered by Keller. However, this does not mean the second view is unimportant. It is fair to suggest that prayer can often begin from a place that implies God is absent and the search is for supernatural intervention, whether internal or external. Ideas of internal change, struggle, and the act of petition are either rooted in a desire to enter into the presence of God, or require

[398] Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2016), 1-2.

the latter in order to achieve their aim. Presence, here, is taken to mean the tangible or discernible experience of the divine in one's life, or the faith that God is present despite the lack of a tangible or discernible feeling. For example, if I were to pray from a feeling of 'absence',[399] a belief that God does not seem to be present, then my desire is to re-enter the *experienced* presence of God so that He will hear my prayer and respond. Likewise, if you were to pray 'your kingdom come', it implies that you believe that God hears your specific prayer and that He is powerful enough to bring about His kingdom and in such a way that pertains to you. What is presupposed here is the belief that in prayer the person praying is already in the presence of the One who hears the prayer, or that by the very act of praying, this person is entering into the presence of God. There are, of course, different types of prayer, each of which serve a differing purpose in our relationship with God. I propose, however, that they all presuppose a personal relationship which is often called 'presence'.

It is important to emphasise that although prayer is powerful, it is not magic. It is not a system that can be manipulated; for some, prayers will not be answered with affirmation. That said, the types of prayer and theological reasoning underpinning prayer outlined later in this chapter are important because the Judeo-Christian worldview has consistently affirmed that God answers prayer. Barth writes that 'the foundation of everything is the certainty that God answers prayer'.[400] Barth's quote truly underscores the importance of this chapter because writing on a theological understanding of prayer is underpinned by the certainty that God does indeed *hear* and *answer*. As such, types of prayer are significant because the relational nature of prayer is reinforced by the idea that it involves far more than speaking to the wind. Therefore, prayer is foundational for personal faith. As Brümmer writes:

[399] One might be tempted to use hiddenness language over and against absence language. However, even if hiddenness is a more accurate description of what is occurring (as I would be inclined to argue), such a 'feeling' for the believer is better described as absence rather than as hiddenness.
[400] Barth, *Prayer and Preaching,* 16.

> Prayer and the life of fellowship with God are impossible without each other. Thus it would be absurd to think that we could enter through prayer into fellowship with God, if this is not manifested in the life we live.[401]

For the believer, prayer is intertwined with the entirety of their life, because it is a relational and therefore communicative action. Through prayer, we enter the presence of God and allow Him to affect our daily lives. In this way, we also see the Trinity at work in the world and our lives. Additionally, as Susan Wood writes:

> …the dynamic in which [Christ] instructs his disciples is trinitarian in structure: Christ, the Son of God, is the exemplar of the Christian life, oriented to the Father and empowered by the Spirit.[402]

When we pray to God, we do so by addressing the Father or Son in the power of the Spirit.[403] If the foundation of our religious life is the certainty that God will answer prayers, these prayers then lead us into the presence of God and so help shape the character of our lives. With the understanding that Christian prayer is founded upon an inherent trinitarian model (as argued by Coakley), the discussion on the being of God and the Trinity will certainly influence how we understand prayer, and indeed it is prayer that helps us understand the former. For example, when Jesus prays, it naturally raises questions of how the trinitarian persons relate to one another, and what this means of the divine being. As we saw in the previous chapter, Jesus reveals the Trinity to us, and models for us communion with God.[404] Such discussion also raises questions of how we can know anything in a model such as this, especially as its reasoning

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401 Vincent Brümmer, *What are we Doing when we Pray*? (London: SCM, 1984), 113.
402 Susan K. Wood, 'Trinity in the Liturgy, Sacraments, and Mysticism', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 382.
403 Indeed, it is Jesus who sets the example of how to pray (for example, Matthew 14:23 or Luke 5:16) and indeed what to pray (Matthew 6).
404 Jesus as a model of divine communion should not be taken to indicate whether a theology should begin (or orientate itself around) a specific person. Rather it merely indicates that the trinitarian persons point to one another, and thus raise key theological questions about this relationship. Indeed, Coakley writes that through an experience of the Spirit there results an 'expression of the simultaneous experience of Father, Son, and Spirit in a reflexive divine 'incorporative' act'. What we see here is the divine communion, as experienced by the creature. And, like arguing that the Son models this communion, one could make the same case here for the Spirit, and consequently ask the same questions. See, Coakley, *The New* Asceticism, 142.

appears circular. However, one might think of it as spiralling – as we begin to understand God, we do so in a relationship, and the further we develop our relationship with God, then so our understanding grows and changes. Thus, as Brümmer observes, our drawing close to God will also change as we deepen our faith and understanding in a continual process.[405] Accordingly, in prayer, our relationship with God is deepened—it is a relationship that actively involves all three persons of the Trinity.

Moreover, this introduction has already highlighted coenacted themes such as 'relationship', which as noted in Chapter One can mean different things depending on how one uses language. The typology of prayer, below, can be subject to differing interpretations based on how one understands words such as 'relationship'. While I will not discuss these interpretations immediately, these discussions will be noted when discussing the predominate understandings of prayer by theologians.

### (5.2.2) Petitionary prayer

It is perhaps fair to assume that the most widely known (and practised) form of prayer is petitionary, the kind of prayer that makes requests of God. It is the most common type of prayer for two reasons. First, humans very rarely exhaust reasons to make requests. As such, we have a tendency to be selfish. As Dostoyevsky writes:

> For the world says: 'you have needs, therefore satisfy them, for you have the same rights as the rich and noble. Do not be afraid to satisfy them, but multiply them even.' That is the modern doctrine of the world.[406]

The reality of our culture – perhaps even of all cultures – is a perpetual striving for something more. It is the 'grass is greener' attitude witnessed by all. This is not to claim that petitionary

[405] Brümmer, *What Are We Doing When We Pray*?, 113.
[406] Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov: Volume I*, trans. David Magarshack (London: Penguin books, 1979), 369.

prayer is simply a selfishly motivated activity that occurs because of our fallen nature. On the contrary, it can be a God-given activity that is relational and positive.

There are several examples of petitionary prayer that are not motivated by greed or ambition. For instance, people might pray to be saved from a burning building, for financial aid, for some experience of God, or indeed for a better future. That we have selfish desires is not necessarily a reason that we should not make petitions to God. Instead, our selfish desires show us just how many things we seek in our lives. One key danger, however, for petitionary prayer is that we may never move beyond praying for ourselves. If prayer is the communication with God upon which we build, ground, and orient our relationships with other people, then petitionary prayer must transcend merely selfish aims. This is not to suggest that we need to disassociate our own desires from our petitionary prayers. Only that we need to ensure our prayers do not simply reflect our selfish nature.

The second reason why petitionary prayer is usually considered the most common type of prayer is due to the biblical precedent. There are numerous biblical exhortations to pray and these indicate the possibility of various types of prayer. For example: Ephesians 6:18 ('And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.'); Matthew 7:11 ('If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!'); and Philippians 4:6 ('Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.'). These are but a selection of New Testament examples of the biblical exhortation to make requests of God. They show that prayer is not limited to what we might think or assume is necessary or important, or even what should occur at specific times or places. Prayer is a command to remain in relationship with God for all creatures, events, things, and at all times.

Petitionary prayer is not only an instinctive activity we are inclined towards when we need, desire, or require something, it is a biblical command and a discipline grounded in implicit

relationships. If we were to largely pray from the position, posture, or place of selfishness, desire, or dire need, then we would neglect the discipline and purpose of bringing all our requests to God. The biblical command to petition shows us that petitionary prayer is not only to be practised in situations where our own strength and power are not enough. Rather, practising petitionary prayer is a discipline of seeking God in all things, one which develops a relationally-motivated character whereby we move away from rendering prayer a last resort or an activity we undertake once we have realised that our own ability is not enough. If we truly seek God in every situation, then our petitions are re-oriented. To pray unceasingly (1 Thessalonians 5:17) means to be constantly entering the presence of God, seeking a genuine relationship with Him. Prayer is more than the Christmas list children write to Santa; it is a means by which we deepen our relationship with God, leaving no desire in obscurity.

The issue I raised at the beginning of this subsection concerns the problem of petitionary prayer leaning towards selfishness, and whilst this may the case, the remedy is not less prayer but more. If our petitions become part of a continual deepening relationship with God, we find ourselves re-oriented. The reorientation of our prayer lives—or even our whole self—does not mean that we stop wishing for things, but rather that these very desires lead us into a deeper relationship with God whereupon we find our hearts changed, and so our desires change, and so our prayers change.

### (5.2.3) Intercessory prayer

Petitionary prayer is closely connected to prayers of intercession. Intercession is essentially petitionary, but is addressed on behalf of other people. As Barth writes:

> But while we are in communion with the saints, the *ecclesia* of those who are gathered together by Jesus Christ, we are also in communion with those, who, perhaps, do not pray as yet but for whom Christ prays, since he prays for all mankind.[407]

Barth's point is that prayer is a communal activity, either with others and God or with God and ourselves. Furthermore, he assumes that prayer is about more than the petitionary prayers for ourselves; it involves an outward orientation towards the world. This outward orientation is essential for the Christian life and is not limited to the action of prayer. The idea of faith facing the world could take multiple forms from prayer through evangelism to social justice. These actions are interrelated to some extent in Christian life and action; for example, evangelism is often coupled with prayer. The activities of Christian life are rarely undertaken or performed in isolation from other activities or postures.

If Christian life itself involves an outward expression towards the world (through evangelism or justice), then linking this expression to the internal posture of faith is fundamental. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer explains:

> So the words we used before must lose their power, be silenced, and we can be Christians today in only two ways through prayer and doing justice among human beings. All Christian thinking, talking, and organizing must be born anew, out of that prayer and action.[408]

Here, Bonhoeffer is arguing that prayer grounds and constitutes our relationship with God as it then propels us out into the world to seek justice for others; prayer is oriented In this case, the role of intercessory prayer is perhaps the most basic and most important way of turning to faith to help the world whilst also remaining oriented to God. Through intercessory prayer, we come to God with the struggles of our friends and our world.

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[407] Barth, *Prayer and Preaching,* 25.
[408] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 'Thoughts on the Day of Baptism of Dietrich Wilhelm Rudiger Bethge' (May 16-18 1944) from *The Bonhoeffer Reader* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 787.

As Michael Widmer remarks in his analysis of the prayers of the prophets, intercessory prayer often takes two main forms: the 'we-prayer' and the prayer for 'your' or 'their' sin or circumstance.[409] These two forms are not merely limited to the prayers of the prophets. Rather, they form the basic structure of prayer in the New Testament and today. The most obvious example of a 'we-prayer' is the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:

> [9] This, then, is how you should pray:
>
> 'Our Father in heaven,
> hallowed be your name,
> [10] your kingdom come,
> your will be done,
> on earth as it is in heaven.
> [11] Give us today our daily bread.
> [12] And forgive us our debts,
> as we also have forgiven our debtors.
> [13] And lead us not into temptation,
> but deliver us from the evil one.'

The pronouns in this passage identify the prayer with the entirety of the community. When the 'I' prays the Lord's prayer, the 'I' prays for the community and not simply the self. The way in which Christ teaches the disciples to pray is as a group, for each other as well as for themselves. The 'we-prayer' recognises that the troubles besetting those who remain in our prayers also apply to us – whether sin and temptation, or the basic needs of daily life.

However, the relationship between the 'I' and the 'we' does not necessitate that intercessory prayer exclusively identifies everyone with the person who is praying. There are also examples where intercessory prayer is purely directed away from oneself towards others. Consider Colossians 1:9:

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[409] Michael Widmer, *Moses, God, and the Dynamics of Intercessory Prayer: A Study of Exodus 32-34 and Numbers 13-14* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 38-39.

> For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives.

This text indicates that Paul and Timothy are praying specifically for another group of people for a particular purpose. Here, the prayers offered are directed towards a new and flourishing church, based upon what they have been told, rather than their prayers also being about both the person praying and those prayed for.

Both forms of intercessory prayer are oriented outwards. At the start of this subsection, I wrote that Barth's conceptualisation of prayer is that it is both a communal activity and an outward-facing one. Describing intercessory prayer as an outward facing communal activity, is perhaps the clearest way to sum up intercessory prayer. We pray as a community, for each other, and not simply for ourselves.

### (5.2.4) Lament and Unanswered Prayers

One issue with prayer is that not all our prayers are answered. What do we do when the call to present and submit all our requests to God (Philippians 4:6) leads to long periods of unanswered prayer? The 'problem' of unanswered prayer is one of the more difficult questions of theology,[410] and there is no simple answer. Nevertheless, a few useful tools exist for addressing the problem. The first is questioning whether a prayer is unanswered. Pete Greig approaches this problem by splitting it into three parts: 'God's world, God's war, and God's will'.[411] The first is the idea that our prayers mostly revolve around the physical world such that they follow specific rules. For example, if I drop my laptop, it is not prevented from breaking by the fact that I might have prayed that my laptop would work forever. The second is the idea of spiritual warfare. If there

[410] Describing unanswered prayer as a problem does imply a specific understanding of prayer. Moreover, as we shall see, unanswered prayer is only problematic according to one's perspective in time i.e. if you are experiencing unanswered prayer. But this does not mean unanswered prayer is *actually* a problem.
[411] Pete Greig, 'The Prayer Course – Session 5', YouTube video, 24:01, accessed May 22, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjrZ6wCS2eM.

are in fact supernatural powers at work, then we should be aware that there is active opposition to the will of God – Daniel 10:13 is a good example of this. Finally, there is God's will. 'God's will' is essentially the idea that when we pray, we receive one of three answers: yes, no, or not yet. If Greig is correct in positing this three-part division, one must not only assess whether a prayer was (un)answered but also consider for what reason it was perhaps (un)answered.

Greig's division allows us to make sense of some unanswered prayers – such as the prayer that my laptop would work forever. Returning to the final division of 'Gods will', if God says 'yes' to a prayer, the results are (often) obvious. Here, one might recall the quote commonly attributed to the former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple: 'when I pray coincidences happen and when I do not, they don't.' The second two options are much harder to parse out. Whilst it is theoretically possible to say the answer is 'no', understanding that God has said 'no' is much harder to make sense of, especially in light of a third possible answer, the 'not yet'. To give an example of what seemed to be a 'no' but was actually a 'not yet', consider the sixth century example of Bertha who marries Ethelbert of Kent on the condition that she would be permitted to practise her Christian faith. Bede tells us that Bertha then introduces her husband to Christianity and, many years later, he comes to faith after the missionary efforts of Augustine.[412] Some accounts state that she spent as many as 17 years praying for her husband and nation before the conversion of Ethelbert and the wider revival under Augustine.[413] Seventeen years was, and is, a long time to wait, and experiencing a period of unanswered prayer this long could make us think that God is not answering our prayers (and indeed was never going to answer this prayer), or that God has turned down our requests, even if that might turn out not to be the case. Nevertheless, the last two options present a difficulty: what to do or think when prayer

[412] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English people with Bede's Letter to Egbert and Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede*, trans. Leo Shirley-Price (London: Penguin, 1990), 75-77.
[413] Greig, 'The Prayer Course – Session 3', YouTube video, 19:49, accessed May 22, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QjrZ6wCS2eM.

goes unanswered.[414] The answer (at least in part) is a second type of prayer, namely that of lament.

Lament is an expression of sorrow or pain. Prayers of lament can be found throughout scripture. Perhaps the most obvious place is the Psalms, where around 42 of the 150 Psalms are Psalms of lament.[415] Some 30 of these are individual laments, with the rest being communal psalms of lament.[416] Furthermore, prayers and songs of lament exist across the breadth of the Old Testament (for example, the books of Job and Lamentations and numerous prophetic texts also contain expressions of lament). In many respects, prayers of lament are bound up with petitionary prayer because it is often in lament that we cry out with petition to God. For example, consider Psalm 41:4: 'I said, "Have mercy on me, Lord; heal me, for I have sinned against you'". It is in the place of pain that the psalmist comes before God in petition. This is the first example of how difficult it can be to divide the types of prayer in a thorough and satisfactory manner. We need to recognise that there is, and always will be, some level of crossover between different types of prayer. The crossover between types is noted by Mandolfo who writes that:

> The following features are typical of most lament psalms:
>
> 1. Invocation—the initial cry to God to take notice
> 2. Complaint—the description (usually general) of the psalmist's suffering that includes a complaint either against God or some enemy/ies
> 3. Request—the psalmist petitions God to act on the psalmist's behalf
> 4. Expression of Confidence—often a recital of God's trustworthy characteristics

[414] Although I now move on to discuss the idea of lament, there are a number of other issues to consider with unanswered prayer. For a fuller and more practical discussion, see Pete Greig, *God on Mute: Engaging The Silence Of Unanswered Prayer* (Kingsway, April 2007).
[415] Carleen Mandolfo, 'Language of Lament in the Psalms', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Psalms* (Oxford: University Press, 2014), 115.
[416] Ibid.

5. Vow of Praise—assurance of praise that will follow deliverance (though the verbal tenses in  section are sometimes ambiguous).[417]

Thus, lament often involves several actions which, considered together, are more than just a sorrowful cry. Although his formula is not true for all psalms of lament, what is clear is that all prayers of lament allow us to voice our frustrations, insecurities and pain to God. At the outset of this chapter, I argued that prayer is rooted in relationship with God. The idea that we come to God with our difficulties and disappointments, and the connection such activity has to both petition and adoration, reveals the implicit and explicit relational nature of prayer. It is not that coming before God provides Him with new information; rather, it is our willingness to be vulnerable with the Almighty that deepens the relationship we already have with Him. This is one place where the arguments for a passible God could be seen to affect our discussion on prayer. If it is the case that God is emotionally affected by creatures, then we could claim that God has an empathetic response to our lament. If so, then the vulnerability of our prayer before God is also responded to by way of God's empathy. Our vulnerability does not have to express worship or confidence, nor are these excluded from lament. In either case, the expression of lament deepens our relationship with God.

### (5.2.5) Thanksgiving

Christians are repeatedly called to give thanks to God. For instance, 1 Thessalonians:16-18 reads, 'Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus'. In addition, Psalm 118:24 reads that 'The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad' and Hebrews 13:15 says, 'Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess His name'. Throughout scripture we observe a continual call to give thanks to the Lord. Prayers of thanksgiving are not

[417] Ibid., 115-116.

meant to be dependent on circumstances. We are not only called to give thanks when our prayers of intercession or petition are answered in the ways we wished, but are also exhorted to give prayers of thanksgiving in all circumstances.[418] An example of the following is the statement of an unknown soldier who wrote:

I asked for strength that I might achieve;

He made me weak that I might obey.

I asked for health that I might do greater things;

I was given grace that I might do better things.

I asked for riches that I might be happy;

I was given poverty that I might be wise.

I asked for power that I might have the praise of men;

I was given weakness that I might feel the need of God.

I asked for all things that I might enjoy life;

I was given life that I might enjoy all things.

I received nothing that I asked for, all that I hoped for.

My prayer was answered, I was most blessed.[419]

As the unknown soldier recounts a lifetime of prayer in which his petitions to God are repeatedly turned down, it is nevertheless a lifetime's worth of unanswered prayers, which, as he reaches the end, arrives at the blessing of God in all of his life. He discovers that God has answered the prayer from the depths of his heart with everything he received, perhaps even more so, as that which he asked for was not actually what he truly wanted. He has found a depth to his relationship with God that the expected answer to his petitions could not occasion, because that which he asked for did not account for the true desires of his heart. What transpires in this example is that if thanksgiving were only offered in response to clearly answered prayer, then the

[418] Though we should give thanks when our prayers are answered.
[419] Quoted in Pete Greig, *God on Mute,* 295-296.

soldier's life would continually lack the blessing of God. Instead, he gives thanks for both the unanswered (or negatively responded) petition and the further realisation that God has blessed him and responded to the desires of his heart that were not put into words, and so he gives thanks for it all, for re-orientation.

Returning here to the purpose of prayer as an activity that grows out of our relationship with God. In thanksgiving, we respond to God's presence and activity in our lives. It is an active response to our circumstances which accompanies the knowledge that the unchangingly faithful God blesses us. Brümmer notes the difference between praise and thanksgiving in the following way:

> In this respect *thanksgiving* (in which I express my gratitude) differs from *praise* (in which I express my admiration). I can praise you for what you do in general, irrespective of whether your action is intended to affect me. My gratitude, however, applies only to what you do for me.[420]

In thanksgiving, we acknowledge and give praise for blessings God actively bestows on us or those around us. We thank Him personally for His love for us. This, as we shall see, is different to adoration. Nevertheless, as indicated earlier, thanksgiving ought not to be limited to the times where blessing in our lives is apparent. If our lives are a continual sacrifice of praise (Hebrews 13:15), then we must assume two things. First, we ought to give thanks even when life is hard and painful. Second, even when we find ourselves in pain and heartache, there remains something to give thanks for. In times when we find ourselves lamenting our circumstances, we still have a God who cares for us and who has died for us – we must still give thanks. Here again, we see that claiming God is passible, unchanging, and eternal makes sense of the complexities of thanksgiving. It allows us to further understand that God cares and constitutes relationship in a passible way; that He is not surprised by our prayer, and that He loves us deeply and

[420] Brümmer, *What Are We Doing When We Pray*?, 86-87.

unchangingly so. These qualifications mean that prayer is viewed as part of the divine-human relationship, and also as a discipline for the creature according to such a relationship.

### (5.2.6) Adoration and Praise

Adoration is a form of worship that, at first glance, appears to work against our desire and mindset. As C.S. Lewis wrote:

> We all despise the man who demands continued assurance of his own virtue, intelligence or delightfulness; we despise still more the crowd of people round every dictator, every millionaire, every celebrity, who gratify that demand.[421]

Thus, it can seem alien that such a large part of prayer and worship is dedicated to doing exactly that: praising a God who asks to be praised. Yet this is a fundamentally flawed way of looking at praise and adoration. With the millionaire or celebrity who desires 'worship', we may say that they do not deserve it; but this is not true with God. As Lewis goes on to say:

> He is that object to admire which (or, if you like, to appreciate which) is simply to be awake, to have entered the real world; not to appreciate which is to have lost the greatest experience, and in the end to have lost all.[422]

Unlike the case of the celebrity, not worshipping or adoring God is to take the position of the fool, someone who does not appreciate the reality and beauty in front of them. Adoration, therefore, forms a key part of our devotional life – a part that is to be embraced.

To some extent, a discussion on prayer as a form of adoration is perhaps misplaced; not because it is irrelevant, but because it should be the primary form of prayer we should engage in. For instance, Keller argues that:

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[421] C.S Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Harper Collins, 2020), 105.
[422] Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 105-106.

> The more we sense his majesty and the more we realise our dependence on him, the more readily we will go to him for every need. We could say that awe-filled adoration of God corrects the other forms of prayer.[423]

All other types of prayer – petition, intercession, lament, thanksgiving – rely on the knowledge that God is powerful enough to do something and loving enough to care. Even lament and unanswered prayer assume such. We only think of unanswered prayer as a 'problem' because we believe God actually wants good things for us (Matthew 7:11). These other forms of prayer are grounded in the idea that God is to be worshipped.

Prayers of adoration are essential in our spiritual lives because they shift the focus from ourselves and from our world to God. This is important not simply because God is worthy of worship, but because we are fundamentally broken beings. J.C. Ryle wrote that 'The first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes anyone a new creature in Christ is to send light into his heart and show him that he is a guilty sinner'.[424] Sin is the fundamental issue with humanity. In adoration, we appreciate not just what God has done for us, but also turn ourselves towards God so that we might be changed through our relationship with Him. It is under adoration that I would generally place contemplative prayer activities such as *Lectio Divina*, because the purpose is primarily spending time with God and contemplation brings us to that place of adoration. Thus, through these forms of prayer, our relationship with God is deepened and our adoration grows. Further, as we deepen our relationship with the Almighty, we are re-oriented away from ourselves, and adoration becomes the very thing that we need most.

### (5.2.7) Closing remarks

These are the five predominant forms of prayer that exist in Christian life. Some might argue that there are other types of prayer, such as confession. However, I would argue that these are

[423] Keller, *Prayer,* 190.
[424] J.C Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (La Grange, KY: 10 Publishing, 2014), 1.

properly situated within these overarching types. For example, confession would fall within petition and/or lament. In any case, these predominant types serve to reveal the types of prayer available to us and the overall purpose of prayer, that is, deepening our relationship with God. Prayer cannot simply be asking for that which we desire, it must be a movement into a deeper relationship with God. As Bonhoeffer writes, 'If we were dependant on ourselves alone, we would probably often pray only the fourth petition of the Lord's Prayer. But God wants it otherwise'.[425] The idea that we are led into a deeper relationship is crucial for the upcoming subsections, because although strengths and weakness of theologies of prayer are usually more apparent when discussing petition, they also apply to the other forms of prayer. That said, petition and intercession are of particular importance when discussing wider theological accounts because what it means to ask God to change or affect the world is expressed differently in each account.

Additionally, while I have suggested that these types of prayer serve to develop our relationship with God, exactly what this means is dependent on what one believes about a number of other factors. As noted in Chapter One both the use of language (in regard to analogy) and also passibility will affect how one understands these types. For example, if one is to adopt the idea that God is passible and that relationship is bi-directional, then how one believes prayer works will incorporate these ideas, because one might assume God is affected by our prayers. These themes will be discussed in more depth below.

After considering the different types of prayer and how they relate to the purpose of growing our relationship with God, I now turn to the ways in which prayer has been, and is, understood, and then discuss how this thesis impacts the way in which we understand the nature of prayer.

[425] Bonhoeffer, 'Prayerbook of the Bible', from *The Bonhoeffer Reader,* 564.

### (5.3.1) Classical views of prayer

There are essentially three main streams of thought around the purpose or function of prayer (in the west) regarding any changes it may make in our lives.[426] In this subsection, I briefly consider these three positions before explicating how the theoretical insights from previous chapters may transform the way in which we understand the purpose and function of prayer, thereby developing an alternative position. The thinkers who represent more traditional approaches to this topic (namely, Calvin, Luther and Aquinas) have been chosen because their thought is still a dialogue partner (in both lay and academic settings) for modern theological discourse. While these ideas may predate these specific theologians (Luther, Calvin, Aquinas), they can be taken as representative of these key views.[427]

While recent academic theology, as noted above, has shown an increased interest in insights from mysticism on the practice on prayer, the discussion below will not focus on mystical theologies of prayer for two key reasons. 1. Though I very much agree that academic theology has much to learn from insights from Christian mysticism on prayer (especially in relation to the theological understanding and reception of contemporary Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity), in what follows I concentrate on the works of Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin because they offer more explicit 'second-order' accounts of prayer; their positions are concerned not only with what prayer is (as opposed to how prayer is practised), but also with the systematic underpinning of how the nature of prayer reflects God's divine attributes and God's

[426] Some might argue that Molinism presents a view distinct from the accounts I will present. However, I do not believe that its logic is distinct enough from either Calvin/Luther or Aquinas to warrant that claim. A critique of the Molinist logic regarding prayer can be found in *God in an Open Universe: Science, Metaphysics, and Open Theism,* eds., William Hasker, Thomas Jay Oord, and Dean Zimmerman (Eugene: Pickwick, 2011), 167-168.

[427] Other thinkers may provide similar theolgical ideas and underpinnings to their views of prayer, and so they can be grouped with these thinkers in the broad 'camps' discussed below. One example of this is Bernard of Clairvaux, who when preaching on conversion, discusses 'conversion of souls is clearly the work of the divine voice, not of any human voice' but also how we must 'lift up the ears of your heart to hear this inner voice'. In this passage we see Bernard exhorting the converted to pray and yet also making the point that this is made possible because God has first worked in them. Thus, he connects divine sovereignty to the act of prayer. See, Bernard of Clairvaux, 'On Conversion', in, *Bernard of Clairvaux: Selected Works*, trans. G. R. Evans, (New York: Paulist Press, 1987) 67.

relationship with human creatures. And 2. Because the mystics can either be counted within the broad groups described or do not focus on second order questions, extensive readings of their views have been omitted.[428] Indeed, Mark A. McIntosh suggests that theology often has an inherent mystical dimension; he writes:

> This means that theology has an inherently mystical dimension in at least two senses: first, theology must seek to discern the mystical 'more' of God's self-communication in all things which gives them their existence precisely as signs; and second, theology can only begin to understand something of this fullness of divine meaning as God draws theology into a provisional sharing in the Trinitarian knowing and loving in which God's meaning lives.[429]

If we accept McIntosh's notion here, then one might argue that the core aim of this thesis (and perhaps most of theology) has at its centre a form of mystical theology, in that it seeks to 'discern the mystical 'more' of God's self-communication'.[430] I would suggest that these two reasons (especially point 2) highlights the problems associated with discussing mystical theology (and its proponents) as a single theological account. Simply put, proponents of mysticism (and the ideas associated with mystical theologians) are to diverse to treat them a cohesive group (especially on second order questions).

It is important to note that the three perspectives that I do discuss here have differing motivations and underpinnings; nevertheless, they can be broadly grouped together. These subsections largely focus on forms of prayer that might be said to accomplish, change, or affect

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[428] One particularly notable omission here is that of the mystics. For while they often delve into the mechanics of prayer, the underpinning (or second order questions) is often less of a focus, or they can fall into one of the categories below (an example of this can be found in the previous footnote). Similarities can be drawn here between the mystics and modern charismatics, who also rarely discuss the theological underpinning. An example of this can be found in Barbara Newman's comparison between medieval mystics and the Vineyard movement. While there are many points of similarity in their practice, the theological underpinning of these practices is not discussed. See, Barbara Newman, 'Lessons from the Vineyard: On the Pedagogy of Prayer: Kalamazoo 2013: "Mystics and Mysticism," In Memory of Paul Lachance', *Franciscan Studies*, 72 (2014), 453-464.

[429] Mark A. McIntosh, 'Mystical Theology at the Heart of Theology', In *The Oxford Handbook of Mystical Theology,* Edi, Edward Howells and Mark A. McIntosh, (Oxford University Press, 2020) 28.

[430] Ibid.

something – in essence, petitionary and intercessory prayer. However, references will be made to the other forms of prayer laid out previously. This is because the approach to adoration is essentially uniform: the conclusion from all sides is that we should worship God. Nevertheless, exactly what worship means may be understood differently by the various accounts, but I believe these differences are best illustrated by examining petitionary and intercessory prayer.

### (5.3.2) Luther and Calvin

Luther and Calvin function as interlocutors for what might be called a 'deterministic account' of prayer. Such a title is not intended to be a negative and philosophically constrictive term for their theologies; it is an account of the world and God that suggests God predetermines what occurs out of love and sovereignty.

At the outset of this subsection, it is vital to clarify that the Lutheran and Reformed views are rooted somewhat differently in their orientation. That said, the basic proposition remains the same for both: the reason for prayer is that we have been commanded to pray. According to Luther, the purpose of prayer is as follows:

> Indeed, the human heart is by nature so desperately wicked that it always flees from God, thinking that he neither wants nor cares for our prayers because we are sinners and have merited nothing but wrath. Against such thoughts, I say, we should respect this commandment [to pray] and turn to God so that we may not provoke his anger by such disobedience.[431]

God cares about us and desires to hear our prayers; hence, He has commanded that we pray. This command is rooted in the idea that we seek to flee from God's presence. Ergo, if we were not charged to do so, then we would be able to avoid prayer and thus avoid the deepening of

[431] Martin Luther, 'Large Catechism: "Third Part"', in *The Book of Concord: Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Muhlenber Press, 1959), 421.

relationship with the Father.[432] For Luther, faith and prayer are bound together by the promise of God, namely that He will 'hear your prayer'.[433] Oswald Bayer outlines five characteristics of Luther's theology that must be present if the prayer is not to be offered in vain.[434] Central are the ideas of promise and faith, in which prayers must be offered. By this I mean God has promised, and we must have faith. Both of these concepts, in Luther's thought, are constitutive of prayer. When combined with the quote above, we see that the act of faith is also an act of obedience because it is commanded.[435] Prayer for Luther functions in a relational structure.[436] Because we have been brought into a relationship with God, we ought now to follow His command and pray with faith to the one who has promised to hear and answer prayer.

Part of the explanation Luther offers regarding how prayer functions is closely connected with divine knowledge. This is because, for Luther, our prayers have already been heard by God.[437] God's nature means that nothing is new to Him, He has already heard and decided the answer to our prayers before we even knew that we would pray that specific prayer; and His faithfulness means that it will be heard and answered. Additionally, with respect to the question of omniscience, Luther's account of prayer is also related to how one wills to act. In *The Bondage of the Will,* Luther writes:

> By contrast if God works in us the will is changed, and by being gently breathed upon by the Spirit of God, it again wills and acts from pure willingness and inclination and of its own accord not from compulsion so it cannot be turned another way by any other

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[432] Ibid.
[433] Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology, a Contemporary Interpretation* (Grand Rapids; Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2008), 351-352.

[434] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 347.
[435] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 346.
[436] In drawing attention to Luther's account of prayer and obedience vis-à-vis his view of the relationship between divine and human action, I am not making a particular claim regarding the various disagreements regarding Luther's overarching ontological views (i.e. whether Luther adopts a relational or substantive ontology). Instead, I wish to focus on how Luther's understanding of prayer avoids a purely deterministic character, as well as the practical implications of his views with respect to the relationship between God and humanity. What is significant is that Luther's understanding of prayer and obedience is nuanced through his emphasis on the relational structure of all prayer.
[437] Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 353.

> opposition…but it goes on willing and delighting in and loving the good, just as before it willed in and delighted in and loved evil.[438]

Up to now I have been treating the human act of prayer as a matter of choice, but adopting Luther's view may impel us to reconsider such an approach. Although Luther still wishes to maintain that when we choose we do so willingly, our willingness is affected either by the Spirit's presence in the believer or lack thereof. Thus, one may wonder if this is actually a free choice. That said, these remarks need to be treated with caution, as the thoughts of Luther on issues of sovereignty and the topic of the will form a far more discursive schema than in other traditions. Nevertheless, it is this tendency to locate the will in the work of the Spirit (in a strong sense) that we may include Luther in the determinist camp when we consider how he thinks about prayer. As I have already alluded to, Luther's view on prayer is, to some degree, more nuanced than this might suggest:

> The swords were already drawn, and the guns loaded. But through our prayers God came to our aid and made it possible for those screamers, with their scratching and threatening to get what was coming to them.[439]

Here, Luther seems to imply that there is power in petitionary prayer beyond that of being an act of 'mere' obedience in that he appears to claim his prayer caused something to come about in the form of divine aid. Thus, Luther's statements on prayer do indeed seem to conflict. I would argue that this is because much of Luther's theology is dialectical. Luther often goes back and forth on theological positions, revealing the inherent or implicit tension in theological belief.

That said, this tension could be said to show 'choice' in the act of prayer. If we allow for choice in some sense, then the basis is clear: for Luther, we should pray because God has commanded us to do so, and it is therefore considered an act of obedience. Our acts of

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[438] Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will* (1525), ed. Philip S. Watson, vol. 33, p. 65, in *Luther's Works, American Edition*, vols 1–30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955–1976); vols. 31–55, ed. Helmut Lehmann (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Muhlenberg/Fortress, 1957–1986); vols. 56–82, ed. Christopher Boyd Brown and Benjamin T. G. Mayes (St Louis: Concordia, 2009–), hereafter LW.
[439] Luther, 'Sermon on the Mount'(1532), LW 21: 233.

obedience may require a wider discussion surrounding the will in Luther's thought (in order to determine how much we could claim to be 'free'). But even assuming that we are able to will, the fact that we pray is known to God.

Whilst divine sovereignty is key to Luther's theology, it is always secondary in some sense to the understanding that God is love. This does not mean God's sovereignty is diminished when it comes to the 'choices' (if indeed 'choice' is the appropriate word) we make. What may be on display here is the difference between orthodoxy and orthopraxy.[440] On the one hand, we have the worked-out theology of prayer (orthodoxy) as an account underpinned by a relational, sovereign, immutable, and omniscient God. On the other, there is the experience of prayer (orthopraxy) and the apparent experience of such prayers being answered as a result of the initial act of praying. Whilst this may be the response to seeing prayer enacted, and functions as an exhortation to pray, it opposes Luther's theological reasoning regarding the purpose of prayer.

Calvin's view is both similar to and distinct from Luther's. Like Luther, Calvin believes that the Christian should pray and that prayer is not a meaningless act. For instance, he writes

> But someone will say, does he not know without a monitor both what our difficulties are, and what is meet for our interest, so that it seems in some measure superfluous to solicit Him by our prayers, as if he were winking, or even sleeping, until aroused by the sound of our voice? Those who argue thus attend not to the end for which the Lord taught us to pray. It was not so much for His sake as for ours.[441]

For Calvin, prayer is for our benefit and not God's. It does not cause God to act or respond, but assists with the internal work of faith in our lives. John Kelsay writes that:

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[440] What I mean by this is that a dogmatic theological point might be referred to as orthodoxy (i.e. correct thought), and so Luther's comments about the role of the Spirit and command/obedience may function in a dogmatic sense. Conversely, we have orthopraxy (i.e. correct practice), so where Luther describes his experiences, this might be seen as the correct practice of prayer, and hence earnestly praying that God would intervene seems to be the correct practice and, as such, is beyond 'mere' obedience.

[441] John Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion*, III. xx. 7, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: James Clarke, 1949), 147.

> According to Calvin, prayer can be considered an act of obedience. The primary justification of prayer is an appeal to justice: prayer is either God's command, requiring obedience because of God's position as Creator and Ruler of the world, or prayer is a means of giving God God's due—an act by which thanks are given to a benefactor recognized as worthy of praise.[442]

Here we see the similarities between Calvin and Luther. For both, our prayers are rooted in obedience to God and provide God with the adoration that is due to the divine. The key difference in their approaches lies in the reasoning that leads each of them to declare prayer an act of obedience. For Luther, the creator-creature relationship is central (obedience should occur because of our relationship with God), whereas for Calvin what is central is the role prayer plays for the creature.

A particular facet of Calvin's view is how it is undergirded by his view of the heart and the will. For Calvin, the nature of humanity is sinful such that all good intentions and actions must be attributed to God. Even for the regenerate human, the very desire for holiness comes from God. As Calvin writes:

> Although believers sometimes ask to have their heart trained to the obedience of the divine law, as David does in several passages (Ps. 51:12), it is to be observed, that even this longing in prayer is from God. This is apparent from the language used. When he prays, 'Create in me a clean heart…'[443]

In Calvin's view, all the good things one does are a result of God's action in one's life. Each action pertains not merely to the act of salvation, but also to the actions of the saved person. This is not to say that one does not 'desire' to pray, but that one's very desires are shaped and changed by God. Therefore, whilst desiring to pray may be an act of obedience, it is only possible because God has caused in the human heart a longing to pray.

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[442] John Kelsay, 'Prayer and Ethics: Reflections on Calvin and Barth', *The Harvard Theological Review* 82, no 2 (1982): 170.
[443] Calvin, *Institutes of Christian Religion,* II. ii. 27, 246-247.

The essential component of Calvin's position is the primacy of divine sovereignty and divine decree. For Calvin in particular, nothing can contradict God's ordination of events. Although there is denial of divine attributes such as foreknowledge, the ordering of theological terms is key in that God (for Calvin) knows that which he sovereignly decrees. Thus, God's knowledge is, to an extent, secondary to His sovereignty. In Calvin's (and perhaps also Luther's) thought, petitionary prayer could be said to cease to be petitionary in any meaningful sense as God's sovereignty means that what will occur is to some degree a forgone conclusion.[444]

Such a view does not mean prayer is worthless. We see in Calvin that he merely re-orientates the purpose of prayer away from petition towards adoration and the building of faith. As Woznicki writes, 'it is apparent that Calvin's solution to the problem of redundancy is to state the benefits that prayer brings to the believers'.[445] In addition, the deterministic accounts of Luther and Calvin perhaps highlight the other types of prayer to a greater degree. For example, if prayer is less focused on petition, then the focus of prayer on adoration and praise towards God assumes a more prominent position.

Whilst such an orientation is positive, it does seem to deny a meaningful form of petition (or perhaps, in fact, any type of prayer) because at no point can you or I 'freely choose' to petition God, as God is not, and cannot, be affected by our prayers. Therefore, the deterministic accounts of prayer would deny human agency in the act of prayer.

### (5.3.3) Aquinas

Luther and Calvin's conception is not the only systematic account of prayer. Aquinas' view is similar in some ways to the Calvinist and Lutheran positions, but does not orient the discussion

[444] Defenders of this way of thinking argue that if God ordains all things, then this does not render petitionary prayer pointless because everything involved is ordained by God. See Oliver D. Crisp, *Retrieving Doctrine: Essays in Reformed Theology* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), 150-151.

[445] Christopher Woznicki, 'What Are We Doing When We Pray?: Rekindling a Reformation Theology of Petitionary Prayer', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 53, Iss. 2 (2018), 331.

in the same way. Aquinas deals with the subject of prayer in the second part of the second part of the *Summa Theologica*, where he replies to three objections. In response to the first objection, he writes:

> Reply to objection one: We need to pray to God, not in order to make known to Him our needs or desires but that we ourselves may be reminded of the necessity of having recourse to God's help in these matters.
>
> Reply to objection two: As stated above, our motive in praying is, not divine Disposition, we may change the Divine disposition, but that, by our prayers, we may obtain what God has appointed.
>
> Reply to objection three: God bestows many things on us out of His liberality, even without our asking for them: but that He wishes to bestow certain things on us at our asking, is for the sake of our good, namely, that we may acquire confidence in having recourse to God, and that we may recognize in Him the Author of our goods.[446]

Aquinas thus argues that although our prayers do not make our needs known to God (God has perfect knowledge), the act of prayer remains vital because it is through petition that we receive answers to our prayers. Like Luther's account, the relationship between humanity and God is key to Aquinas' understanding: we ask God to bless us because of our relationship to Him. However, unlike Luther, the act of petition goes beyond obedience. Thus, the situation in which one finds oneself praying is the means through which prayer is answered. In other words, without praying there is no answer to prayer.

One might question how both Luther and Aquinas can both begin with creator-creature relationship yet reach differing conclusions on the function of prayer. For Aquinas, prayer being the means by which we receive that God has for us, is interrelated with his conception of

[446]Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, Q.83, A.2, rp1-3. Aquinas here goes onto quote Chrysostom, writing, 'Hence Chrysostom says [*Implicitly [Hom. ii,de Orat.:Hom. xxxin Genes.]; Cf.Caten. Aur. on Lk. 18]: "Think what happiness is granted thee, what honor bestowed on thee, when thou conversest with God in prayer, when thou talkest with Christ, when thou askest what thou wilt, whatever thou desirest'".

causality, which is a fundamental component of his theological outlook. For Aquinas, God is the one who brings about all things via His sustaining and creating power. However, He does not necessarily force things to act in specific ways. For example, God creates my hands in such a way that I can pick up my phone, but He does not cause me to pick up my phone. As Brian Davies writes, 'Aquinas thinks that God's omni-causality does not act as a rival to the causality of creatures, since it actually empowers this or makes it to exist'.[447] Thus, for Aquinas, some level of human agency is maintained. However, even this is a 'result', in some sense, of divine providence. Elucidating Aquinas' view, Stump writes that 'Divine providence determines not only what affects there will be in the world, but also what causes will give rise to those affects and in what order they will do so'.[448] Ostensibly, Aquinas' view here seems to be identical to the view held by the determinists, as examined in the previous subsection, something that Stump herself goes on to note.[449] However, Aquinas is committed to defending a view that fits with free will, which is why the discussion surrounding causality is significant.

According to Aquinas, petitionary prayer remains important, not just because of obedience, but because we have been created in a way that allows us to communicate with God, to make requests of Him. God endows us with the ability to pray and make petition, and through the act of petitioning what we truly want (or at least what we think we want) we grow closer to God, thereby witnessing our will conform to the divine will. Geldhof and Geybels describe this as follows:

> Petitionary prayer cannot intend to change God's will, which is an impossible act…One wants to obtain something from God according to one's own will, but without changing God's eternal will. In fact, individuals ask for something to happen which is in accordance with God's will, while they conform their will to God's. Individuals cannot

[447] Brian Davies, 'Prayer', in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, eds. Brian Davies and Eleonore Stump (Oxford University Press, 2012), 469.
[448] Eleonore Stump, 'Petitionary Prayer', *American Philosophical Quarterly,* 16 (1979): 86.
[449] Ibid.

> pray that God change what He has foreseen in His eternal providence, but they can hope to discover what God has planned for them.[450]

The combination of causality and divine will, as seen in Aquinas' *Summa* (as quoted above), is where the tension between divine knowledge and petition is clearly observed. A key point to note is that Aquinas not only roots the purpose of prayer in obedience but moves beyond this to posit that petitionary prayer allows us to gain something. In so doing, Aquinas is attempting to allow for some possibility of human agency. Such agency is, perhaps, best illustrated by examining Aquinas' view of sin, on which he writes:

> For there is a good belonging to the very substance of nature, which good has its mode, species and order, and is neither destroyed nor diminished by sin. There is again the good of the natural inclination, which also has its mode, species and order; and this is diminished by sin, as stated above (AA[1], 2), but is not entirely destroyed. Again, there is the good of virtue and grace: this too has its mode, species and order, and is entirely taken away by sin.[451]

Aquinas outlines three types of 'goods', including natural inclination. If this inclination was entirely destroyed by sin, then one could only will to sin, and not will to good (as we see with Calvin). Likewise, some natural agency to resist sin must remain or holiness would not be possible. In the same vein, humanity can choose whether or not to pray, because it still has some inclination towards to the good. In contrast with the deterministic view of prayer we find in Luther and Calvin, there seems to be an attempt to maintain human agency in Aquinas' account of prayer, even if agency is affected by the fall.

Aquinas' view of petitionary prayer places a greater emphasis on the act of petition than Luther or Calvin. Nevertheless, it could be argued that his account still portrays prayer as a

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[450]Joris Geldhof and Hans Geybels, 'Aquinas' Prayer as *locus theologicus*', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses,* 95, no 2 (2019): 216.

[451] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II, Q.85, A4.

foregone conclusion. The key difference is that, for Aquinas, it is only a foreknown conclusion because God knew we would petition, rather than because we were ordained by God to petition. One way of putting this would be to say that the actions of God are in response to human actions, but these human actions were foreknown and so take place under God's sovereign will. The same could be said of all the other types of prayer. It is foreknown that we will praise, give thanks, or lament, but these actions are genuinely enacted by us because we have agency. From a creaturely perspective, God's response is a genuine one, but for God it was foreknown.[452] One might still question whether Aquinas' account allows for a meaningful sense of human agency, given that God has already decreed what we will obtain through our prayers.[453] It is my contention that Aquinas' account, whilst being more nuanced than that of Calvin or indeed Luther, still forces a rejection of a meaningful account of human agency, which means that petitionary prayer does not affect God's will.

### (5.3.4) Open Theism

Open Theism is a theological tradition that strives to maximise both human and divine freedom. However, this normally involves God's foreknowledge being limited in some sense. As David Woodruff puts it:

> A noticeable consequence of this commitment is that Open Theists affirm that the future is open in the sense that in many cases what will occur is not specifically foreordained by God, but is also the result of the free acts of humans.[454]

The claim of Open Theism is essentially that God is (self)limited in some way, because if He were not, then genuine human agency would not exist.[455] This form of human agency is then

[452] Eleonore Stump assesses whether Aquinas is in fact helpful in making sense of petitionary prayer, and ultimately concludes that he is not. See Eleonore Stump, 'Petitionary Prayer', 86.
[453] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, Q.83, A.2, rp2.
[454] David Woodruff, 'Presentism and the Problem of Special Relativity' in *God in an Open Universe,* 94-95.
[455] Robin Collins, 'Prayer and Open Theism' in *God in an Open Universe,* 171. McCormack, *Engaging the Doctrine of God,* 190.

seen to actively make a difference in all aspects of life.[456] With regard to prayer, it means that praying for something to occur may cause God to act, whilst not praying will prevent Him from doing so.

The Open Theists' view of God stems from the way in which they conceive of the divine-human relationship, where the idea of relationship forms a key part of their theological schema.[457] This develops an elevated view of humanity that suggests we can directly affect God. As Robin Collins puts it:

> The co-creator model starts with the assumption that our prayers directly affect (that is, affect without being mediated by special acts of God) those things or persons for whom we pray.[458]

The Open Theist view of the divine-human relationship does find support in scripture. For example, in Amos 7:3, we read 'And so the Lord relented' or 'The Lord changed His mind about this'. Similar statements can be read in Jeremiah 26:19, Exodus 32:14, and several other places. In addition, there are verses that seem to imply human action affects how God works; for example, 2 Kings 13:18-19.[459] Thus, Open Theists claim that their model of prayer accounts for the scriptural narrative as well as the relational character of God. Such a view of prayer gives new meaning to the types of prayer described earlier. For example, we might say that the prayers of thanksgiving affect God in ways that Luther, Calvin, and Aquinas cannot argue for, because any genuine prayer of thanksgiving must be entirely human in origin: to be thankful or not is the choice of the human in question.

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[456] As explained previously, human agency is granted in other schemes, such as with Luther or Aquinas, but in Open Theism it is a much stronger claim.

[457] I have already demonstrated that most theological models wish to claim 'relationship' in some sense. The key difference here is the amount of freedom granted to the human in their relationship with God. This will be discussed in more depth later.

[458] Robin Collins, 'Prayer and Open Theism,' 172.

[459] 'Then he said, "Take the arrows", and the king took them. Elisha told him, "Strike the ground". He struck it three times and stopped.[19] The man of God was angry with him and said, "You should have struck the ground five or six times; then you would have defeated Aram and completely destroyed it. But now you will defeat it only three times"'.

However, the Open Theist view faces three significant problems. The first is that whilst some scripture does seem to support this view, other passages do not. For example, 1 Samuel 15:27-29 reads:

> 27 As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. 28 Samuel said to him, 'The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbour's—to one better than you. 29 He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.'

This seems to be in direct opposition to the scriptures used to support the Open Theist case. Secondly, numerous Open Theists argue for a rejection of the 'God of the philosophers' which entails repudiating many of the classical divine attributes. However, as argued in Chapter Two, the classical divine attributes find much of their support in scripture and, although endorsed by philosophy, it is unfair to assert that the divine attributes are unchristian or take a non-biblical approach to understanding the divine being.[460] Third and finally, such a generous view of human agency can limit the power of prayer rather than giving it more freedom. If humans are as free as Open Theism claims, then what does it mean for God to harden or soften hearts (Exodus 4:21, Jeremiah 24:7, Ezekiel 7:11)? Furthermore, can we make petitionary prayers over events and actions caused by the will of other people? If humans are free in the Open Theist sense, then their own agency would counter the petitionary prayers of others. For example, if acts of persecution or oppression are committed by free agents, does praying for an end to such acts lose all meaning? Thus, the Open Theist position may engender many problems that they would seek to avoid.

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[460] The idea of the 'God of the philosophers' or 'the Hellenization of Christianity' does not account for all that is going on in the early church. As Robert Wilken writes, 'It will become clear in the course of this book that a more apt expression would be the Christianisation of Hellenism…At the same time one observes again and again that Christian thinking, whilst working within patterns of thought and conceptions rooted in Greco-Roman culture, transformed them so profoundly that in the end something quite new came into being'. In *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), xvi-xvii.

### (5.3.5) Summary remarks

One might remark that the theological accounts of Luther, Calvin, and Aquinas seem to be very similar – if not the same – in terms of how they affect a theology of prayer. Nevertheless, the way each approaches the divine attributes and relationships leads to differing conclusions. For Luther, the divine-human relationship takes precedent over sovereignty; for Calvin, sovereignty precedes all else; and for Aquinas, foreknowledge is central. On the other hand, the Open Theist position emphasises human will to a maximal degree, limiting God's agency and power in an attempt to create space for greater human agency.

A problem emerges from the desire to suggest that humans have a relationship with God. In part, this is because relational language is used throughout scripture.[461] The crux of the issue concerns how each of these positions envisage the concept of relationship and how they follow different lines of thought and come to different conclusions. For example, in Luther, we are brought into relationship through the Spirit, as God changes our inclinations to will towards the good. Conversely, in Open Theist accounts, relationship denotes a human choice to engage and interact with God. Such an understanding of relationship significantly affects how prayer is thought about. The Open Theist view is affectively drawing on the 'bi-directional' ideas discussed in Chapter One, to suggest that relationship requires reciprocity. Whereas this is not the case for Luther, Calvin and Aquinas, all of whom adopt a classical approach to the idea of relationship. For accounts such as those given by Luther or Calvin, God's action in our lives enables a relationship with God (but this is not necessarily a 'free' choice). In Aquinas' account, there remains some human agency, because the ability to will the good has not fully diminished, but agency takes place within a context of divine foreknowledge and decree. By contrast, for the Open Theist, God does not determine our actions, hence relational language is used to imply

[461] For example, Romans 8:15, 2 Corinthians 6:18, Mark 3:34-35.

human freedom in a strong sense, such that one can freely enter into a relationship with God (we are not compelled to do so by God's work).

It should be noted that these positions do contain within them a complex landscape of views; hence I consider the theologians mentioned in this chapter as representatives of the various schools of thought whilst recognising that a greater level of nuance exists than I am able to present here.

Nevertheless, I argue that two main problems are manifested throughout these theological schemas. The first is the question of the divine attributes and being. For instance, Luther, Calvin, and Aquinas all seek to affirm and employ divine attributes in their theology of prayer (such as foreknowledge or sovereignty), but each utilises the attributes differently. However, the Open Theist position often seeks to reject the classical attribute discussion entirely. While this view sidesteps debates that surround such classical articulations of divine attributes (as noted in Chapter Two) the Open view does leave us with several problems in either constructing a view of the divine being or using the scriptures within which divine attributes find their roots. The question then, is firstly does one accept a classical articulation of divine attributes? And if one does accept a classical articulation of divine attributes, how is this employed? Moreover, while an Open Theist account would seem to allow for a passible God, it does not allow for an immutable One, whereas the reverse is true for the other accounts (at least as traditionally understood).

The second problem concerns in what way prayer can be said to be meaningful. For Luther, Calvin, and Aquinas, either God knew exactly what we would pray or He actively ordained our prayers to occur. In either sense, there are distinct questions to be asked regarding our freedom to pray or not pray. By contrast, the expansive view of human agency presented by Open Theism does make our prayers our own (in a quite radical sense) but limits God's ability to act. This renders some, if not all, petitionary prayer pointless in that we cannot be sure that God

can fulfil the requests of His people.[462] In fact, it not only makes petitionary prayer seem pointless but other forms of prayer as well. As we saw with prayers of lament, the belief that God is powerful enough to act is presupposed, thus He can change our situation and cares about our troubles. If we cannot be sure that God is able to respond to our requests, then lament can no longer presuppose God's power to act in the created universe. In the Open Theist scheme, God may care about our troubles but His ability to act has been limited, thus one might wonder if there is any point in crying out to God.

As well as these two theological problems, I also contend that there is a breakdown between the practical faith of lay people and the system of the academic theologian (similar to the breakdown noted in the Introduction). All the theologians mentioned above are attempting to reconcile who God is with the practical outworking of prayer. No matter the tradition, there generally seems to be an exhortation to pray as though prayer can 'change' something. This is more than the obedience that Luther or Calvin speak of: prayer matters because you have a choice to pray and because God is powerful enough to respond to said prayers. In my view, none of the theological accounts give an adequate account of prayer, if we are to affirm that God can be emotionally affected by our prayers and indeed respond to them.[463] That is not to say that these accounts are all meaningless or worthless. Accounts of prayer should, as Calvin suggests, affirm that it is obedient to pray. Like Luther, they should affirm it is a relational activity. Like Aquinas, they should argue for a God that is omniscient. And like the Open Theist, it is important that humanity has a choice to pray and about what to pray for.

[462] As Scott Davison notes, petitionary prayer being 'pointless' does not mean that it has no effect, but that it fails to 'influence' God's action, which is often assumed to be the 'point' of petitionary prayer. See Scott Davison, *Petitionary Prayer: A Philosophical Investigation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7.

[463] Of course, different views of prayer do work within their own systems. For example, Calvin's view is perfectly acceptable if one agrees with his wider systematic theology. However, if we are to affirm that God can be emotionally affected by our prayers and indeed respond to them (and is relational in a bi-directional sense), then these views seem insufficient, given these parameters.

## (5.6) A New Way

The problem of prayer is that if we want to affirm the classical divine attributes then we have to assume that God is both omniscient and omnipotent as well as being pure act, simple, and so on. Prayer, at least in its practical sense, seems to imply two-way contingency,[464] that is to say, not praying will fail to cause that which would otherwise be prayed for to come about. It is important to note that such two-way contingency, where prayer requires human and divine freedom, does not mean that whatever is prayed for becomes possible. As Vincent Brümmer writes:

> We can conclude that it would make no sense to request God do what is logically impossible since such a request would be incoherent and therefore fail to ask anything. Also, it would be futile to ask God to act contrary to his will since there is not the slightest likelihood that he would ever do so.[465]

Therefore, the ability to ask God for whatever we desire does not entail that God can or will grant everything or anything we ask for. God could not, for example, create a square circle as this is a contradictory request and so one would not actually be asking for anything at all. Similarly, belief in two-way contingency does not entail that any and all 'possibilities' are open to the person praying. On the contrary, it means that one may ask for anything that is within God's character and ability to grant. This could include prayer for miracles; even though such things defy natural laws, they do not constitute the same kind of logical impossibility as the creation of a square circle.

As discussed previously, theologians can be divided into three broad camps: one may espouse a Calvinist or Lutheran theology of prayer where prayer does not actually change anything but is in fact about our relationship with God and our faith. Crisp describes it in the

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[464] Two-way contingency implies action on behalf of two parties where A) the human in question actually choses (freely) to pray (and does so) and B) God hears and responds. Point A must be a free choice, otherwise God would have carried out both A and B by decreeing that one would pray and act.
[465] Brümmer, *What are we Doing when we Pray*?, 33.

following way: 'God knows what we want and what we need and his knowledge of these things is not affected one whit by our petition'.[466] Theologians may also be part of the second, broader camp, characterised by Aquinas, where the divine attributes are maintained, as is the efficacy of prayer. The key difference between Aquinas' view and the determinist view is that Aquinas' views of causation and knowledge maintain a greater emphasis on human freedom, rather than rendering prayer a phenomenon purely determined by God. A theologian could also belong to the camp represented by the Open Theist or libertarian position which emphasises two-way contingency to the denial of some of (or all) the divine attributes, and the denial of God's power (in a traditional sense).

It is my contention that, if we are to affirm that God can be emotionally affected by our prayers and indeed respond to them, all these views leave much to be desired. While these views on prayer function well within their respective frameworks, they no longer resonate with the passible yet immutable conception of a relational God, held by many lay members and practitioners of prayer in the contemporary church (as noted in the Introduction). Additionally, the practice and meaning of prayer envisioned by the aforementioned options (determinism and Aquinas' view) are quite different from the common lay Christian conviction that prayer changes things/ circumstances (which would appear to resonate with the Open Theist view). Thus, it seems that we are able to maintain that prayer changes things but are forced to reject the classical attributes (or vice versa), particularly the traditional understanding of God's omniscience.

There is of course one other option that I have not discussed, which is that we are forced to submit that prayer is a holy mystery that cannot be truly understood. Such an approach is not uncommon to theology, but an appeal to divine mystery is not usually the way prayer is understood and explained by the tradition. Therefore, a more robust alternative is required.

[466] Crisp, *Retrieving Doctrine: Essays in Reformed Theology*, 135.

I believe this thesis offers such an alternative option, in much the same way the passibility debate is reconciled in Chapter Three. In God's eternal frame of reference, He experiences all of His existence in the same 'present'. This means that God experiences His act of creation simultaneously with His experience of judgment. The Lutheran and Calvinistic explanations of prayer fit well with this view of God as all things have occurred in God at the same 'present'. However, if God is eternal and all temporal moments are present to Him, then He experiences prayer at the moment the prayer is made. According to this framework, when I pray for it to rain tomorrow, my prayer is present to God in eternity, and also present to God which is, for me, the later temporal moment of me experiencing an answer to my prayer. Because the current temporal moment is simultaneous with God's eternal existence, it means that my prayer is heard eternally, yet it requires that I pray, allowing for agency on my part. It also means that God experiences my prayer in the eternal present. Thus, at the moment I pray, God is also simultaneously present at the time of sending or not sending rain. The sending (or not sending) of rain may be in my future experience as I am purely temporally located, but it is experienced simultaneously with my prayer in the eternal experience of God. Indeed, the idea that God is responsive in this model is a move that Stump herself wishes to make, the key difference being that for Stump, God is not passible.[467]

This framework also allows for a fuller understanding of the different types of prayer I have outlined in this chapter. Our prayers of thanksgiving, lament, adoration, intercession, and petition begin for us in a temporal frame. Such a view means that we have a choice to praise or not praise, a choice whether to be thankful, a choice to raise our laments to God, and a choice to pray for ourselves and for others. But these choices are not new to God, they do not represent changes in His knowledge: God therefore remains immutable. This is precisely because God experiences all things in the eternal present, rather than merely having the knowledge of these

[467] Stump, *The God of the Bible and the God of the Philosophers*, 76.

events at a prior time (as with Aquinas[468]) or not having knowledge until individuals pray (as with some Open Theist accounts[469]).

What this means is that one could affirm a relational account of prayer (in the passibilist sense) which maintains human freedom without the need for God to be limited. Thus, as we pray, our relationship with the creator is deepened (or stagnates if we do not). Moreover, this shows why an understanding of prayer as more than petition and intercession is important. Because prayer is relational (as per the discussion in Chapter One), the types of prayer that are not simply 'asking' are vital; they speak to a wider purpose of prayer than simply 'getting something' from God. Our ability to raise prayers of thanksgiving and adoration affects our relationship with God, and the fact that these prayers can be genuinely occasioned by us is important. If we were unable to bring about our prayers by our own volition, then one might wonder whether prayer is in fact relational, given that we usually understand relationships as involving the activity of two parties.[470] Instead, this schema enables us to maintain both human and divine freedom without impugning divine knowledge or sovereignty, thereby ensuring that prayer and wider Christian life are relational in a meaningful and actual sense.

Thus, it remains possible to hold a strong view (positively speaking) of divine foreknowledge, sovereignty, and action alongside human agency. We can also maintain that God is omniscient because He simultaneously experiences every temporal moment.

Under this framework, we can affirm, as Stump writes, 'That asking makes a difference.'[471] God knows all and has power over all things without predetermining all things and stripping them of their freedom and agency. We can even go further and declare that praising

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[468] Of course, if Stump is correct, then this framework is in fact Aquinas' view.
[469] For example, Richard Swinburne writes, 'God, if He is necessarily and eternally perfectly free, must be ignorant of his own future actions.' Richard Swinburne, *The Christian God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 134.
[470] Of course, one might argue that some relationships require only one party; for example, a son with an estranged father is still related to his father in some sense, but even this 'relation' could be said to lack 'relationship'.
[471] Stump,' Petitionary Prayer', 91.

makes a difference, lamenting makes a difference, and so forth because of the relational character of prayer.

The additional change my thesis makes concerning our understanding of prayer is that I argue for a passible God.[472] A God who is passible is also a God who can be affected by us. It means God can be said to 'care' in a way which we understand and that God can bring about a relationship with humanity that displays all the hallmarks of what we understand a relationship to entail. These points (passibility, care and so on) are essential for any discussion on prayer, given that we wish to affirm that prayer makes a difference, since one could then say that God cares for us on the grounds that an uncaring God would not be concerned to answer our prayers. When we petition God, He hears and responds, whereas not petitioning curtails the blessings we may receive, precisely because the act of asking matters. This is not to say that God will not move to bless us even when we do not ask for it, but that the relationship between human creatures and God can mean that asking leads to blessing.

In this chapter I have sought to show how a passible yet immutable conception of God can affirm that God genuinely cares for us, that He does respond to our prayers, and that we have choice in whether to pray or not pray. Affirming divine passibility can also highlight the relational character of non-petitionary prayers. For example, an account of divine passibility can account for how prayers of lament are spoken to a God who desires to hear our laments, loves us, and cares for us in a way that requires divine affectedness. Passibility helps us make sense of the divine-human relationship because we are not forced to argue that God 'cares' or 'loves' in an impassible way that is 'unlike' the human understanding of these emotions. Instead, our understanding of emotions like 'love' and 'care' are meaningful (yet still analogical) descriptors of God. In turn, this affects our view of prayer, given the account of eternity presented in Chapter Three, as what we do can be said to affect God, even if God does not change. As noted above,

[472] Other similar views include the system developed by Leftow, discussed in part in Chapter Three.

much of the view presented above can also be accounted by Stump's Thomistic framework. But in my account, it is important to affirm and maintain that God is passible and immutable, as these two attributes are key to how we think about prayer: namely, that prayer makes 'a difference' and affects God, but does not cause change in God who remains eternally the same.

This is where I differ from Stump and Kretzmann's Thomistic outlook. Whereas Stump develops her account of eternity to help elucidate Aquinas' view on prayer,[473] I argue that (Kretzmann) and Stump's position can be used to present a coherent account of God as both immutable and passible. As opposed to God as the '*unmoved* mover' God in Thomist theology, I argue that a relational account of prayer entails that God can be said to be passibly affected by our prayers. But such a passible affectedness need not entail divine mutability. Rather, as I sought to show in Chapter Three, (Kretzmann and) Stump's account of eternity helps us conceive of God as immutable while also being passible: that God can be affected but not changed. And, as we saw in Chapter Four, the conception of God as passible and immutable can be applied to trinitarian theology. The result of this is that Stump and Kretzmanns view can now be applied to a passible trinitarian God, and can be shown to affect how prayer is viewed, particularly in relation to second-order questions.

A view of God as passible yet immutable can combine the strengths of the three views presented in this thesis. It allows me to emphatically state that we can have an account of prayer that, like Calvin, affirms obedience; like Luther, affirms that praying is a relational activity; like Aquinas, argues for a God who is omniscient; and like an Open Theist, affirms humanity has freedom in choosing to pray and what to pray for.

[473] Stump, 'Petitionary Prayer', 85.

## (5.7) Conclusion

In this chapter, I have laid out the most common types of prayer uttered by believers around the world, suggesting that prayer is, at its most fundamental level, communication with God and deepens our relationship with Him. I have examined how prayer has been commonly understood by theologians, dividing them into three broad groups: determinism (as categorised by Luther and Calvin), foreknowledge (as seen in Aquinas), and two-way contingency (as seen in the Open Theist movement). All three groups provide useful insights into the purpose and use of prayer. All three also make assumptions about the nature of divine being which affect their conclusions. This highlights the importance of the discussion surrounding divine being for theological praxis. Thus, the arguments one wishes to make about prayer all find their root in who we think God is, His being, and the relationship we have to Him.

After surveying the three predominant accounts of prayer and their respective strengths and weakness, I presented an alternative conception of prayer, which I believe possesses the strengths of all three groups. My conception affirms that prayer is rightly an obedient act; that it takes place within our relationship to a passible God; and that we have agency when it comes to the act of prayer. This shows how an account of God as eternal allows us to affirm both human agency and freedom without compromising God's omnipotence and omniscience (among other divine attributes). Furthermore, my account of prayer takes into account the view that God is understood to be passible (in a qualified sense). The claim that God is passible, affects how one thinks the types of prayer (as examined at the beginning of the chapter) are to be understood. Further, the immutability of God as argued in this thesis (Chapter Two), coupled with passibility has a direct impact on how we understand prayer.

While the topic of prayer itself does not dictate whether one affirms a passible or impassible God (or a mutable or immutable one), prayer remains a test case, both for exploring key theological ideas which underpin Christian *praxis* (such as second-order questions on foreknowledge or determinism) and for showing how some of the themes addressed in this

thesis (such as the conception of God-creature relationship) affect specific aspects of Christian *praxis*. Additionally, given my reliance on Stump's work in the previous chapters, the test case of prayer helps to highlight where my account differs from her work on matters of both speculative and practical theology.

In the discussion on 'what is prayer', I quoted Barth's statement that 'Even before praying, we must assume that we have been heard'.[474] Based on my account in this chapter, it is my contention that Barth's statement needs to be reconsidered. We must assume that we are being heard – and that God's hearing of our prayer occurs in the same eternal present as wondering whether I will be heard before I pray. In this way, God can be considered immutable and yet also be responsive.

[474] Barth, *Prayer and Preaching,* 22.

## Conclusion

Schwöbel writes that, 'Although systematic theology is theoretical activity, it is provoked by very practical problems and its final aim is a practical one'.[475] It is this idea that underpins the work of this thesis. Drawing on contemporary philosophical accounts of time and eternity (as examined in Chapter Three), this thesis has sought to explore how God can be passible yet immutable and, more broadly, how divine passibility can be compatible with, or even complement, the classical divine attributes. It has also aimed to highlight the implications of such an account of God for everyday Christian thought and practice; specifically the practice and understanding of prayer. Thus, whilst this thesis is largely a work in systematic theology with its focus on the being of God, it has implications for practical theology and was motivated by practical concerns.

I posit that one can argue for a passible God who is also simple and immutable. This rendering of passibility involves a number of qualifications and a careful understanding of analogy. As examined in the Introduction, theologians can usually be separated into two broad camps: those who embrace the classical divine attributes and reject passibility, and those who reject (some, or all, of) the classical divine attributes and embrace passibility.[476] This division is often a result of the 'immutability problem' discussed in the introduction. This holds that if God does not change then he cannot be passible, because experiencing emotions or suffering is generally construed as experiencing change.

In part, the motivation for this present study was rooted in the adoption of apparently contradictory claims that God is both passible and immutable within lay Christianity, as evidenced by contemporary Christian worship music, literature, and the experiential claims of theologians. Accordingly, this thesis has attempted to reconcile two competing theological

[475] Christoph Schwöbel, *God: Action and Revelation* (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1992), 13.
[476] This includes both mutable-passibilists and immutable-passibilists.

claims, that God is either passible or immutable but not both.[477] The solution proposed serves to break the impasse between academia and the laity by examining God's relationship to time and eternity, and considering how such categories fundamentally transform the discussion on divine attributes.

To address this question, I argued that a notion of divine passibility need not be construed in univocal terms as creaturely passibility. Drawing on Paul Gavrilyuk's observation that the early church's conception of divine impassibility is a qualified notion of impassibility to be distinguished from the impassibility of insentient inanimate objects, I argued in Chapter One that it is more fitting to predicate passibility than impassibility of the divine life, provided such passibility is qualified analogically (just as the patristic understanding of divine impassibility is qualified analogically).

If we accept an analogical conception of divine passibility, I can argue that the apparent contradiction of divine immutability and passibility arises if we only view God through a temporal lens. My proposal is that we can hold both immutability and passibility together if we clarify the way in which God is understood to be eternal. If one adopts a temporal perspective which assumes that God exists and operates 'in' a temporal frame (and/or all temporal frameworks), then 'experience' can be understood in terms of change. However, if this is not the only way to construe God's relationship with the temporal world, then one could understand divine experience in a different way. To achieve this, I drew on Stump and Kretzmann's conception of eternal-temporal simultaneity to argue that the eternal God does not experience the world as we do (that is to say, temporally), and God's eternal experience can be affected by creation without amounting to a change in God's eternal being.

It is my contention that this view of God has major implications for a number of theological issues, the primary one explored in this thesis being the 'immutability problem' faced

[477] The academic debates, as we have seen, also involve a number of sub-debates, such as how one understands the biblical data or sets up a theology of divine being.

by passibilists. I have argued that this view of God's eternal being allows us to assert that God can, in fact, have an emotional life, and even suffer. If God appears to suffer in a temporal frame of reference (such as in Genesis 6:6 or Exodus 22:24), these emotions have been experienced eternally, and appear to us at distinct temporal moments. In temporal frames of reference, it may appear that God goes – and apparently changes – from one state of being to another. For example, He moves from declaring all creation to be good on the sixth day (Genesis 1:31) to regretting the creation of humanity a few generations later (Genesis 6:6). Both events are experienced eternally by God and hence both emotional responses are held in the eternal frame of reference – and eternally experienced – as one 'present' moment for God. As such, God's experiences do not constitute a change in God's being, because there is no 'moment' of time in which He does not experience these emotions, given that all moments of time are experienced in the eternal 'present' (and *as* 'present'). God can thus be said to be both passible *and* immutable. Under the theological schema presented in this thesis, one would be able to affirm that God can be *affected without change*.

Because the divine attributes are usually, and I think rightly, thought to function as a cohesive whole, the fact that passibility can be thought to function as one of the divine attributes is an important contribution, because it means that the system continues with the attributes drawing upon each other. If we can adhere to the divine attributes en masse, then we can affirm that God is both simple and passible. If this is the case, then passibility is not only applicable to the suffering of the human nature of the second person but also (albeit in a different way, e.g., non-physically) to the Father and Spirit.

I laid out a possible strategy for conceiving how a passible and immutable trinitarian God exists, with reference to the concept of time and eternity outlined in Chapter Three. I explained that the issue of (im)passibility is traditionally solved using the two natures of Christ to locate certain activities in the humanity of Jesus. I argued that distinctions such as the one between passibility and impassibility should be made on the basis of divine revelation, and that it is not

clear that the suffering of Christ should, on this basis, only be applied to the human nature. This is not to say that I deny the two natures of Christ. Rather, it is to affirm the importance of revelation in the Christological and trinitarian formulations. Moreover, as we saw in Chapter Four, even if one was to affirm that only the human nature of Christ suffers, one would still have to work with the myriad of references that ascribe passibility to the Father and Spirit (for example: Genesis 6:6, Zephaniah 3:17, Ephesians 4:30). Thus, while the passibility of Christ is a key argument, it is by no means the only one in favour of divine passibility. As I argued in Chapter Three, understanding God as ET-Simultaneous means one can assert that God actually suffers and does so eternally. God can be passible but also immutable, affected without change.

The immutable passibilist position presented in this thesis undoubtedly contradicts the sensibility of much of traditional theology (with the exception of certain modern thinkers such as McCormack). One advantage of upholding the position that God eternally suffers the pain of the cross is that it underscores the importance of the latter as not only an expression of God's love but also the way in which God reconciles humanity to himself. The importance such a view places on God's action in the fallen creation has clear implications for discussions surrounding soteriology. Additionally, because this thesis suggests attributes such as divine simplicity can aid the arguments for a passible God, it then stands apart from the arguments that have been made by McCormack. In this sense, the thesis is sympathetic to classical theology, and attempts to occupy a middle ground between anti-classical positions and classical theology.

The theoretical questions examined in the first three chapters of this thesis were prompted by a very practical concern: namely, reconciling the gap between classical theism and divine passibility which has arisen in academic theology. The core issue is that parts of each view (passible yet immutable) have filtered into lay belief. Consequently, the view that God is both immutable and passible has become common in the theology of the laity, which seems to render Christian theology paradoxical (arguably, without good reason) in a way that it was not prior to

the 20th century.[478] This apparently paradoxical stance affects what is communicated from the pulpit, in prayer, and in sung worship. In light of this, the argument presented not only provides an intelligible means of reconciling academic and lay theology but also an integration of systematic and practical theology.

To show how the systematic theological proposition of this thesis impacts Christian practice, Chapter Five offered a case study on how the specific immutable passibilist view of God, as outlined in Chapters One to Four, can illuminate the understanding and practice of prayer—a practice that is shared by Christians across both time and space. Chapter Five argued that the three major views of prayer – represented by Luther/Calvin, Aquinas and Open Theism, respectively – all possess weaknesses, but all have their own strengths. Drawing on the account of divine being laid out in the first four chapters, the final chapter developed an alternative account of prayer which enables us to accommodate a multitude of mutually affirmative statements. In so doing, the suggestion that God is eternal (in a specific way) compels us to reconsider various questions of both theological practice and dogmatic theology. Such a reconsideration would allow lay and academic theology to align with one another, and demonstrates that this thesis impacts practical considerations as well as dogmatic ones.

In conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated that one can affirm that God is passible and immutable, and has provided a cohesive way of maintaining most of the divine attributes while rejecting impassibility. It has further shown that this can significantly affect theological praxis, as evidenced in the examination of prayer. It then argued that with a careful rendering of passibility, immutability, and God's eternity, we can suggest that God loves us and cares for us (in a passible sense), and have confidence that, due to God's immutability, such a statement will always be true.

[478] For example, see the contemporary worship songs, literature, and testimonies in the introduction. Additionally, this may also be considered a problem for academic accounts of impassibility, given that the wider Church appears to have little issue with the idea that God feels or changes his mind.

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