THE EMPATHY OF GOD:

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY

OF THE CHRISTOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

OF JOHN 11:35

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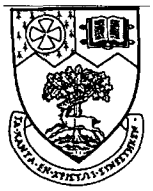

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ABSTRACT

"Jesus wept" (John 11:35) is the shortest verse in the Bible, yet it reveals much about the human and divine natures of Jesus. The tears of Jesus have usually been understood by commentators as an expression of anger or proof of his human nature, but rarely as genuine grief at the death of a beloved friend although Jesus' behaviour is consistent with expressions of grief in the Old Testament and New Testament examples, Homeric Greek culture, and contemporary psychological insights into grieving. However, the Platonic and Socratic ideals of masculine control of emotions, which continue to influence western culture, make it difficult to think of Jesus as weeping.

In John's Gospel, Jesus is described as God in the flesh. Rarely has his weeping been thought to reveal anything about God despite the fact that God is said to mourn and grieve in the Old Testament, especially in the prophets and Jeremiah with whom Jesus the Prophet is often connected. The degradation of anthropomorphic language, and Greek ideas about the ideal passionless God have lead to an apathy axiom in theology and christology which is preserved in the doctrine of the two natures of Christ and the Creed of Chalcedon. A christology which is based on who Jesus is, rather than what divinity is, can allow Jesus to be included in the identity of God and God to be revealed in the tears of Jesus. The weeping of Jesus reveals the empathic love of God and requires an empathy axiom as the basis for theology. The empathy axiom can be seen in the thought of Jung Young Lee, Kazo Kitamori, and Jürgen Moltmann. The weeping of Jesus challenges the impassibility of God.

To my mother — of blessed memory —
with, and for, whom Jesus wept

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INTRODUCTION

"Jesus wept" (John 11:35) is the shortest verse in the Bible. Beyond this accident of versification, it is notable as the only place where the word δακρύω (burst into tears) occurs in the New Testament.[1] This verse is one of only two places in the gospels where Jesus weeps[2] and one of the very few times where Jesus is said to experience human emotions — he is never said to laugh or even smile. Jesus' weeping occurs in the story of the death and raising of Lazarus, but it is interesting to note that another, more common word, κλαίω (cry), is used to describe the weeping of Mary and Martha and the other mourners.

The short sentence is easily overshadowed by the drama of the miraculous raising of Lazarus. The story could easily function as the glorious conclusion of the ministry of Jesus without verse 35 at all, and yet there it is, God incarnate weeping at the grave of a friend. Since Jesus was a human being, it should not be surprising that he cries because weeping is a human universal and weeping is exclusively human — no other animal produces emotional tears.[3] The tendency to cry at death is also a human universal,

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[1]The *noun* δάκρυον "tear" is used 10 times.

[2]See also Luke 19:41 where Jesus weeps over Jerusalem.

[3]There have been claims that elephants cry when scolded or reunited with their handlers, and some pet owners have thought their dogs cry, but no independent

although different cultures have various ways of ritualizing tears and different ideas about when, where, and how long weeping is appropriate.[4]

Tom Lutz, in his study of crying, observes that "weeping often occurs at precisely those times when we are least able to fully verbalize complex, 'overwhelming' emotions, least able to fully articulate our manifold, mingled feelings. We recognize in crying a surplus of feeling over thinking, and an overwhelming of our powers of articulation by the gestural language of tears."[5] Tears are a kind of language, a primary, and often primal, form of communication.[6] The question raised by the weeping of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus is what is Jesus communicating through the language of his tears. What does the statement that Jesus wept tell us about Jesus and what, if anything, does it tell us about God?

Rarely has the weeping of Jesus been taken seriously in the history of the church and rarely has the picture of God they communicate been sought. Greek cultural ideas about male expression of emotion have caused discomfort at the idea that God in the flesh should weep and suffer the pain of grief — these feelings do not seem appropriate for the creator of the world. Some commentators barely mention verse 35, and those who do pay attention to it have offered various opinions about why Jesus is weeping that

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confirmation has ever been made. See Tom Lutz, *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), 17.

[4]Ibid., 195.

[5]Ibid., 21.

[6]Ibid., 24.

shield Him from the obvious implication that he is mourning the death of a friend. Some have said it is an expression of his anger at the people for failing to understand who he is and what he is doing, or is it anger at the human sin that is the cause of Lazarus's death? Commentators, ancient and modern, have thought it better to understand the weeping of Jesus as an expression of anger rather than grief, as if anger was somehow more appropriate for God in the flesh even though it too is an emotion, and both anger and grief are attributed to God in the scriptures.

The Old Testament has many examples of Israel's patriarchs, prophets, priests and kings openly grieving, mourning and weeping at the death of loved ones. The New Testament also describes reactions to the death of loved ones that are similar to the weeping of Jesus for Lazarus. The works of Homer contain many examples of grieving with tears but by the time of Plato, weeping and mourning was thought to be appropriate only for women. Rarely has it been thought that Jesus is genuinely grieving the loss of a dear friend with those who loved him, even though a careful reading of the text shows this to be the most obvious idea.

Several times in the gospels Jesus is identified as a prophet, or *the* prophet.[7] Neither the evangelists nor Jesus deny or correct them which suggests that Jesus understood his ministry to be prophetic and in continuity with the prophets. The prophets of Israel not only spoke God's words to the people but also reflected God's character. The prophets attribute a range of emotions to God including lamenting, mourning, and weeping. In the weeping of Jesus there is a strong connection to the

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[7]John 4:19,44; 6:14; 7:40; 9:17.

weeping of Jeremiah. The tears of Jesus reveal the prophetic pathos of God.

There has been a long history in the Christian church of denying the experience of emotions to God as the traditional doctrine of the impassibility of God ensures. Greek philosophical ideas about the ideal passionless God were applied as an axiom to the Christian doctrine of God and to the divine in Christ. The human emotions of Jesus are attributed to his human nature while his divine nature remains unsullied by humanity's weaknesses. The development of the doctrine of the two natures of Christ, expressed in the Council of Chalcedon in 451, was important for providing a way to understand Jesus as God to those who thought he must be only a man and as a man to those who thought Jesus was God in human appearance. However, the result of this important distinction has been a tendency to see a division in the person of Jesus that is foreign to the gospels. There have always been voices calling Christians to consider the reality of the biblical evidence that God feels, suffers and rejoices. Sometimes these people were called heretics. There has been a movement by some Christian thinkers, particularly in the post-Auschwitz context,[8] to imagine a God more like the God of the prophets than the God of Greek philosophy, who suffers with and for humanity and transforms grief into joy and death into life. William Placher asks "what sort of God one would believe in if

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[8]For a summary of the development of the shift from an understanding of the impassibility of God, see Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 1-26. For a study of the idea of a passible God up to the first part of the twentieth century, see J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 127-166. Paul S. Fiddes identifies four factors that have given rise to a challenge of the impassibility of God: 1. The meaning of the love of God, 2. The cross of Christ, 3. The problem of human suffering, 4. The world-picture today. See *The Creative Suffering of God* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 16-45.

one took the biblical narratives, especially the Gospel stories about Jesus, as the best clue to who God is."[9] More specifically, what sort of God one would believe in if one took the story of the weeping of Jesus and the raising of Lazarus as a clue to who God is. This understanding of God is a challenge to the apathy axiom.

Lutz suggests that "tears are one of the ways empathy is recognized, and one of the ways empathy is sought."[10] The tears of Jesus reveal the empathic love of God for the world and his creatures as he grieves with the mourners. This same empathy of God is revealed in his covenant fidelity with Israel, in the prophetic pathos, and in the incarnation. Throughout the scriptures, God is deeply moved and affected by his creatures as he grieves, mourns and suffers with them. Rarely is the empathy of God more clearly revealed then in the words "Jesus wept." The weeping of Jesus challenges the idea of the impassibility of God.

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[9]William Placher, *Narratives of a Vulnerable God: Christ, Theology, and Scripture* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), xv.

[10]Lutz, 245.

CHAPTER ONE

THE WEEPING OF JESUS

The Emotions of Jesus in the Gospels

The gospels are not primarily concerned to reveal details about the everyday, normal life of Jesus — their purpose is to witness to the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mk. 1:1). With the exception of the account of the twelve-year old Jesus at the temple talking with the teachers (Lk. 2:41-51), we know very little of the life of Jesus from his birth to the beginning of his public ministry.[1] Yet the accounts of his teachings and miracles and interactions with people do reveal a range of emotions that are attributed to him. As Thomas Oden has observed, these accounts reveal that "Jesus' humanity was entirely ordinary. Jesus is pictured as a normal person in unmistakably human terms — going to weddings, visiting friends, eating and drinking, getting tired and napping."[2]

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[1]It is interesting to note that many of the non-canonical gospels purport to fill in the details of the life of Jesus as a child and young man that are missing from the canonical gospels. The Jesus depicted in these writings is generally much more emotionally expressive than in the canonical gospels. He laughs and cries as he learns to use his extraordinary power. Many of these writings were held in high esteem by gnostics (for example the Manichaeans liked *The Gospel of Thomas*) and heretics and so were rejected by the Church. The Apocryphal Gospels do suggest an interest in the details and periods of the life of Jesus about which the New Testament is silent.

[2]Thomas C. Oden, *The Word of Life, Systematic Theology: Volume Two* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1998), 120.

Jesus experienced pity (Mk.1:41), anger (Mk. 3:5), deep sighing (Mk. 7:34), compassion (Mk. 8:2), surprise (Mk. 6:6), disappointment (Mk. 8:17; 9:19), and distress (Lk. 22:15). He is never said to have laughed or smiled, but he did feel joy (Lk. 10:21), and love (Lk. 7:36-50). He was tempted (Mt. 4:1-11), concerned for his mother (Jn. 19:25-26), and even more poignantly he wept, 'deeply moved in spirit and troubled' at the death of his dear friend Lazarus (Jn. 11:33-35).[3] In short, Jesus experienced the whole range of human emotions that any living person experiences. Princeton theologian B.B. Warfield says: "It belongs to the truth of our Lord's humanity, that he was subject to

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[3]Ibid., 124-125. John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, is known as the first to point out that Jesus never laughed. Chrysostom is critical of those who laugh in church 'after the manner of women of the world who are on the stage' even during prayer 'Christ is dishonored, is thrust aside "dost thou laugh? What is 'foolish talking'? that which has nothing profitable. And dost thou, a solitary, laugh at all and relax thy countenance? thou that art crucified? thou that art a mourner? tell me, dost thou laugh? Where dost thou hear of Christ doing this? Nowhere: but that He was sad indeed oftentimes. For even when He looked on Jerusalem, He wept; and when He thought on the Traitor He was troubled; and when He was about to raise Lazarus, He wept; and dost thou laugh? If He who grieves not over the sins of others deserves to be accused, of what consideration will he be worthy, who is without sorrow for his own sins, yea laughs at them?.... dost thou not hear Christ saying, 'Woe to them that laugh, for they shall weep' (Luke vi. 25.)"

Chrysostom admonishes: "Serve God with tears, that thou mayest be able to wash away your sins. . . . Let us mourn therefore, beloved, let us mourn in order that we may laugh indeed, that we may rejoice indeed in the time of unmixed joy." Chrysostom, 'Homilies on Hebrews,' in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), 442.

See Ingvild Saelid Gilhus, *Laughing Gods, Weeping Virgins: Laughter in the History of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 1997) for a discussion of how in the early church, weeping was important in monasticism and as a mark of the ideal woman. He writes that for monks, weeping "was meritorious, and the monks had much to cry over: the crucifixion of Jesus; constant awareness of their sins; fear for the demons who continually tempted and tormented the monks; terror of eternal damnation. In short, the monks cried over the miseries of this world." (pp. 61-68) St. Francis of Assisi is said to have gone blind from too much weeping!

all sinless human emotions."[4]

The message of the gospels is that this man was also God. This man, ordinary in many ways, also healed the sick, gave sight to the blind and raised the dead, and so was revealed to be God. The Scriptures represent Jesus Christ as having a divine nature and a human nature in a single, undivided personality.[5] Oden calls this the Theandric union which he defines as "nothing more than the idea that one person is both human and divine, uniting God and humanity in one individual."[6] Jesus cannot be reduced either to Jesus or the Christ. The narratives of Jesus do not mention anything he *did* that could be understood as disconnected form *who he was* as Sent and Anointed One.[7]

Oden says if we take the New Testament as our starting point, "then everywhere we turn in the texts we are being met by one who is thoroughly human who claimed to be God, was attested as Son of God, and according to Christian confession was God-incarnate. Little attempt is made in the texts to theorize about how that could or could not be. No attempt is made to protect Jesus from the charge of paradox, for he was a *skandalon*, 'a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.' Two certainties are most deeply shared by all writers of the New Testament: that Jesus was fully human, and

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[4]B.B. Warfield, *The Person and Work of Christ* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1950), 93. See the chapter "On the Emotional Life of Our Lord," pp. 93-145.

[5]Oden, 165.

[6]Ibid., 170.

[7]Ibid., 22.

that in him God has personally appeared into our midst."[8] In the gospels, Christ is God while being at the same time human, limited, dependent, facing suffering and death.[9]

As Oden writes: "While incarnate, the Son was truly God. Scripture does not teach that his divinity ceased, was cast aside, absorbed, or left behind. As incarnate Lord he acted in a way that only God can act: forgiving sin, giving life to the dead, revealing the secret thoughts of persons, dividing loaves and fishes, and laying down his life and taking it up again."[10] It was this God-man who wept at the tomb of Lazarus and raised him from the dead.

Jesus in John's Gospel: The Word

John's gospel begins with identification of Jesus as the Word of God through whom all things were created. John goes on to say "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (1:14) The message of the prologue is that in the life and ministry of Jesus the glory of God was uniquely and perfectly disclosed.[11] Oden says "Jesus as portrayed by John assumed that the encounter with him was indeed an encounter with God, that to know him would be to know God, that loving or hating Jesus

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[8]Ibid., 203.

[9]Oden suggests that: "This point alone singles Christianity out as something quite distinct from other major world religions." p. 127.

[10]Ibid., 114.

[11]F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 28.

amounted to loving or hating God, that trusting Jesus was trusting God (John 8:19; 12:44-45, 14:1-9; 15:23)."[12] Leon Morris writes that the "Greeks thought of the gods as detached from the world, as regarding its struggles and heartaches and joys and fears with serene divine lack of feeling. John's idea of the *Logos* conveys exactly the opposite idea. John's *Logos* does not show us a God who is serenely detached, but a God who is passionately involved."[13]

Aloys Grillmeier observes that the "Johannine christology has a dynamism all of its own. Christ appears as the definitive Word of God to man, as the unique and absolute *Revealer*, transcending all prophets."[14] In Jesus "the office of 'revealer' is so closely bound up with the person of Jesus that Christ himself becomes the embodiment of revelation. Not only his words, but the very fact of his coming and of his being are in themselves a divine self-revelation."[15] Thomas Oden says "Jesus not only spoke, but was the truth enfleshed, God's own Word of truth. He did not merely teach revelation by words, but was himself that revelation, a living Word, the Word of Life."[16]

As Grillmeier observes, "John represents his Christ as a real man, with body and

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[12]Oden, 38.

[13]Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 117. For more on the *Logos* in John, see also 115-126.

[14]Aloys Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition: From the Apostolic Age to Chalcedon (451)* , trans. J.S. Bowden (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1965), 28.

[15]Ibid., 29.

[16]Oden, 289.

soul, and therefore capable of spiritual feeling and inner emotion. The Apostle who has an unparalleled vision of the Logos in Jesus always sees him as having a human psychology (11. 33; 12. 27; 13. 27)."[17] In the Incarnation Jesus (the medium) is the Word (the message).[18] As Oden explains: "The one person is both proclaimer and proclaimed."[19] Raymond Brown notes that in the "mind of the theologian of the Prologue the creative word of God, the word of the Lord that came to the prophets, has become personal in Jesus who is the embodiment of divine revelation."[20]

In John, the words of Jesus himself declare his unity with the Father. Jesus says "I and the Father are one." (Jn. 10:30) This declaration causes the accusation of blasphemy "because you, a mere man, claim to be God." (Jn. 11:33) Jesus said "the Father is in me, and I in the Father" (Jn. 10:39), and it is interesting to note that in John's structure, this occurs just prior to the Lazarus story. Jesus says for someone to look at him, "When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me." (Jn. 12:44) He says "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well" (Jn. 14:7), and "Anyone who has

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[17]Grillmeier, 34.

[18]The Canadian media "guru" Marshall McLuhan, a devout Catholic, agreed that his famous statement that "the medium is the message" applied very well to the prologue of the Gospel of John and indicated that Christ Himself is the archetypal example of the medium as message. See Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion*, eds. Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szklarek (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd., 1999), xxvii. McLuhan says that the message of the Church is Christ's penetration into all human existence. Thus, in Jesus Christ there is no distance or separation between the medium and the message — they are fully one and the same. (pp. 102-103)

[19]Oden, 210.

[20]Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John (i-xii)*. The Anchor Bible (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1966), 524.

seen me has seen the Father. . . . Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" (Jn. 14:9-10) Jesus says he was with God "before the world began." (Jn. 17:5) In his prayer, Jesus asks that those who believe may be one, "Father, just as you are in me and I am in you." (Jn. 17:21) In these examples, it is Jesus himself who declares his unity with God and his divine nature, and reactions to these statements clearly demonstrate that those who heard him understood that this man was claiming to be God.

Catholic theologian Karl Rahner expresses the Johannine Christ well when he says "what Jesus is and does as man reveals the Logos himself; it is the reality of the Logos as our salvation amidst us. Then we can assert, in the full meaning of the words: here the Logos with God and the Logos with us."[21] Rahner thinks that the Son is "the self-communication of the Father to the world in such a way that in this Son he is radically *there* and that his self-communication entails, as an effect produced by itself, its radical acceptance. The *Son* is the economic (historical) self-communication of the Father."[22] This is the Jesus who travels to the tomb of his friend Lazarus.

The Lazarus Story in John's Gospel: The Seventh Sign

John's Gospel can be divided into two major sections. The first can be called the Book of Signs (2-11) which describes the public ministry of Jesus and the seven miracles

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[21]Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 33.

[22]Ibid., 63.

he preforms as signs[23] that he is the Son of God.[24] The second, is the Book of Glory (12-20) which details the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus. The story of the raising of Lazarus is the seventh of the miraculous signs that Jesus performed beginning with the turning of the water into wine at Cana. John says he wrote about the miraculous signs "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (Jn. 20:30-31) John presents the miracles as a work of revelation which is intimately connected with salvation.[25]

The seven signs are: changing water into wine at Cana (2:1-11); the healing of the royal official's son at Cana (4:43-54); the healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-14); the feeding of the five thousand in Galilee (6:1-15); walking on the Sea of Galilee (6:16-21); the healing of the man born blind in Jerusalem (9:1-12); and the raising of Lazarus from the dead at Bethany (11:1-44). The raising of the dead is clearly the most dramatic of the signs.

Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh say that in John's Gospel, "Jesus' so-called public ministry is the story of how he brought life and light to Israel through his self-disclosure. The major events of this story take place at celebrations and/or feasts that were full of feeling for first-century Israelites. The author notes how Jesus initiates his self-disclosure at a wedding in Galilee. The series of self-disclosures, called 'signs,'

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[23]Jesus refers to his miracles as 'works' 17 times. It is the other characters and John who say 'sign,' a term that Jesus does not use. See Brown, 526.

[24]See Brown, Appendix III: Signs and Works, pp. 525-532.

[25]Brown, 529.

comes to a close with a funeral in Judea."[26]

Brown says that the "miracles worked by Jesus are not simply external proofs of his claims, but more fundamentally are acts by which he establishes God's reign and defeats the reign of Satan. . . . The raising of men to life is an assault on death which is Satan's peculiar realm."[27] Although it is not a prominent theme, the conflict of Jesus with Satan is a part of the story of the ministry of Jesus. Jesus said the voice from heaven (12:28) indicates that now is the time of judgment when "the prince of this world will be driven out." (Jn. 12:31) Jesus again speaks of the "prince of this world" (Jn. 14:30) but encourages his disciples by saying "take heart, I have overcome the world." (Jn. 16:33) The raising of Lazarus is a clear example of the power of Jesus to overcome the prince of this world.

According to Brown, all of "Jesus' miracles are signs of what he is and what he has come to give man, but in none of them does the sign more closely approach the reality than in the gift of life. The physical life that Jesus gives to Lazarus is still not in the realm of the life from above, but it is so close to that realm that it may be said to conclude the ministry of signs and inaugurate the ministry of glory. Thus, the raising of Lazarus provides an ideal transition, the last sign in the Book of Signs leading to the Book of Glory. Moreover, the suggestion that the supreme miracle of giving life to man leads to the death of Jesus offers a dramatic paradox worthy of summing up Jesus'

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[26]Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 65.

[27]Brown, 525.

career."[28] Rudolf Schnackenburg observes, "together with the healing of the man born blind, the raising of Lazarus expresses the central Christological idea of the fourth gospel, that Jesus is the light and life of the world (cf. 1:4)."[29]

The Story: John 11:1-44[30]

The story begins with Mary and Martha sending a message to Jesus that Lazarus, the one he loves (φιλέω), is ill (v.3).[31] Verse 5 also says that Jesus loved (ἀγαπάω) Martha, her sister, and Lazarus.[32] This is the word used to describe the love of God for the world (Jn. 3:16). There seems to be no great difference in their meanings here. Verse 5 seems to be a parenthetical insertion to assure the reader that Jesus' failure to go to Lazarus (v. 6) does not reflect indifference. The repetition of his love for Lazarus and

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[28]Ibid., 429.

[29]Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John,* vol.2, trans. Cecily Hastings, Francis McDonagh, David Smith, and Richard Foley (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 316.

[30]For a discussion of John's use of narrative features in the Lazarus pericope, see C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 228-232.

[31]Brown says John's purpose in describing Lazarus as the one whom Jesus loves, "is probably being held up as the representative of all those whom Jesus loves, namely the Christians. . . . Just as Jesus gives life to his beloved Lazarus, so will he give life to his beloved Christians." (Brown, 431)

[32]Only in John 11:3 and 36 is φιλέω used for the love of friends and is used here to explain the relation between Jesus and Lazarus. It may be that the Evangelist has in mind here the love for the φίλοι chosen by Him which is why in 11:11 Lazarus is called ὁ φίλος ἡμῶν (his friend).

the use of two different words stresses the fact of the deep emotional bond between Jesus and the family from Bethany. It is thus curious why Jesus decided to stay two more days where he was instead of going to be with his beloved friend (v. 6) but it seems clear that it was not because of a lack of love or affection for the family.[33]

After remaining where he was for two more days, Jesus says to the disciples that they should go into Judea again but the disciples remind him that the Judeans (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι)[34] were trying to stone him.[35] Jesus attempts to allay their fear and informs them that Lazarus has fallen asleep and he is going to awaken him — but the disciples do not understand. He then clarifies what he meant and tells them plainly that Lazarus is

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[33]Morris, 539. Brown thinks that verses 5 and 6 as they now stand are a paradox, p. 423.

[34]The words οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι are often translated 'the Jews.' In this passage it is better translated as 'the Judeans.' Malina and Rohrbaugh point out that the 70 "instances in John where the term *Judeans* (Greek *Ioudaioi*) appears, there is nothing of the modern connotations of 'Jew' or 'Jewishness.' Hence, it is simply inappropriate to project those modern meanings backward into the period when John was written. Rather, Judean meant a person belonging to a group called Judeans, situated geographically and forming a territory taking its name from its inhabitants, Judea." (p. 44) In this passage it is Judeans who "console Mary and Martha after the death of Lazarus (11:31), but after raising Lazarus, Jesus can no longer go around openly among Judeans, so he retreats to the region near the wilderness of Judea (11:54)." (p. 45)

Raymond Brown agrees that this is the better understanding in this passage, but not in all of the references to the Jews in John. He says "there is one stratum of Johannine material, particularly evident in xi-xii, where the term the Jews simply refers to Judeans and thus covers both Jesus' enemies and those who believe in him. [Apart from this and other exceptions] the Fourth Gospel uses 'the Jews' as almost a technical title for *the religious authorities, particularly those in Jerusalem, who are hostile to Jesus.*" (Brown LXXI)

[35]The reason the Judeans had tried to stone Jesus (11:8) is because they perceived Jesus' claim to be Son of God as a dishonour to God, so to defend God's honor, they seek to apprehend him (10:39) in order to stone him. See Malina and Rohrbaugh, 196.

dead (v. 14). This is an example of a well- known pattern in John for the teaching of Jesus where there is ambiguity, leading to misunderstanding which is then followed by clarification.[36]

In John, Jesus is rarely approached by others for help, but in those few instances when people do make requests, Jesus' response is always one of delaying reluctance, followed by compliance, and then a return to the conflict with the hostile Judeans.[37] Malina and Rohrbaugh say the episode of the raising of Lazarus begins with what they evocatively call the pattern of 'dynamic dawdling.'[38]

It seems clear that Jesus' reluctance to go to Lazarus was not because of a lack of love. Malina and Rohrbaugh conclude that in "John's narrative the purpose of this stalling reluctance is threefold: to underscore Jesus' ability to overcome death after three days (he arrives on the fourth day), to bring honor to God, and to gain honor for Jesus. The three-day wait is especially important since it points ahead to Jesus' three days in the tomb (20:1ff.; previously alluded to in 2:19-20)."[39] Jesus' delay in coming has a purpose, but it is understandable that to Mary and Martha and the others his failure to come for no obvious reason might have seemed like inappropriate and even insulting behaviour from

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[36]Other examples of the pattern of ambiguity, misunderstanding, and clarification in John are John 2:19ff.; 3:3ff.; 4:10ff.; 4:32ff.; 6:33ff.; 8:31ff.; 8:38ff.; 11:11ff.; 11:23ff.; 13:8ff.; 14:4ff.; 14:7ff.; 14:21ff.; 16:16ff.

[37]Malina and Rohrbaugh, 67. Examples are 2:1-11; 4:46-54; 7:2-14; 11:1-16. See p.68 for a table comparing the four instances.

[38]Ibid., 193.

[39]Ibid., 195.

a beloved friend. The fact that Lazarus had been in the tomb for four days when Jesus arrived is stressed in the story and is significant (v. 17) to demonstrate that Lazarus was truly dead.[40]

John says in verse 19 that many Judeans had come to console Mary and Martha in the loss of their brother. One of the most binding Rabbinic directions was the comforting of mourners.[41] In their culture, it was important to have as many mourners as possible at the time of death, for a large group was an indication of family honour. In a warm climate where embalming is not practiced, burial takes place on the day of death so mourning must follow burial. According to custom, the sexes walked separately in the funeral procession to the grave. After burial the women returned home alone from the grave to begin the thirty-day period of ritual mourning. During this time women usually sat on the floor. Mourning usually included loud wailing and dramatic expression of grief such as beating of the breast (normally a female gesture, but sometimes practiced by men at the time of death).[42]

In verse 21, Martha, who had gone out to meet Jesus, says to him: "Lord, if you

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[40]There was an opinion among some ancient Israelite scribes and rabbis that a person's life force hovered near the cadaver for three days after death, finally departing on the fourth day. After the fourth day, there was thus nothing of the previous life force around and so no hope of resuscitation. This detail of being in the tomb for four days would thus prove that Lazarus was truly dead. See Malina and Rohrbaugh, 199 and Brown, 424. For Jewish burial customs, see Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 2 (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), 316-320. See also Morris, 546.

[41]Edersheim, 320.

[42]Malina and Rohrbaugh, 199. Brown, 424. See also Edersheim 320.

were here, my brother would not have died." This could be a simple statement of fact or it could reveal some anger that Jesus had not come sooner and prevented the tragedy which Martha seems certain he could have done. Martha may have felt shamed that Jesus had not come quickly. Malina and Rohrbaugh point out that shameful situations are those that contribute to the breakdown of civilized community. One example is an unneighbourly marriage celebration (where wine runs out). Another is an unsatisfying death (being buried without key friends in attendance)."[43] They say that the fact that "Jesus dawdled and missed the funeral would look like a dishonor to the Bethany family and may account for a certain testiness in Martha's initial words to Jesus in v. 21."[44] According to custom, people were normally expected to fulfill the symbolic contract implied in friendship by dropping everything and going immediately when summoned.[45]

Verse 31 is the first use of the word κλαίω as the Judeans assume that when Mary leaves the house she is going to the tomb to weep. The word means "to cry" or "bewail" and is used to express grief at parting and sorrow for the dead. As we have seen, the mourners in the house with Mary were undoubtedly women and the entourage

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[43]Malina and Rohrbaugh, 194.

[44]Ibid., 195.

[45]Ibid. The fact that Martha calls Jesus 'the Teacher' (v. 28) may be important for our understanding of Jesus. Morris says it is "important to notice this use of the term by a woman. The Rabbis refused to instruct women, but Jesus took a very different view." Here, and in talking to the woman at the well (4:4-42), Jesus seems to be indifferent to traditional gender roles which may help to explain the significance of his weeping with the women in verse 35.

thinking to follow her to the tomb would have been largely Judean women.[46] Mary repeats Martha's assertion that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' death (v. 32).

Verse 33 is interesting in its use of words and is difficult to understand. When Jesus sees Mary weeping (κλαίω) and the Judeans also weeping (κλαίω), John says he "was deeply moved in spirit and troubled" or "shuddered, moved with the deepest emotions." The word κλαίω signifies a loud weeping, a wailing. It was the habit of the day to express grief in a noisy, rather unrestrained fashion and this is what these mourners would have been doing. With a crowd of people engaged in this activity there must have been quite a scene of confusion and sorrow. The phrase translated "deeply moved" or "moved with the deepest emotions," is the aorist middle of the verb ἐμβριμᾶσθαι (which also appears in v. 38). Here the verb is used with the expression τῷ πνεύματι, "in spirit," while in 38 it is used with ἐν ἑαυτῷ, "in himself" — these are Semitisms for expressing the internal impact of the emotions. The basic meaning of ἐμβριμᾶσθαι seems to imply an expression of anger.[47] It signifies a loud inarticulate noise, and its proper use appears to be for the snorting of horses. When used of men it usually denotes anger. Here it clearly points to some deep emotion. "In the spirit" does not appear to refer to the Holy Spirit, but to the human spirit of Jesus and signifies that His feeling was no light emotion.[48] The second Greek expression "troubled" or "deeply

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[46]Malina and Rohrbaugh, 199.

[47]In the LXX, the verb, along with its cognates, is used to describe a display of indignation (e.g., Dan. 11:30), and this usage is also found in Mark 14:5. The verb also describes Jesus' reaction to the afflicted (Mk. 1: 43; Mt. 9:30). See Brown, 425.

[48]Morris, 555.

moved" is ταράσσειν ἑαυτόν.[49] Used with the reflexive, it means literally "he troubled himself."[50]

In verse 34, Jesus asks where they laid him. Then, in verse 35 Jesus wept (ἐδάκρυσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς). This is the only time the word δακρύω is used in the New Testament and clearly is meant to mean something different than the three uses of κλαίω before it. The word means "to burst into tears"[51] and in the context of verse 33 and the deeply troubled spirit suggests a deeply felt emotional response. The word points to a quiet weeping in contrast to the loud wailing of the others. Jesus did not wail loudly but He was deeply grieved.

The emotional display prompts the Judeans to observe "see how he loved him!" (v. 36) Here the word of love is φιλέω, the same word used to describe Jesus' love for Lazarus in the message to Jesus in verse 3. The Judeans seem surprised that Jesus who could open the eyes of a blind man could not have prevented the death of Lazarus (v. 37). The response of the Judeans in verse 36 does not necessarily express unbelief. It may have seemed difficult to understand how, seeing there was the will (in His affection for Lazarus), there was not the power to prevent him from dying.[52]

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[49]*Tarassein* is usually intransitive (Jn. 14:1, 27) and implies deep disturbance, Brown, 426.

[50]Brown says: "Note the expression *tarassein en pneumati* in xiii 21, which has elements of both the Greek expressions in the present passage." (Brown 425-426)

[51]F.F. Bruce says this seems to be the 'ingressive' sense of the aorist. See Morris, 558 and also note 71 on δακρύω.

[52]Edersheim, 324.

In verse 38, Jesus is once again deeply moved ἐμβριμᾶσθαι ἐν ἑαυτῷ (the same word as verse 33). There seems to be very little difference in meaning of the phrase in verses 33 and 38.[53] Jesus asks for the stone to be removed, but Martha reminds him again that Lazarus has been dead for four days (see v.17) and reinforces the point by the fact that by now there would be a stench.[54] Jesus reminds her that they will see the glory of God (v. 40), and then prays to the Father and thanks him for hearing him.

The climax of the story is in verses 43-44 when Jesus cried out in a loud voice "Lazarus, come out!" and the dead man came out, still wrapped in his grave clothes. This was a fulfillment of what Jesus had said in 5:25 that "a time is coming when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live." If the family had felt any dishonour, it was now dramatically overcome. They saw the glory of God. Jesus had the power to raise Lazarus from the dead even after four days.

John reports that the miracle had an immediate affect on the Judeans. Some put their faith in him but others went to the Pharisees, who along with the chief priests, called a meeting of the Sanhedrin which set in motion the plot to take the life of Jesus (11:53). The bringing of life to Lazarus brought death to the Son. Brown says "John makes the Lazarus miracle the direct cause of the death of Jesus, for it provokes a session of the Sanhedrin (xi 46-53) which reaches a decision to kill Jesus. The theme of the

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[53]Brown thinks that it is possible that verses 33 and 38 are duplicate accounts. See Brown 435.

[54]See Edersheim, 324-325.

Lazarus miracle is also found in Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem (xii 9-11)."[55]

The Meaning of the Tears: Four Views

Like the other stories of the signs, in many ways the story of the raising of Lazarus is straight forward and clear — the raising of Lazarus revealed the glory of God and glorified the Son (Jn. 11:4,40). The delay in coming and stress on the four-day period since death serve to heighten awareness of the power of God over death. However, the language and implications of the descriptions of Jesus' behaviour in verses 33, 35 and 38 have caused much disagreement among commentators. We have seen that the story has made the fact of Jesus' emotional attachment to Lazarus and the family very prominent (vv. 3, 5, 36) and uses two different words for love — friendship and godly love to express the breadth of his affection. The delay of Jesus in coming clearly upset Mary and Martha who did not understand why their dear friend did not come to them sooner — a natural response in a culture where this would be considered shameful. It seems entirely consistent with the context that Jesus should weep in grief and mourn the death of his friend, literally "he whom you love," with those who loved him. There is, however, disagreement on what the tears of Jesus really mean and what caused his display of emotion.

1. There are several ways in which the tears of Jesus have been interpreted by commentators and theologians. The first, and this is the most popular view, sees the

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[55]Brown, 428.

groaning and weeping at the tomb of Lazarus as the result of anger, a kind of righteous indignation similar to that exhibited at the cleansing of the temple (Jn. 2:12-25). In this view Jesus is angry at the unbelief of the mourners and their failure to understand who he is and what he is doing. Jesus may also be angry at death itself and at the destructive power of the "prince of this world" to cause pain and destroy his creation.

Raymond Brown says that in the Lazarus miracle "Jesus' emotion in the face of death may represent anger at the power of Satan."[56] He was angry because he found himself face to face with the realm of Satan which, in this instance, was represented by death.[57] He thinks the weeping in verse 35 is caused by the thought of Lazarus in the tomb, but the verse is primarily intended to set the stage for verse 36.[58]

Gregory Boyd agrees that the Lazarus story is an example of Jesus' war on Satan, as are his exorcisms, healings and other miracles over nature. He thinks "they reveal yet another dimension of his war on Satan. As when he saw the sick and hungry, Jesus was moved by compassion toward those who had died and those who mourned, for he knew that these things were never intended to be part of God's creation (e.g., Jn 11:33-35). They were, rather, the work of the devil, and it grieved and angered him to see it."[59]

Rudolf Bultmann also wants to attribute the tears of Jesus to anger and frustration

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[56]Ibid., 526.

[57]Ibid., 435.

[58]Ibid., 426.

[59]Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997), 213.

instead of genuine grief. He says that the response of being deeply moved and troubled in verse 33 is because of "his wrath over the lack of faith, expressed in the wailing that is raised about the death of Lazarus in his presence — the presence of the Revealer."[60] Bultmann thinks that the "statement that he wept (v. 35) — where the weeping must be understood as a sign of agitation in the sense of v. 33 — has hardly any other purpose than to provoke the utterance of the Jews (vv. 36f.), and so to set in a yet brighter light the motif of the faithlessness in the presence of the Revealer."[61]

George R. Beasley-Murray is another example of a commentator who does not see genuine human grief in the tears of Jesus but rather godly anger. He says the groaning in the spirit in verse 33 was caused by "the unbelief of the people of God in the presence of him who is the 'Resurrection and the Life,' arrived among them to call their friend and brother from the grave, that made Jesus angry."[62] Beasley-Murray asserts that the tears in verse 35 are certainly not caused by "grief for Lazarus: his illness and death had been stated to be for the glory of God (v 4), and Jesus was now advancing to his tomb to call him from it, not to weep beside it. It is possible that the tears were motivated by the unbelief that caused him anger." However, he thinks it is "more likely that they were brought about by the sight of the havoc wrought among people through sin

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[60]Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray, R.W.N. Hoare and J.K. Riches (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1971), 406.

[61]Ibid., 407.

[62]George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 36 (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1987), 193.

and death in this world. It would be harmonious with what we know of Jesus in this Gospel if anger by reason of unbelief was balanced by grief over the tragedy of the human situation, from which not even the people of God can extricate themselves."[63]

Leon Morris observes that many feel that the word "groaned" must be taken to mean anger, and if so it is probably anger against death that is meant. He thinks that the word may not be so specific because it is difficult to read anger into either of the other passages where it is used of Jesus (Mk. 1:43; Mt. 9:30). Both times it is used of His attitude to men He cured. He thinks John probably means no more than that Jesus was profoundly moved which is also the meaning of "was troubled." Morris thinks that "Jesus was about to raise Lazarus and we cannot interpret His perturbation as an act of mourning for the deceased. It must refer to His deep concern and indignation at the attitude of the mourners."[64]

2. The interpretation of Rudolf Schnackenburg brings another element to the reading of anger in the description of Jesus' behaviour in verses 33-38. He thinks John's use of his sources explains the meaning of the tears and makes the section difficult to understand. Schnackenburg asserts that for these verses a "psychologising explanation is inappropriate, here as throughout the gospel, but equally a dogmatic Christological discussion of the divinity and humanity of Jesus (the latter supposedly appearing here in his 'weeping') would be misleading. The evangelist's picture is best understood as the result of his use of the source narrative, which he has developed with commentary and

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[63]Ibid., 193-194.

[64]Morris, 557.

original remarks."[65] He thinks the story is from a σημεῖα-source and seems in general to be closely modeled on the synoptic story of Jarius,[66] with the exception that in this case the situation is heightened by the fact that the dead man is already in the tomb.[67]

Schnackenburg argues that in verse 33 the "word ἐμβριμᾶσθαι (basically to sniff or snort with anger) indicates an outburst of anger, and any attempt to reinterpret it in terms of an internal emotional upset caused by grief, pain or sympathy is illegitimate. In the account in the tradition the verb may even have expressed an angry rebuke to the mourners (cf. Mk 1:43; 14:5; Mt 9:30). The evangelist has interpreted it as an inward anger on the part of Jesus (τῷ πνεύματι, cf. V. 38 ἐν ἑαυτῷ) and further glossed it with his preferred term ταράσσειν (cf. 12:27; 13:21; 14:1,27). Jesus' 'spirit' (13:21) or 'soul' (12:27) is moved, agitated."[68]

Schnackenburg asks, "what is the reason for this angry inward emotion? Does the evangelist think he is angered by the lack of faith of the wailers, or is his indignation directed at the power of death, which reveals Satan, the destroyer of life? The first is much more likely since (1) it is suggested in the second passage (v. 38) after the critical

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[65]Schnackenburg, 334-335.

[66]See Mt. 9:18-26; Mk. 5:22-43; Lk. 8:40-56.

[67]Schnackenburg, 335. He thinks that in the source, the lament for the dead person (θρῆνος), which was sung in the house of death and on the way to the tomb, and belonged to the burial ritual, with wailing women and flute-players (cf. Mt 9:23) and shouts of grief from the men in the procession, must have been already over. But Jesus found large numbers of people weeping and wailing, and this aroused his anger in the same way as the lament at the deathbed of Jairus' daughter (Mk 5:38-39). (pp.10-11)

[68]Ibid., 335.

and basically incredulous question of the Jews (v. 37), (2) it makes sense as a Johannine development of a traditional motif (anger at the mourners), (3) there is no reference to Satan in this context (he is regarded as responsible only for Jesus' death, 13:27,30; 14:30), and (4) death is not normally regarded by John (as opposed to Paul) as a personified force."[69]

Schnackenburg points out that the reference to Jesus' weeping in verse 35, "which is indeed surprising after v. 33, has irritated ancient and modern interpreters. The weeping here has no connection with the surge of anger, but is also unlikely that it is meant to stress Jesus' humanity, his emotional warmth, which would not have excluded silent grief. This can be seen from the fact that, for the evangelist, the interpretation of the Jews who infer from the tears that Jesus loved Lazarus deeply (v. 36) also misses the point; it does not go beyond the surface."[70]

He thinks that the weeping of Jesus does serve an important purpose in the story: "On the sad journey to the tomb Jesus too is moved by the darkness of the inevitability of death. The evangelist does not gloss over the horror of death, but believes that it is conquered in faith (cf. v. 25c,39). The scale of Jesus' act can only be recognised if the bitterness of physical death is not minimised. The short remark that Jesus began to weep is the dark precursor of his confident prayer to the Father (v. 41). . . . It is in this sense that the Johannine Jesus is one with men and not impervious to their distress."[71]

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[69]Ibid., 336.

[70]Ibid.

[71]Ibid., 337.

Schnackenburg thinks that Jesus' renewed anger in verse 38 is clearly (οὖν) connected with the questioning of his ability in verse 37 which provokes his displeasure, just like the weeping and wailing of the mourners (v. 33).[72]

In this view, John has used the weeping in his sources to express the reality of death. In these two interpretations, the primary purpose of the tears of Jesus is to express His righteous anger at the unbelief of the people and the destructive power of Satan.

3. A third way to understand the meaning of the description of the response of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus is to see the tears of Jesus to be real, but necessarily only as part of his human nature, not the divine nature. The weeping is part of his humanity while his divinity is unaffected. In this view the tears of Jesus are for the benefit of the witnesses and readers of John's Gospel, to demonstrate that Jesus is indeed a human being. In a similar way, Jesus says that his prayer to the Father is for the benefit of the people (Jn. 11:42). The weeping does not require an emotional or psychological explanation.[73] This interpretation was popular in the first centuries of the Christian church and was used by orthodox writers to deny the claims of various heretical groups that thought that Jesus only appeared to be human (docetism) or that Jesus body was only created to house God's spirit but not a real human body.

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[72]Ibid.

[73]In this view the tears of Jesus could be understood as an example of the popular term "crocodile tears." Tom Lutz explains the meaning of the term: "When crocodiles fully extend their jaws to swallow a victim, the crocodile's lacrimal ducts are squeezed, and excess lubricating tears are produced. Real crocodile's tears are in fact meaningless in emotional terms." Lutz, 57.

A good example of this understanding of the weeping of Jesus is found in the fourth century "Homilies on the Gospel of John" by St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople. He used the tears of Jesus in his argument with heretical sects like the Anomeoans who held that the Son was not even of like substance with the Father. Chrysostom wanted to resist any notion of an inferior divinity or an unreal humanity in Jesus.

Chrysostom observes that when Mary says to Jesus that if he had been there, Lazarus would not have died (11:32), Jesus does not speak with her nor say what he had said to Martha (11:23-27) because others had come with her, and this was not the right time for such words. Instead, "He only acteth measurably and condescendeth; and to prove His human nature, weepeth in silence, and deferreth the miracle for the present. For since that miracle was a great one, and such as He seldom wrought, and since many were to believe by means of it, lest to work it without their presence should prove a stumbling-block to the multitude, and so they should gain nothing by its greatness, in order that He might not lose the quarry, He draweth to Him many witnesses by His condescension, and showeth proof of His human nature. He weepeth, and is troubled; for grief is wont to stir up the feelings. Then rebuking those feelings, (for He 'groaned in spirit' meaneth, 'restrained His trouble,') He asked, "Where have ye laid him?"

Of verses 34 and 35, Chrysostom says: "Seest thou that He had not as yet shown any sign of the raising, and goeth not as if to raise Lazarus, but as if to weep? For the Jews show that He seemed to them to be going to bewail, not to raise him. . . . He cometh then to the tomb; and again rebuketh His feelings. Why doth the Evangelist

carefully in several places mention that 'He wept,' and that, 'He groaned'? That thou mayest learn that He had of a truth put on our nature."

Chrysostom observes that Jesus makes no response to the question of his ability in verse 37 and is again troubled in verse 38. He concludes: "For had He not been of our nature, He would not once and again have been mastered by grief. What did Jesus? He made no defense with regard to their charges; for why should He silence by words those who were soon to be silenced by deeds? a means less annoying, and more adapted to shame them."[74]

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[74]Chrysostom, 'Homilies on St. John,' in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 14, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1999), 232-233. Another example is the Latin theologian Hilary of Poitiers (ca. 315-67) who wrote: "No less real were the tears He shed for Lazarus. The first question here is, What was there to weep for in the case of Lazarus? Not his death, for that was not unto death, but for the glory of God: for the Lord says, *That sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be honoured through him.* The death which was the cause of God's being glorified could not bring sorrow and tears. Nor was there any occasion for tears in His absence from Lazarus at the time of his death. He says plainly, *Lazarus is dead, and I rejoice for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe.* His absence then, which aided the Apostles' belief, was not the cause of His sorrow: for with the knowledge of Divine omniscience, He declared the death of the sick man from afar. We can find, then, no necessity for tears, yet He wept. And again I ask, To whom must we ascribe the weeping? To God, or the soul, or the body? The body, of itself, has no tears except those it sheds at the command of the sorrowing soul. Far less can God have wept, for He was to be glorified in Lazarus. Nor is it reason to say His soul recalled Lazarus from the tomb: can a soul linked to a body, by the power of its command, call another soul back to the dead body from which it has departed? Can He grieve Who is about to be glorified? Can He weep Who is about to restore the dead to life? Tears are not for Him Who is about to give life, or grief for Him Who is about to receive glory. Yet He Who wept and grieved was also the Giver of life." "De Trinitate" in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* II, vol. 9, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), X, 56.

Hilary says "Stand aside then, all godless unbelievers, for whom the divine mystery is too great, who do not know that Christ wept not for Himself but for us, to prove the reality of His assumed manhood by yielding to the emotion common to humanity." "De Trinitate" X, 63

In this view, the primary purpose of the tears of Jesus is to prove his human nature. It is not necessary to attach grief or mourning or any psychological or emotional significance to them. The fact that he wept, as all people do, proved his humanity. In this interpretation there is also no need to see any connection of the weeping of Jesus to the divine part of Christ which was about to raise Lazarus from the dead.

4. A fourth option for understanding verses 33, 35 and 38 does not deny the insights of the others — the weeping of Jesus may indeed be partly because of anger at sin and death and his tears do show that Jesus had a human nature — but adds the idea that the weeping of Jesus is a reflection of genuine grief at the loss of a dear friend. In this view Jesus experiences the same emotions as all other people at the loss of a loved one. Jesus weeps in sympathy with the other mourners as he too experiences the pain of separation. If Jesus is God in the flesh and one with the Father, than this view can even understand God to be experiencing grief in Christ. The tears of Jesus reveal God's empathic love for the bereaved as he shares in their sufferings.

F.F. Bruce provides an eloquent description of the problem. He observes that:

> Some commentators have found it difficult to suppose that he who is presented in this Gospel as the incarnate Word, knowing what he was going to do, should be genuinely moved by sorrow and sympathy (as others might at the graveside), and have put his tears down to some other cause — anger and frustration, perhaps, at the blindness and lack of faith which he saw in those who were around at the time. But the friends and neighbours who were there had no doubt about the cause of his tears: he was weeping for a dearly loved friend. 'Look, how he loved him!' they said. Some indeed thought, and not unnaturally, that such a healer as he had already shown himself to be might have done

> something to prevent his friend from dying. In truth, the reader may feel some surprise that Jesus, who was so completely in command of the situation, and knew that the glory of God as about to be manifested in a signal manner, should nevertheless shed tears of grief for a departed friend and his mourning relatives as any one else might do. But in him the eternal Word became truly *incarnate* and shared the common lot of mankind: our Evangelist would have agreed completely with the writer to the Hebrews that Jesus is well able to sympathize with his people's weaknesses, having been tested himself in the school of suffering. It was in sympathy with those who wept that he also wept. Here he is no automaton, but a real human being.[75]

Alfred Edersheim says that the expression, 'groaned in spirit,' (v. 33) "cannot mean that Christ 'was moved with indignation in the spirit,' since this could not have been the consequence of witnessing the tears and what, we feel sure, was the genuine emotion of the Jews. Of the various interpretations, that commends itself most to us, which would render the expression: 'He vehemently moved His Spirit and troubled Himself.'" Edersheim thinks that the miracles of the Lord were not brought about by the simple word of power, but that in a mysterious way the element of sympathy entered into them. Jesus took away the sufferings and diseases of men in some sense by taking them upon Himself.

Edersheim concludes that it follows that: "If, with this most just view of His Condescension to, and union with, humanity as its Healer, by taking upon Himself its diseases, we combine the statement formerly made about the Resurrection, as not a gift or boon but the outcome of Himself — we may, in some way, not understand, but be able to gaze into, the unfathomed depth of that Theanthropic fellow-suffering which was both vicarious and redemptive, and which, before He became the Resurrection to Lazarus,

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[75]Bruce, 246-247.

shook His whole inner Being, when, in the words of St. John, 'He vehemently moved His Spirit and troubled Himself.'"[76]

B.B. Warfield combines the ideas of anger, conquest of death, and sympathy in his reading of the verses 33 to 38. He says that the tears "which wet his cheeks when, looking upon the uncontrolled grief of Mary and her companions, [when] he advanced, with heart swelling with indignation at the outrage of death, to the conquest of the destroyer (Jon. xi. 35), were distinctly tears of sympathy. The sight of suffering drew tears from his eyes; obstinate unbelief convulsed him with uncontrollable grief."[77] Warfield thinks unbelief caused profound pain "to our Lord's sympathetic heart, by those whose persistent rejection of him required at his hands his sternest reprobation."[78] It hurt Jesus because Jesus' prime characteristic was love, and love is the foundation of compassion.[79]

Warfield says: "What John tells us, in point of fact, is that Jesus approached the grave of Lazarus, in a state, not of uncontrollable grief, but of irrepressible anger. He did respond to the spectacle of human sorrow abandoning itself to its unrestrained expression, with quiet, sympathetic tears: 'Jesus wept' (verse 36 [sic]). But the emotion which tore his breast and clamored for utterance was just rage."[80] Warfield thinks the

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[76]Edersheim, 323-324.

[77]Warfield, 100.

[78]Ibid., 101.

[79]Ibid.

[80]Ibid., 115.

"raising of Lazarus thus becomes, not an isolated marvel, but — as indeed it is presented throughout the whole narrative (compare especially, verses 24-26) — a decisive instance and open symbol of Jesus' conquest of death and hell."[81] Warfield concludes that in "his sorrows he was bearing our sorrows, and having passed through a human life like ours, he remains forever able to be touched with a feeling of our infirmities."[82]

This fourth view is the best reading of the text. Not only can it include the insights of the first three views — John may have used his sources to show that the tears of Jesus can be seen to communicate anger and to prove his human nature — but it can also understand the tears as the result of genuine grief and sympathy with the mourners. This view is more consistent with the emotional attachment of Jesus to Lazarus in the story and with weeping and mourning in the Bible and in contemporary psychology.

In summary, the weeping of Jesus at the death of his friend Lazarus is a part of the range of normal, human emotions that the Gospels attribute to Jesus. In John's Gospel, Jesus is depicted as a real man with a human psychology but he is also the Word made flesh so that to see him is to see the Father. The life of Jesus reveals the Father. The story of the weeping of Jesus and the raising of Lazarus is an important part of the gospel of John. It is the climax of the seven miracles or signs that demonstrated that in Jesus, light and life had come into the world. The Lazarus story stresses the love of Jesus for his friend and his family and the language that he was "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (v. 33, 38) indicates the depth of the internal impact of the emotions that were

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[81]Ibid., 117.

[82]Ibid., 144.

outwardly expressed when he "burst into tears" (v. 35) and publicly, quietly wept while the others loudly bewailed the untimely death.

In attributing the tears of Jesus to righteous indignation at unbelief, death itself, or the power of Satan commentators have failed to notice the emotional significance of the tears as does the understanding that the weeping of Jesus stresses the reality of death or proves his human nature. Those who also see sympathy in the tears have a deeper understanding of the human psychology revealed in the grief of Jesus but none of these views has adequately appreciated the implications of what it means for God in the flesh to weep and mourn in light of the Jewish understanding of the character of God in the Old Testament.

CHAPTER TWO

THE WEEPING OF JESUS AND THE HUMAN NATURE OF CHRIST

From the description of Jesus' reaction at the grave of his beloved friend, his tears clearly reveal a normal, genuine human reaction to death of a loved one which is entirely consistent with the biblical descriptions of mourning and grief and with the reactions to death in ancient Greek literature, as well as with contemporary insights into the psychology of grieving. It would be surprising to see that commentators have not appreciated the grief of Jesus if it were not for the reality that since the time of Plato, western culture has tended to downplay weeping as an appropriate masculine response to grief. John W. Miller, in his psychological study of Jesus, observes that on the part of Christians there is a "widespread and largely unconscious resistance to a full recognition of Jesus' humanity and the more obvious emotional factors at work within it."[1] In John's Gospel, the genuine grief communicated in the weeping of the human Jesus is a challenge to these ideas.

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[1]John W. Miller, *Jesus at Thirty: A Psychological and Historical Portrait* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 14.

Weeping and Mourning: Old Testament Precedents

There is a time for everything. . .
a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance
Ecclesiastes 3:1-4

There are several examples in the Old Testament of people mourning, grieving, and weeping at the death of loved ones. Men and women grieve and mourn openly and publicly with tears and other outward expressions of their inner pain. There are also many instances where God himself is said to grieve, mourn, and weep in the same way his creatures do.

Genesis records a particularly moving instance of mourning and weeping when Sarah, the wife of Abraham, the founder of the Hebrew nation, died at the age of 127. "She died at Kiriath Arba (that is Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over her." (Gen. 23:2)

Another vivid depiction of grief is the response of Jacob when he thinks his beloved son Joseph has been devoured by a wild animal (he was actually sold into slavery in Egypt). His reaction is deeply felt: "Then Jacob tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and mourned for his son many days. All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. 'No,' he said, 'in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son.' So his father wept for him." (Gen. 37:34-35)

Just as moving is the response of Joseph when his father Jacob dies. "Joseph threw himself upon his father and wept over him and kissed him . . . . And the Egyptians

mourned for him seventy days." (Gen. 50:1-4) The Egyptians embalmed Jacob's body and Joseph and Egyptian dignitaries took it from Egypt to be buried in Canaan with Abraham and Sarah. "When they reached the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they lamented loudly and bitterly; and there Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father. When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, 'The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning.'" (Gen. 50:10-11)

Aaron, the brother of Moses and high priest of the Tabernacle, died and was buried on Mount Hor. "Then Moses and Eleazar came down from the mountain, and when the whole community learned that Aaron had died, the entire house of Israel mourned for him thirty days." (Num. 20:28-29) When Moses, the hero whom God called to deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt and to reveal the law, died in Moab at the age of 120, God buried him at an unknown location and the entire nation mourned: "The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over." (Deut. 34:8)

The book of 1 Samuel records that when David and his men came to Ziklag, they discovered that the Amalekites had raided and burned Negev and Ziklag and had taken captive the women, including David's wives Ahinoam and Abigail. Their reaction was deeply felt: "So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep." (1 Sam. 30:4)

An Amalekite tells David the news that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead. "Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They

mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword." (2 Sam. 1:11-12) Then David took up a lament for Saul and Jonathan and ordered that the men of Judah be taught it (1:17-18). The lament calls "O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul" and David himself laments "I grieve for you Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me." (2 Sam.1:24,26)[2]

Abner was the commander of Saul's army and in self defense he killed Asahel, the brother of Joab, King David's captain of the host. To avenge the blood of his brother, Joab killed Abner without David's knowledge. When David found out, he said to Joab and the people: "'Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and walk in mourning in front of Abner.' King David himself walked behind the bier. They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king wept aloud at Abner's tomb. All the people wept also." (2 Sam. 3:31-32) David sang a lament for Abner and all the people wept over him again (v. 34).

Women also mourned and grieved in the Old Testament. King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, a soldier in David's army. David sent her husband to the front line where he was killed. "When Uriah's wife heard that her

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[2]There is another interesting but unusual example of weeping and mourning in 2 Samuel 12:15-23. The child borne to David by Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, became ill, and David fasted and wept. When the child dies, the servants are amazed that he eats and acts normally. Here David behaved before the death as a normal man would after the death of his son. It seems as if David was trying to impress the Lord so that He might let the child live but after he had died, David saw no point in continuing. See Flemming Friis Hvidberg, *Weeping and Laughter in the Old Testament: A Study of Cannanite-Israelite Religion* (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 1962), 138-146 for a discussion of the use of weeping to impress Yahweh for help with crops and fertility and to change his mind.

husband was dead, she mourned for him." (2 Sam. 11:26)

David mourned for his son Absalom who fled after killing Amnon (who had ravished Absalom's sister Tamar). Although he was not dead, David grieved: "But King David mourned for his son every day." (2 Sam. 13:37) Later, when Absalom died at the hand of Joab, David's grief intensified: "The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: 'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you — O Absalom, my son, my son!'" (2 Sam. 18:33) When the army heard that the king was weeping and mourning for Absalom they too were moved: "And for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning, because on that day the troops heard it said, 'The king is grieving for his son.'" (2 Sam. 19:2)[3]

King Josiah, the religious reformer who restored the temple in Jerusalem and recovered the law, was shot by archers in battle at Megiddo because he disobeyed the word of God. The chronicler records: "He was buried in the tombs of his fathers, and all Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him. Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and women singers commemorate Josiah in the laments. These became a tradition in Israel and are written in the Laments." (2 Chron. 35:24-26)

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[3]First Kings records the story of the man of God from Judah who disobeyed the word of the Lord and ate and drank with the old prophet — the man of God died because of his disobedience. The old prophet picked up the body, "Then he laid the body in his own tomb, and they mourned over him and said, 'Oh, my brother!'" (1 Kings 13:30) Because of the king's failures, the prophet Ahijah tells King Jeroboam's wife that their son Abijah will die and "All Israel will mourn for him and bury him." (1 Kings 14:13) The son died and just as the prophet had said, "They buried him, and all Israel mourned for him (v.18).

These examples of mourning, grief, and weeping from the Old Testament show that the great figures of Israel's history from patriarchs to prophets to kings — including Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and David — grieved, mourned, and wept when loved ones died. The people mourned and wept when Aaron, Moses and Josiah died. Both men, including soldiers, and women mourned and wept sometimes for long periods accompanied by acts such as the tearing of clothes and fasting. It should be no surprise that Jesus should mourn and weep at the death of Lazarus when his ancestors mourned and wept and grieved. The genealogy in Matthew chapter 1 links Jesus to many of these Israelite mourners by name (1:2-16).

Weeping and Mourning in the New Testament

> Blessed are those who mourn,
> for they will be comforted.
>
> Matthew 5:4

In Acts there is a story with parallels to the Lazarus miracle. Peter was near Joppa when he was asked to come because Tabitha (or Dorcas), a disciple who was always doing good and helping the poor, had died. When he arrived, he found all the widows crying and mourning the loss of their dear friend. In words similar to those of Jesus at the raising of Lazarus (Jn. 11:43) Peter said "Tabitha, get up" (Acts 9:40) and she opened her eyes. Peter did not weep with the widows and there is no evidence that he was emotionally affected by her death but the story does illustrate the shared grief of

loved ones who had gathered to support each other. The women display intuitive grief while Peter, in contrast to Jesus at the death of Lazarus, does not express any emotions.

Another example of weeping and mourning is the story of the death and raising of the daughter of Jarius, a synagogue ruler (Mt. 9:18-26; Mk. 5:22-43; Lk. 8:40-56). Matthew says that when Jesus entered the ruler's house he found flute players, hired to play in mourning ceremonies, and a noisy crowd who had come to mourn with wails and laments. Luke 8:40-56 says that when Jesus arrived, "all the people were weeping and mourning for her. 'Do not weep,' Jesus said. 'She is not dead but asleep.'"

A story with some similarities to the Lazarus story is the raising of the widow's son in Luke 7:11-16. Like Mary and Martha who lost the support of their brother, she was deprived of the support of her only son. Luke says when the body of the widow's son was being carried out, "a large crowd from the town was with her" (v. 12), no doubt to mourn with her. The attendance of the crowd at the funeral is in keeping with Jewish custom and the mourning was even greater for an only child.[4] The miracle is another example of the compassion of Jesus in caring for those in distress. Luke says: "When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, 'Do not weep.'" (v. 13) Like his words to Lazarus, Jesus instructed the young man to get up and he was raised.[5] In this example, Jesus is emotionally affected by the mother's grief.

Jesus expected his disciples to weep and mourn for him at his death because they

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[4]I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 285.

[5]See Edersheim, Vol. 1, 554-556.

did not understand what he meant when he said, "'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me[.]' I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. . . . Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy." (Jn. 16:19-22)

Many did grieve and weep at the death of Jesus. In Mark's gospel, when Jesus rose from the grave he appeared to Mary Magdalene and she "went and told those who had been with him and who were mourning and weeping." (Mk. 16:10) John also says that after the death of Jesus, "Mary stood outside the tomb crying." (Jn. 20:11)

The only other example of the weeping of Jesus in the gospels is Luke 19:41: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it." Here, the sorrow of Jesus over the impending fate of Jerusalem (cf. 23:28f) is matched by that of Jeremiah (Jer. 8:18ff.; 15:5; cf. 2 Ki. 8:11f). The word used here is κλαίω, the same word used to describe the weeping of Mary, Martha and the Judeans at the death of Lazarus.

The book of Hebrews says "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears. . . ." (5:7) The word used here for tears, δάκρυον, is the nominal form of the verb δακρύω in John 11:35. However, this seems to be a reference to Gethsemane and not the weeping of Jesus over Jerusalem or at the tomb of Lazarus. It is interesting to note that the author does link the cries and tears of Jesus with his suffering which would suggest that the tears over Lazarus were more than anger or mere show, but included the suffering of genuine grief.

These examples of mourning from the New Testament show that at the time of

Jesus' life and ministry, public expressions of grief and mourning were common when loved ones died. The reactions of the people are similar to the reaction of Jesus when his friend Lazarus died — public weeping shared with others.[6]

Weeping and Genuine Grief

Contemporary insight into grief from psychology and thanatology can help in understanding the descriptions of the behaviour of Jesus in verses 33-38 and support the interpretations of Bruce, Edersheim, and Warfield that the tears of Jesus do express genuine emotion. Terry Martin and Kenneth Doka provide some helpful information about the nature of grief which supports the idea that the weeping of Jesus can legitimately be understood as genuine, normal human grief. They suggest that grief or grieving arises as a reaction to loss. Specifically, "grief can be defined as the psychic energy that results from tension created by an individual's strong desire to (a) maintain his or her assumptive world as it was before the loss, (b) accommodate themselves to a newly emerging reality resulting from his or her loss, (c) incorporate this new reality into an emerging assumptive world."[7] This definition is consistent with the idea that Jesus

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[6]There is an interesting story in the apocryphal book *The Infancy of the Saviour* where the infant Jesus and Lady Mary encounter three women who are weeping and lamenting the loss of their brother, who had been turned into a mule. Before the power of Jesus restores the man, Mary weeps with the sisters. This may indicate that it is more fitting for a woman to weep rather than Jesus. See "The Arabic Gospel of the Infancy of the Saviour," 20-21.

[7]Terry L. Martin and Kenneth J. Doka, *Men Don't Cry. . . Women Do: Transcending Gender Stereotypes of Grief* (Philadelphia: Brunner/Mazel, 2000), 14-15.

was also weeping because of death itself and the changes it brought to the world as well as the loss of a dear friend.

Martin and Doka argue that grief can be perceived as an emotion, an attempt to make internal and external adjustments to the undesired change in one's world brought upon by the loss. Grief triggers changes in various adaptational systems that constitute the individual's response tendency. The affective or emotional changes might include sadness and anger, physical changes might include nausea, pains, and tenseness. The spiritual response might include searching for meaning in loss, and cognitive response can include disorientation and confusion.[8] The different reactions that persons experience in each of these four response tendencies may be outwardly expressed as behaviours. Among observable behaviours of grief are crying, observable illness-related symptoms, and outward expression of emotion such as anger or euphoria.[9]

Martin and Doka identify two distinct major patterns of grief which occur along a continuum. At one end is intuitive grief and at the other is instrumental grief. There can also be a blended pattern which combines elements of both. The intuitive griever converts more of his or her energy into the affective [emotional] domain and invests less into the cognitive. For the intuitive griever grief consists primarily of profoundly painful feelings. These grievers tend to spontaneously express their painful feelings through crying and want to share their inner experiences with others.

The instrumental griever, on the other hand, converts most of the instinctual

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[8]Ibid., 16-18.

[9]Ibid., 19.

energy generated by bereavement into the cognitive domain rather than the affective. Painful feelings are tempered; for the instrumental griever, grief is more of an intellectual experience.[10] There is a desire to master feelings along with a general reluctance to talk about feelings.[11] Instrumental grievers may demonstrate feelings but they do not show the depth and intensity of feelings that intuitive grievers do.[12] If we apply this grief continuum to Jesus and his response to the death of Lazarus, his behaviour seems to clearly fit the pattern of an intuitive griever.

Intuitive grievers, like Jesus, experience their losses deeply. For these people, feelings are varied and intense, ranging from shock and disbelief to overwhelming sorrow and a sense of loss of self-control. The intuitive griever may experience grief as a series or waves of acutely painful feelings. Intuitive grievers often find themselves without energy and motivation. Their expressions of grief truly mirror their inner experiences. Anguish and tears are almost constant companions. The pain of loss is often expressed through tears, and ranges from quiet weeping to sobbing to wailing.[13] Intuitive grievers gain strength and solace from openly sharing their inner experiences with others — especially other grievers because for intuitive grievers, a grief expressed is a grief experienced (or a burden shared is half a burden). Because openly expressing and sharing feelings is traditionally identified as a female trait, intuitive grieving is usually

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[10]Ibid., 31.

[11]Ibid., 40.

[12]Ibid., 48.

[13]Ibid., 37.

associated with women. They point out that this is not always the case because male intuitive grievers grieve in ways similar to female intuitive grievers.[14] Jesus is a clear example of a male intuitive griever. He does not seek a private place to grieve but weeps openly with Mary and Martha and the Judean women, and shares his grief with them.

The weeping of Jesus can be seen as an expression of his inner experience of genuine grief as the words "deeply moved in spirit and troubled" (Jn. 11:33) reveal. Clearly, Jesus was not an instrumental griever. Martin and Doka say that grief "is emotion, an instinctual attempt to make internal and external adjustments to an unwanted change in one's world — the death of someone significant to the griever. Grief involves both inner experience and outward expression."[15] Jesus has both — inner experience, "deeply moved in spirit" (v. 33) and outward expression "Jesus wept" (v. 35). Jesus experienced genuine grief and his tears expressed sympathy with those who mourned.

Grief and the Male Gender Role

Martin and Doka have provided insights into grieving that can help to see Jesus' behaviour as genuine grief, what they call intuitive grief. They also can help to understand why it has been difficult for some to think of Jesus grieving in this way. They point out that in western culture, "Managing one's expression of feelings and projecting

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[14]Ibid., 35.

[15]Ibid., 74.

a sense of control remain consistent with the male role."[16] They observe that men and women, "because of their socialization into sex roles, are likely to exhibit different grieving patterns. Men are more likely to be found on the instrumental end of the continuum, while women are more likely to exhibit an intuitive style. Yet gender role socialization is but *one* factor that influences a pattern of grief. This leads to a critical affirmation that *while patterns of grieving are certainly influenced by gender, they are not determined by gender.*"[17] Tom Lutz agrees when he points out that the idea of tearlessness was the height of male stoicism and virtue, which we all recognize as part, albeit a 'traditional' or old-fashioned aspect, of our emotional culture. It has a long history but "tearlessness has not been the standard of manliness through most of history."[18]

Martin and Doka suggest that "women may be more invested in family roles. Thus, when a loss occurs it has multiple impact. A woman may lose a more central role, more critical to her identity than that of a man."[19] This insight may be relevant to the Lazarus story as Lazarus may have been the provider for his sisters and may have been the leader of the family. There may be reluctance in some commentators to see the intuitive kind of grief in Jesus because of cultural assumptions and ideals that associate

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[16]Ibid., 64.

[17]Ibid., 99-100.

[18]Lutz, 64. For a survey of the changing cultural attitudes towards male tears see Lutz, 31-66.

[19]Martin and Doka, 108-109.

appropriate male response to grief with the instrumental pattern. Righteous indignation or anger is more easily associated with the male role.[20] There is however no reason from the Lazarus story to deny that Jesus was grieving in the intuitive way. In fact, this genuine emotional response is consistent with other patterns of grief in the scriptures.

Weeping and Mourning in Greek Culture

Homer

Similar to the patterns of grief and mourning in the Bible, there are several examples of men weeping and mourning in Homer and the foundational stories of Greek culture.[21] Hans Van Wees says that in Homer, "the most powerful expressions of male

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[20]Tom Lutz describes a famous experiment by John and Sandra Condry in which two groups (each 50 percent male and 50 percent female) were shown the same video of an infant bursting into tears at the sudden pop of a jack-in-the-box. One group was told the baby in the video was a girl, the other that it was a boy. The vast majority of respondents (of both sexes) assumed the 'girl' baby was crying out of fear and that the 'boy' baby was crying out of anger. (pp.151-152)

[21]There are several examples of men crying in Homer. The warrior Diomedes sheds tears when he realizes he will lose a chariot race (Homer *Iliad* 23.385-7). Military leaders shed tears when the going gets tough in battle and even at assembly. Homer says: "So they sat sorrowful in assembly, and Agamemnon stood up weeping like unto a fountain of dark water that from a bettling cliff poureth down its black stream; even so with deep groaning he spake. . . . " (Hom. *Il.* 9.14-15) When some young warriors saw the Trojans advancing, "they looked on them, and shed tears beneath their brows, thinking that never would they escape destruction." (Hom. *Il.* 13.88-89)

emotion are found in spontaneous reactions to personal loss."[22] When he hears the word of the death of his friend Patroklos, Antilochos "had horror of the word he heard. And long time speechlessness possessed him and his eyes were filled with tears, and his full voice choked."[23] When Achilles hears the news, "a black cloud of grief enwrapped Achilles, and with both hands he took dark dust and poured it over his head. . . . [A]nd with his own hands tore and marred his hair."[24] He was so distraught that he appeared to be suicidal: Antilochos "wailed and shed tears, holding Achilles' hands while he groaned in his noble heart, for he feared lest he should cleave his throat with the sword."[25]

Priam, a king of Troy, openly mourns the death of his son Hector, a Trojan warrior. At the house of Priam, Iris, the messenger of the gods, found "therein crying and moan [*sic*]. His children sitting around their father within the court were bedewing their raiment with their tears, and the old man in their midst was closed wrapped all over in his cloak; and on his head and neck was much mire that he had gathered in his hands as he grovelled upon the earth."[26]

Van Wees says that "physical expressions of grief in Homer range from slapping one's thighs, through shedding tears, to tearing out one's hair and writhing on the

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[22]Hans van Wees, "A brief history of tears: gender differentiation in archaic Greece" in Lin Foxhall and John Salmon, eds., *When Men Were Men: Masculinity, Power and Identity in Classical Antiquity*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 13.

[23]Hom. *Il.* 19.600-605.

[24]Hom. *Il.* 18.17-35.

[25]Hom. *Il.* 18.

[26]Hom. *Il.* 24.163-165.

ground."[27] In Homer, we see men and women, warriors and military leaders, and kings weep and mourn and openly express their grief at the loss of loved ones. In expressions of grief, Homer is similar to and in harmony with the biblical examples of weeping and mourning.

Eventually a profound change took place in Greek culture from the expressions of grief in Homer. H. van Wees observes that a "comparison between the extrovert grieving by men as well as women in Homer and the much more restrained expression of sorrow by men in classical Athens reveals a significant change in the ideology of masculinity."[28] He says it is a fact that "all Homer's heroes display sadness and despair far more extrovertly and frequently than classical and modern audiences have regarded as normal and appropriate for men."[29]

Plato

It is in the thought of Plato that the change in the notion of proper expressions of grief in Greek culture is clearly evident. Hans van Wees says of Plato: "No other classical Greek author is quite so adamant about the importance of keeping a stiff upper lip."[30] Plato seems to be embarrassed by the overt expressions of grief by men in Homer.

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[27]Van Wees, 12.

[28]Ibid., 11.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid., 16.

In his *Republic* he suggests that Homer should be edited to take out "the wailings of renowned men and we'd give them to women — and not to the serious ones, at that — and to all the bad men. Thus the men we say we are rearing for the guardianship of the country won't be able to stand doing things similar to those such people do."[31] If Plato is so concerned that his philosopher kings not express their grief like Homer's men it is not surprising that in the Greek world of the early Christians the weeping of Jesus should be downplayed and explained as righteous anger rather than womanly wailings of grief.

Plato says when we hear Homer "imitating one of the heroes in mourning and making quite an extended speech with lamentation. . . singing and beating his breast, you know that we enjoy it and that we give ourselves over to following the imitation; suffering along with the hero in all seriousness, we praise as a good poet the man who most puts us in this state. . . . When personal sorrow comes to one of us, you are aware . . . we pride ourselves if we are able to keep quiet and bear up, taking this to be the part of a man and what we then praised to be that of a woman."[32] Plato seems to think that men should keep a stiff upper lip and *real* men do not cry. Weeping is for women.[33]

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[31]Plato, *The Republic*, 387 E8-388 A2.

[32]Ibid., 605 C9-E1.

[33]We have seen that Martha's reference to Jesus as "the Teacher" and Jesus' weeping with the women challenge gender roles. Van Wees says the doctrine of natural superiority of men over women was a general principle commonly recognized in Plato's world. He says: "In this light, it is quite obvious why, in classical Greece, men should have been encouraged to maintain their composure at all times, while women were expected to weep at the slightest provocation. . . . [U]ltimately the women's tears, lamentations, and ritual wailing. . . had the effect of reinforcing the men's claims to natural superiority, and justifying their power." (p. 44) In the Greek world it was women who played the leading role in laying out and lamenting the dead, and it was women who

Van Wees argues that by 580 BC, "controlled and rational behaviour had established itself as a vital ingredient of true masculinity. For centuries to come, the Greek version of the idea that 'real men serve others' held that real men would put their superior minds at the disposal of the emotionally unstable and intellectually feeble — and in return ask only to rule over these inferior beings."[34] Similar views are still part of western culture. It would not be wrong to see in the weeping of Jesus, with Mary and Martha, a challenge to these kinds of views of masculinity. Just as the raising of Lazarus transformed death into life so too may the tears of Jesus transform ideas about men and women in the kingdom of God from hierarchy to mutuality.

Socrates

Plato presents the great philosopher Socrates as the ideal man and included in this idealism is his disdain for womanly expressions of emotions and tears. In his defence to his accusers, Socrates is critical of the actions of a man who in a similar situation "begged and supplicated the judges with many tears, bringing forward his own children and many others of his family and friends."[35] Socrates thinks that it would not be noble for him to do so. He says "I have often seen some such men when they are judged, who,

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expressed their grief most extrovertly. (p. 19) Van Wees says that the Greeks, by having only women honour the dead with displays of extreme emotion, bracketed women with barbarians as inferior by nature and born to be ruled by their betters." (p. 45)

[34]Ibid., 45-46.

[35]Plato, *Apology of Socrates*, 34c.

although they are reputed to be something, do amazing deeds. . . . They seem to me to attach shame to the city, so that anyone, even a foreigner, would assume that those Athenians who are distinguished in virtue — the ones whom they pick out from among themselves for their offices and other honors — are not distinguished from women."[36]

After being found guilty and sentenced to death, Socrates must drink the poisonous hemlock. The story in Plato's *Phaedo* is dramatic and revealing:

> Then holding the cup to his lips, quite readily and cheerfully he drank of the poison. And hitherto most of us had been able to control our sorrow; but now when we saw him drinking, and saw that he had finished the draught, we could no longer forbear, and in spite of myself my own tears were flowing fast; so that I covered my face and wept over myself, for certainly I was not weeping over him, but at the thought of my own calamity in having lost such a companion. Nor was I the first, for Crito, when he found himself unable to restrain his tears, had got up and moved away, and I followed; and at that moment, Apollodorus, who had been weeping all the time, broke out in a loud cry which made cowards of us all. Socrates alone retained his calmness: What is this strange outcry? he said. I sent away the women mainly in order that they might not offend in this way, for I have heard that a man should die in peace. Be quiet, then, and have patience.
>
> When we heard that, we were ashamed, and refrained our tears.[37]

This is a profound criticism of male expression of grief and sorrow. The last words of a great philosopher might be expected to be a profound adage or pithy summation of his wisdom. It is striking that the last words of the great teacher Socrates were to tell his disciples to stop offending him by crying like women! The contrast to the weeping of Jesus at the death of his friend Lazarus is obvious and certainly helps to

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[36]*Apology*, 34c.

[37]Plato, *Phaedo*, 112-113.

explain why there might be a tendency to downplay the tears of Jesus as Christianity developed in Greek culture. This ideal is still part of western culture to this day.[38]

In summary, insights into grieving from contemporary psychology can help to understand the description of Jesus' inner emotions and external weeping as communicating genuine grief, which clearly fits the pattern of intuitive grieving. Since this type of grief is often associated with the female response to the loss and separation of death, this helps to explain why it is difficult for some to see genuine grief in the tears of Jesus. Yet, the examples of mourning and weeping in the Bible and ancient Homeric Greek culture are entirely consistent with the weeping of Jesus as a normal, human response to the loss of a loved one. There is, however, a very different example of masculinity and the ideal male response to death in the writings of Plato and the ideal life of Socrates where weeping is seen to be appropriate only for women. This helps to explain why the meaning of the tears of Jesus has rarely been explored, especially why the implications of the weeping of Jesus and his revelation of the character of God have been ignored.

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[38]The ideal of masculine control of emotion is reflected in the British "stiff upper lip" and the admonition to boys to "be a man" when injured and not to "cry like a baby." The international public outpouring of grief at the death of Princess Diana was notable as an exception that proves the rule. See Lutz, 151-192.

CHAPTER THREE

THE WEEPING OF JESUS AND THE DIVINE NATURE OF CHRIST

John's Gospel presents Jesus as a human being and there is no biblical or psychological reason to conclude that his tears at the death of Lazarus are not a genuine, emotional response to the death of a dear friend. Platonic and Western ideals of masculinity have obscured the meaning of his tears. It must be remembered that Jesus is also presented in John's Gospel as God, God in the flesh — to see him is to see the Father. This raises the obvious question — are his genuine human tears of grief also the tears of the Father expressing his genuine grief? Rarely have the tears of the God-man been related to the divine nature of Christ. The interpretations of the tears as the result of anger or to prove his humanity avoid the implications of God in the flesh weeping and mourning at the tomb of Lazarus.

In addition to the very human emotional responses to the death of loved ones and heroes, there are times in the Old Testament when God himself is depicted as mourning and grieving especially in the prophets and particularly in Jeremiah. The prophet and God share the grief and pain of death and reveal the pathos, anger, and sympathy of God. Since Jesus in John's Gospel is often called a prophet, the implications of the prophetic pathos of God must be explored to fully appreciate the character of God communicated in the weeping of Jesus. In so doing, the question of the revelatory capacity of anthropomorphic metaphors about God needs to be examined to see what, if anything, the ideas of God's grief and mourning reveal about God and God in Christ. Since Greek

ideals of masculinity have affected the understanding of the weeping of the human Jesus, the Greek ideals of divinity must be explored to determine how they have influenced the emotions of God.

God Mourns and Grieves in The Old Testament

There are many examples in the Old Testament where God is said to experience grief and to mourn. In Genesis, when the Lord saw how great the wickedness was on the earth, "The Lord was grieved that he had made man on earth, and his heart was filled with pain." (Gen. 6:6ff.) He was so hurt that he decided to wipe human and animal kind from the earth. Fortunately, Noah found favour in the eyes of the Lord.

The Lord tells Samuel that once again God is grieved by a decision he has made. "Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: 'I am grieved that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.'" (1 Sam. 15:11) "Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel." (1 Sam. 15:35; cf. 16:1)

The grief, mourning and suffering of God reach their height of expression in the prophets — the people God calls to speak his word and to reveal himself, including his emotions, to his people. The word of the Lord to the prophet Ezekial says: "For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!" (Ez. 18:32) In Isaiah the Lord weeps and laments over the destruction he has had to bring on

Moab because of her pride and conceit. God says "So I weep, as Jazer weeps, for the vines of Sibmah. I drench you with tears! The shouts of joy over your ripened fruit and over your harvests have been stilled. Joy and gladness are taken away from the orchards; no one sings or shouts in the vineyards; no one treads out wine at the presses for I have put an end to the shouting. My heart laments for Moab like a harp, my inmost being for Kir Hareseth." (Is.16:9-11)

Terence Fretheim observes that in the prophets, a "variety of mourning speech is used, language that is commonly found elsewhere on the lips of human beings."[1] Isaiah 15-16 are filled with the language of mourning for Moab. God says "My heart cries out over Moab." (Is. 15:5) To hear such mourning on the part of God or a non-Israelite people is striking. Most of this language is also used to describe the weeping and wailing of the Moabites, so that the impression created is that of a God whose lamentation is as deep and broad as that of the people themselves.

God is seen lamenting the death of Israel (Amos 5:1-2). Fretheim says God will join the people in taking up a lament over what has happened; God mourns as they do (Amos 5:16-17;8:10). Ezekial uses the divine funerary lament. He says the Lord sent him to the Israelites who had rebelled against him and asked him to speak His words to them. Ezekial says: "Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe." (Ez. 2:9) Ezekial not only portrays God lamenting over the

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[1]Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 132.

"princes of Israel" (Ez. 19:1) but also over foreign nations (27:2; 32:2). Fretheim says "because it is God who asks the prophet to take up the lamentation, this initiative must reflect God's own feeling concerning what has happened. Just as the princes of this world will mourn (26:17-18), so also will God."[2]

It is in Jeremiah, the man the Lord knew before he was born and whom he appointed as a prophet to the nations (Jer. 1:5) that the tears and grief of God are most deeply revealed. There are striking similarities between Jesus and Jeremiah.

Jesus the Prophet

The prologue to John's Gospel identifies Jesus as the Word who is God, through whom all things were created, and who became flesh. The book of Hebrews begins with the identification of Jesus with the prophets of Israel: "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe." (Heb. 1:1-2) God speaks to the world through his Word, his Son. In a similar way, the prophetic books often begin with the assertion that the word of the Lord came to the prophet,[3] but the word of the Lord is more than a message and the

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[2]Ibid., 131.

[3]For example, Jer. 1:2,4. Also, "the word of the Lord came to Ezekial" (Ez. 1:3); "The word of the Lord came to Hosea" (Hos. 1:1); "the Word of the Lord came to Joel" (Joel 1:1). The word of the Lord also came to Jonah (Jonah 1:1), to Micah (Mic. 1:1) and to Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:1) and "the word of the Lord came through the prophet Haggai to Zerubbabel (Hag. 1;1) and to Zechariah (Zech. 1:1). The last book of the Old Testament

prophet is more than a messenger. The word challenged the prophet and impelled him to give it to others.[4] In John's gospel, the Word was God and "the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." (Jn. 1:14) Instead of the Word of the Lord coming to a person, in John's gospel the Word of the Lord became a person who revealed the Word of the Lord not only in words, but also in his life and deeds.

Richard Longenecker points out that for the early Jewish Christians there was an expectation, evidenced in the literature of Judaism, that in the Messianic Age the spirit of prophecy would be restored and prophetic figures would be prominent in the life of the nation.[5] This is evident in the question the priests and Levites ask John the Baptist "Are you the Prophet?" (Jn. 1:21) Moses had said "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers." (Deut. 18:15) Longenecker thinks the Gospels reflect the firmly embedded Jewish expectation of the first centuries B.C. and A.D. that the eschatological prophet and/or coming Messiah would have Mosaic characteristics.[6]

There are several instances in the gospels where Jesus was viewed by the people as a prophet. When Jesus feeds the five thousand, John says: "After the people saw the miraculous sign that Jesus did, they began to say, 'Surely this is the Prophet who is to

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identifies itself as "The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi" (Mal. 1:1).

[4]See Brown, 519-524.

[5]Richard N. Longenecker, *The Christology of Early Jewish Christianity* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1970), 32.

[6]Ibid., 33.

come into the world.'" (Jn. 6:14) Jesus talked with a Samaritan woman at a well and when she found that he somehow knew her marital history, she concluded "I can see that you are a prophet." (Jn. 4:19) Jesus made no protest or qualification to her assertion.

When Jesus asks the disciples who people were saying the Son of Man was, they replied that some said "Jeremiah or one of the prophets." (Mt. 16:13-14; Mk. 8:28; Lk. 9:8; 24:19; Jn. 7:52) Mark records that some people were claiming of Jesus that "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." (Mk. 6:15) Luke reports the reaction of the people when Jesus raised the son of a widow from the dead: "They were all filled with awe and praised God. 'A great prophet has appeared among us,' they said. 'God has come to help his people.'" (Lk. 7:16) This miracle has strong parallels to the raising of Lazarus in John 11 and implies that when Jesus weeps and raises Lazarus he is acting as a prophet who has come to help his people. At his triumphal entry into Jerusalem the crowds declare: "This is Jesus the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee." (Mt. 21:11) The men on the road to Emmaus say "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people." (Lk. 24:19;cf. Lk. 7:39)

Jesus was also viewed by the apostles as a prophet. Peter's sermon in Acts 3 identifies Jesus as the prophet that the prophets had foretold would come (Acts 3:22). Similarly, Stephen's speech to the Sanhedrin in Acts 7 connects Jesus with the prophet that Moses had told the Israelites was to come (cf. Acts 7:37).

There are times in the gospels when Jesus refers to himself as a prophet. Matthew records that when Jesus taught in the synagogue of his hometown the people were amazed at his wisdom and miraculous powers and they took offense at him. "But

Jesus said to them, 'Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor.'" (Mt. 13:57; Mk. 6:4; Lk. 4:24) Luke 13:31-35 is significant because Jesus says "I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day — for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!" because Jesus is expressing a Jeremiah-like sorrow for the fate of Jerusalem.

Clearly Jesus was understood to be a prophet, but what does it mean for him to be a prophet? Jaroslav Pelikan thinks that the "identification of Jesus as prophet was a means both of affirming his continuity with the prophets of Israel and of asserting his superiority to them as *the* prophet whose coming they had predicted and to whose authority they had been prepared to yield."[7]

The usual image of a prophet is one who speaks a message of warning or a description of the future that no ordinary person could know. This would seem to be the expectation of those who blindfolded Jesus and then hit him, asking him to 'Prophesy!' (Mk. 14:65) They seemed to think that if he was a prophet he would know who was hitting him without seeing. However, most of the times in the Gospels, Jesus is declared a prophet when he acts, heals or raises the dead and not when he says something profound or predictive. Thomas Oden says the "prophets of ancient Israel had characteristically fulfilled their office by *teaching, foretelling, healing*, or some combination of these functions. Similarly Jesus went about doing good in all of these forms. . . . In these three ways he followed and transmuted the extraordinary functions of

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[7]Jaroslav Pelikan, *Jesus Through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 16.

the ancient Hebrew prophets."[8]

Jesus fulfilled the prophetic office both directly and indirectly. His prophetic work proceeded by direct embodiment, *immediately* exhibiting God's holy love through interpersonal meeting. He taught the whole counsel of God by embodying it nonverbally. In Jesus the prophetic revealer comes not in speech alone, but in person."[9] This is the message of the prologue of John's Gospel and is profoundly demonstrated in the story of Lazarus — he is the pathos of God. God is revealed in the tears of Jesus.

Jesus and Jeremiah

The weeping of Jesus over Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41) and at the grave of Lazarus (Jn. 11:35) clearly links Jesus to the prophet Jeremiah, the weeping prophet. H. Wheeler Robinson observes that: "Even when considered only from an outer point of view, it is plain that there is no life in the Old Testament which more closely resembles the life of our Lord. . . . Jeremiah and Jesus both wept over Jerusalem."[10] Robinson says that there are between forty and fifty quotations or echoes of the Book of Jeremiah in the New Testament, "but we chiefly remember the fact that some men could find no better

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[8]Oden, 292.

[9]Ibid.

[10]H. Wheeler Robinson, *The Cross in the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1955), 150.

interpretation of Jesus than to see in him Jeremiah come back to his people."[11] The key to understanding the significance of the weeping of Jesus as a communication of the character of God is in understanding the character of God revealed in the prophet Jeremiah.

One of the features of the book of Jeremiah that quickly becomes apparent to the reader is the difficulty in distinguishing when Jeremiah is speaking and when God is speaking. Terence Fretheim observes that the "messenger formula, and other means of determining divine speech, are not always present. Moreover, the prophets' words are often integrated into divine speech, so closely related are the prophet and God; they will need to be interpreted in the light of one another."[12] He goes on to say that "it is often very difficult, if not impossible, to sort out explicit divine speech from prophetic speech; pronominal references do at times seem to be interchanged, particularly in Jeremiah.[13] Robinson agrees that in his dialogue with God, it seems "the prophet is unconscious of the degree to which the words of both speakers in the debate are his own, the degree to which God is speaking man's language, even when His will is asserting itself against that of the prophet."[14] Robinson says that in Jeremiah "we begin to learn that a *life* is the fullest revelation of truth — which is one of the secrets of the Incarnation."[15] This is a

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[11]Ibid., 188.

[12]Fretheim, 107-108.

[13]Ibid., 150.

[14]Robinson, 167.

[15]Ibid., 170.

good description of the portrayal of Jesus in John.

The suffering Servant of Yahweh of Deutero-Isaiah has long been seen by Christians to be a description of Jesus the Christ (Matt. 8:17). Isaiah says "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows [grief], and familiar with suffering. . . . Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows [griefs]." (Isa. 53:3-4) Robinson says the suffering Servant of Yahweh emanates from Jeremiah. The comparison of the Servant to the lamb that is led to the slaughter (Is. 53.7) is verbally borrowed from Jeremiah's self-description (Jer. 11.19): "Through the Servant, and more directly still, Jeremiah became an influence of the great moment in the life of our Lord, whom the New Testament calls by Jeremiah's figure, 'The Lamb of God.' It was Jesus who first united the figure of the Suffering Servant with the traditional figure of the Messiah, and in so doing gave a new content of meaning to the old name. It was Jesus who lifted the sacrificial suffering which Jeremiah experienced in history, and Deutero-Isaiah interpreted in idea, to a new level of meaning and a new purity of expression."[16]

Robinson compares Jesus to Jeremiah when he asserts that for the prophet, "the very contact with the sin of Israel must have been something of a crucifixion. How much deeper the suffering of Jesus in presence of the world's sin! But is not that depth of suffering the earthly realization of the heavenly law, that sin taken up into holiness *must* be transformed into suffering? As God's self-limited circle expands to take in that sin of the world which He cannot ignore, the sin becomes so much suffering for the Holy God

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[16]Ibid., 189.

— in no other way can it enter the circle of His holiness."[17] This is entirely consistent with the idea that the weeping of Jesus includes the communication of his suffering at the results of sin and death.

Robinson says "*within God*, the irrationality of sin is transformed into the mystery of the eternal Cross, the Cross within the very heart of God. To be called into the fellowship of God is to be called into the fellowship of that suffering for sin. As we realize what that meant for Jeremiah, we may be brought to realize something of what it meant to the perfect fellowship of Jesus with His Father — a far deeper suffering and a far higher Atonement. We cannot lift the veil that hides *His* inner life from us; we can but reverently look when His own hand lifts it for a moment in the temptation in the wilderness, in the prayer of Gethsemane, in the cry of the Cross, 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' But the fact that Jeremiah has so opened his heart to us, and has shown us so fully the cost of such spiritual achievement as was his, may teach us something of the mystery of the greater cost of the offering of the Son of God, the temporal realization of the eternal Cross of God Himself."[18] The weeping of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus is part of his suffering that reached its climax in Gethsemane and the cross.

Walter Brueggemann suggests that "in those early claims for Jesus, the early Church derives its understanding of the historical process from prophetic faith, and perhaps precisely from Jeremiah. In both cases, Jeremiah and Jesus, the text invites one

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[17]Ibid., 191.

[18]Ibid., 192.

to reckon with the reality of discontinuity in the historical process out of which God can work a powerful newness, utterly inexplicable."[19] This is a good description of the weeping of Jesus over Lazarus before raising him from the dead.

Jeremiah is often described as the weeping prophet (Jer. 9.1) because he responds to the sins of the people with tears. Brueggemann says that for Jeremiah "tears are a way of solidarity in pain when no other form of solidarity remains."[20] When Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41), Brueggemann thinks that it indicates that Jesus of Nazareth

> understood grief as the ultimate criticism that had to be addressed against Jerusalem. . . . Jesus had understood Jeremiah. Ecclesiastes said only that there is a time to weep and a time to laugh, but Jesus had seen that only those who mourn will be comforted (Matt. 5:4). Only those who embrace the reality of death will receive the new life. Implicit in his statement is that those who do not mourn will not be comforted and those who do not face the endings will not receive the beginnings. The alternative community knows it need not engage in deception. It can stand in solidarity with the dying, for those are the ones who hope. Jeremiah, faithful to Moses, understood what numb people will never know, that only grievers can experience their experiences and move on.
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> I used to think it curious that when having to quote Scripture on demand someone would inevitably say, 'Jesus wept.' But now I understand. Jesus knew what we numb ones must always learn again: (a) that weeping must be real because endings are real and (b) that weeping permits newness. His weeping permits the kingdom to come. Such weeping is a radical criticism, a fearful dismantling, because it means the end of all machismo; weeping is something kings rarely do without losing their thrones. Yet the loss of thrones is precisely what is called for in radical criticism.[21]

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[19]Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 26.

[20]Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1978), 59.

[21]Ibid., 60-61. Brueggemann is correct but a more cynical conclusion is that it is likely that the first reason that "Jesus wept" is often cited when people are asked to quote

In Jeremiah, God says "O my people, put on sackcloth and roll in the ashes; mourn with bitter wailing as for an only son, for suddenly the destroyer will come upon us." (Jer. 6:26) Abraham Heschel says "these words are aglow with a divine pathos that can be reflected, but not pronounced: God is mourning Himself."[22]

In Jeremiah God says "I will weep and wail for the mountains and take up a lament concerning the desert pastures" (Jer. 9:10) as he mourns the sin of his people. Jeremiah says: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'Consider now! Call for the wailing women to come; send for the most skillful of them. Let them come quickly and wail over us till our eyes overflow with tears and water streams from our eyelids. The sound of wailing is heard from Zion: 'How ruined we are! How great is our shame! We must leave our land because our houses are in ruins.' Now, O women, hear the word of the Lord; open your ears to the words of his mouth. Teach your daughters how to wail; teach one another to lament. Death has climbed in through our windows and has entered our fortresses; it has cut off the children from the streets and the young men from the public squares." (Jer. 9:17-21) Heschel comments that when the calamity came, "He called upon the people to take up 'weeping and wailing' — to raise a wailing *over us*, . . .' Does not the word of God mean: Cry for Israel and Me? The voice of God calling upon the people to weep, lament, and mourn, for the calamities are about to descend

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scripture is because it is the shortest verse in the Bible and thus the most easily memorized!

[22]Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 111.

upon them, is itself a voice of grief, a voice of weeping."[23]

Jeremiah says "Oh, that my head were a spring of water and my eyes a fountain of tears! I would weep day and night for the slain of my people." (Jer. 9:1) Brueggemann thinks that in this verse, the "hurt in the face of Judah's death requires and evokes more grief, more crying, and more tears than his body is capable of transmitting. God is inadequate for the grieving now to be done, for 'my people' are very close to death."[24]

Jeremiah says "But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the Lord's flock will be taken captive." (Jer. 13:17) "Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day without ceasing; for my virgin daughter — my people — has suffered a grievous wound, a crushing blow." (Jer. 14:17)

Brueggemann thinks Jeremiah 31:20 may be the most poignant utterance of Yahweh in all of these texts, as a parent speaks with uncommon, devoted passion: "Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he the child I delight in? As often as I speak against him, I still remember him. Therefore I am deeply moved for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says the Lord." (Jer 31:20) Brueggemann comments: "This beloved child is treasured and remembered, even when harshly spoken against in rejection. Yahweh is 'deeply moved.' Yahweh's innards (*m`h*) are stirred. Yahweh is upset, as in Hos 11:8, and therefore

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[23]Ibid., 113.

[24]Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah*, 94.

Yahweh 'will surely have mercy.'"[25]

Brueggemann observes that in the prophet Jeremiah, the healing work of Yahweh is freighted with anguish and pathos. Thus in Jeremiah 3:22, Yahweh promises to "heal your faithlessness" and in 8:22, Yahweh asks the haunting question: "Is there no balm in Gilead? Is there no physician there? Why then has the health of my poor people not been restored?" In Jeremiah 9:1-3, "Yahweh/Jeremiah dissolves in tears of love and anguish. This same utterance of pathos in relation to healing is evident in Jer 30:12-17, which begins in terminal illness (v. 12) and ends with restoration and health (v. 17). But the way to healing is not an easy one for Yahweh; Yahweh goes through loss, anguish, rage, and humiliation. The healing costs the healer a great deal."[26]

Jeremiah depicts God himself mourning. Terence Fretheim provides some insight into what it means for God to be described as a mourner: "For God to mourn with those who mourn is to enter into their situation; and where God is at work, mourning is not the end."[27] Fretheim says the prophet's life was "reflective of the divine life. This became increasingly apparent to Israel. God is seen to be present not only in what the prophet has to say, but in the word as embodied in the prophet's life. To hear and see the prophet was to hear and see God, a God who was suffering on behalf of the people."[28]

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[25]Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 300-301.

[26]Ibid., 253-254.

[27]Fretheim, 136.

[28]Ibid., 149.

This continues in the weeping of Jesus over Lazarus.

Fretheim points out that in the prophetic texts that speak of God suffering, it is clear that the interaction between God and people "takes place not simply at the intellectual level as it were, nor in a law court; the exchange occurs also at the emotional level. God shares feelings, not just thoughts. The people know not only what God thinks, but what God feels."[29] Fretheim also points out that while God's suffering is in many ways analogous to human suffering, there are also ways in which it differs. "God's suffering is not such that he is overwhelmed by the experience; his emotions do not get out of control or lead to incapacitation."[30]

In Jeremiah 9:17-18: "The use of the first person plural in this text clearly includes God. The professional mourners are to come and weep not only for Israel, but for God as well!"[31] In Jeremiah 31 God is identified with Rachel weeping for her children who are no more (31:15). The Lord declares "Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight? . . . Therefore my heart yearns for him; I have great compassion for him." (Jer. 31:20) There is more — the Lord says "I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow" (Jer. 31:13). This is precisely what Jesus did in John 11. He not only wept and mourned with those who loved Lazarus, he turned their mourning into joy by raising Lazarus from the dead and later by his own resurrection defeated death itself. In Jesus, as the Old Testament

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[29]Ibid., 123.

[30]Ibid., 124.

[31]Ibid., 134.

prophets, Fretheim notes the "people not only hear the prophet as spokesman of God but they also *see* the lamentation of God embodied in the person of the prophet."[32] Indeed, John tells us the Judeans did see when they exclaimed: "See how he loved him!" (Jn. 11:36)

Fretheim makes four observations about the mourning of God in the prophets. First, God's response to Israel's judgment is to take up the cry of a mourner. Second, God is at work *in* death to bring about life. Third, God's mourning means that judgment finally is indeed death for Israel and not discipline — death is necessary for such a people before life is possible again. Fourth, that God is represented as mourning over the fate of non-Israelite peoples as well as Israelites, demonstrates the breadth of God's care and concern for the sufferers of the world, whoever they might be.[33] Each of these points applies to the mourning of Jesus. The wages of sin is death and Jesus mourns, but Jesus is at work to bring about life. Since Jesus loves everyone (Jn. 3:16), he weeps for everyone.

With this rich tradition of God lamenting and mourning and weeping for, and with, his people, it should be no surprise to see its continuation when God becomes enfleshed and encounters the result of human disobedience — death. The mourning, grief, and weeping of Jesus at the death of Lazarus is another example of the mourning, grief and weeping of God. As Fretheim says, "the prophet is not the suffering

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[32]Ibid., 135.

[33]Ibid., 136-137.

representative of the people, but one who embodies the suffering of God."[34] Fretheim suggests that "it seems best to understand the mourning of God and prophet as so symbiotic that in everything we hear the anguish of both."[35]

Fretheim points out that "in the prophet we see decisive continuities with what occurs in the Christ-event. God's act in Jesus Christ is the culmination of a longstanding relationship of God with the world that is much more widespread in the OT than is commonly recognized."[36]

Abraham Heschel agrees that in the prophets, "God Himself is described as reflecting over the plight of man rather than as contemplating eternal ideas. His mind is preoccupied with man, with the concrete actualities of history rather than with the timeless issues of thought."[37] For the prophet, "his essential task is to declare the word of God to the here and now; to disclose the future in order to illumine what is involved in the present."[38] In the Old Testament, the "prophet claims to be far more than a messenger. He is a person who stands in the presence of God (Jer. 15:19), who stands 'in the council of the Lord' (Jer. 23:18), who is a participant, as it were, in the council of God, not a bearer of dispatches whose function is limited to being sent on errands. He is

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[34]Ibid., 154.

[35]Ibid., 161.

[36]Ibid., 166.

[37]Heschel, 1:5.

[38]Ibid., 12.

a counselor as well as a messenger."[39] Heschel says of the prophet: "In the presence of God he takes the part of the people. In the presence of the people he takes the part of God."[40] This is an important insight for understanding the actions of Jesus in the gospels.

The Character of God in the Prophets

The Pathos of God

Heschel says that an "analysis of prophetic utterances shows that the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a *sympathy with the divine pathos*, a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet's reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos. The typical prophetic state of mind is one of being taken up into the heart of the divine pathos."[41] For Jeremiah, his "inconsolable grief over the destiny of the people is an expression of fellowship and love; the people's anguish is his anguish."[42] The prophet Jeremiah "not only was a man concerned with right and wrong. He also had a soul of extreme sensitivity to human suffering."[43]

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[39]Ibid., 21.

[40]Ibid., 24.

[41]Ibid., 26.

[42]Ibid., 119.

[43]Ibid., 120.

Heschel thinks that the "chief characteristic of prophetic thought is the primacy of God's involvement in history. History is the domain with which the prophets' minds are occupied. They are moved by a responsibility for society, by a sensitivity to what the moment demands. . . . It is more accurate to see them as proclaimers of God's pathos, speaking not for the idea of justice, but for the God of justice, for God's concern for justice. Divine concern remembered in sympathy is the stuff of which prophecy is made."[44] This is a profound insight into the actions of Jesus in the Lazarus story.

Heschel defines prophecy as the inspired communication of divine attitudes to the prophetic consciousness. The divine pathos is the ground-tone of all these attitudes. A central category of the prophetic understanding for God, it is echoed in almost every prophetic statement. To the prophet, God does not reveal himself in an abstract absoluteness, but in a personal and intimate relation to the world. He does not simply command and expect obedience; He is also moved and affected by what happens in the world, and reacts accordingly. Events and human actions arouse in Him joy or sorrow, pleasure or wrath. He reacts in an intimate and subjective manner, and thus determines the value of events. In the biblical view, man's deeds may move Him, affect Him, grieve Him. This notion that God can be intimately affected, that He possesses not merely intelligence and will, but also pathos, basically defines the prophetic consciousness of God"[45]

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[44]Ibid., 218-219.

[45]Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, Vol. 2 (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), 3-4.

In the prophets, Heschel says "God does not stand outside the range of human suffering and sorrow. He is personally involved in, even stirred by, the conduct and fate of man. Pathos denotes, not an idea of goodness, but a living care; not an immutable example, but an outgoing challenge, a dynamic relation between God and man; not mere feeling or passive affection, but an act or attitude composed of various spiritual elements; no mere contemplative survey of the world, but a passionate summons."[46] In the Old Testament, "pathos was understood not as unreasoned emotion, but as an act formed with intention, depending on free will, the result of decision and determination."[47] Pathos is not "an attribute but *a situation*. . . . It is rather a reaction to human history, an attitude called forth by man's conduct; a response, not a cause."[48] What a profound description of Jesus weeping, a response to death and loss. Heschel observes that to the prophets, "the gulf that separates man from God is transcended by His pathos."[49] In this way, the "divine pathos is like a bridge over the abyss that separates man from God."[50]

The prophets, Heschel says, "face a God of compassion, a God of concern and involvement, and it is in such concern that the divine and the human meet. Pathos is the focal point for eternity and history, the epitome of all relationships between God and

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[46]Ibid., 4.

[47]Ibid.

[48]Ibid., 5.

[49]Ibid., 8.

[50]Ibid., 9.

man."[51] Pathos is not a passion, an unreasoned emotion, "but an act formed with intention, rooted in decision and determination; not an attitude taken arbitrarily, but one charged with ethos; not a reflexive, but a transitive act. To repeat, its essential meaning is not to be seen in its psychological denotation, as standing for a state of the soul, but in its theological connotation, signifying God as involved in history, as intimately affected by the events in history, as living care."[52]

Heschel argues that the "idea of pathos is both a paradox and a mystery. He Who created All should be affected by what a tiny particle of His creation does or fails to do? Pathos is both a disclosure of His concern and a concealment of his power."[53] To the prophets, "the relationship of the world to the transcendent is signified by the participation of God (pathos) in the world. Not self-sufficiency, but concern and involvement characterize His relation to the world."[54] Pathos, as a theological category, is a genuine insight into God's relatedness to man, rather than a projection of human traits into divinity.[55] The idea of divine pathos is not a personification of God but an exemplification of divine reality, an illustration or illumination of His concern.[56]

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[51]Ibid.

[52]Ibid., 11.

[53]Ibid., 12.

[54]Ibid., 15.

[55]Ibid., 51.

[56]Ibid., 53.

The Anger of God

We have seen that many interpreters find it better to attribute the groaning and weeping of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus as anger at unbelief or death than to see his actions as expressions of genuine grief. Heschel points out that anger in the Bible "denotes what we call *righteous indignation*, aroused by that which is considered mean, shameful or sinful; it is impatience with evil."[57] However, "God's concern is the prerequisite and source of His anger. It is because He cares for man that His anger may be kindled against man."[58] In the prophets, the "prophet's angry words cry. The wrath of God is a lamentation. All prophecy in one great exclamation; God is not indifferent to evil! He is always concerned, He is personally affected by what man does to man. He is a God of pathos. This is one of the meanings of the anger of God: the end of indifference!"[59]

The prophet not only hears and apprehends the divine pathos; he is convulsed by it to the depths of his soul.[60] This sounds very much like Jesus in John 11:33 when he is personally affected by death and mourning. The tears of Jesus are the end of indifference. To attribute the tears of Jesus to anger does not shield Jesus from emotion — the anger of God is a powerful emotion. If the tears of Jesus can communicate the

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[57]Ibid., 63.

[58]Ibid.

[59]Ibid., 64.

[60]Ibid., 88.

anger of God, they can also express the prophetic sympathy of God.

The Sympathy of God

Heschel says that to be a prophet "means to identify one's concern with the concern of God. Sympathy is a state in which a person is open to the presence of another person. It is a feeling which feels the feeling to which it reacts — the opposite of emotional solitariness. In prophetic sympathy, man is open to the presence and emotion of the transcendent Subject. He carries within himself the awareness of what is happening to God."[61]

However, in the prophets, sympathy "is not an end in itself. Nothing is further from the prophetic mind than to inculcate or to live out a life of feeling, a religion of sentimentality. Not mere feeling, but action, will mitigate the world's misery, society's injustice or the people's alienation from God. Only action will relieve the tension between God and man. Both pathos and sympathy are, from the perspective of the total situation, demands rather than fulfillments."[62] This is a profound explanation for the raising of Lazarus, it is not mere feeling but implies action.

Sympathy is the fundamental feature of the prophet's inner life. It assumed various forms and common to them all as an essential element is the focusing of the attention on God, the awareness of divine emotion, intense concern for the divine pathos,

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[61]Ibid., 89.

[62]Ibid.

sympathetic solidarity with God.[63]

Heschel identifies two types of sympathy in the prophets, each of which can apply to the ministry of Jesus. The first is community of feeling, or sympathy *with* God: "Since the prophets are, so to speak, confronted with the same object or reality as God, namely the spiritual and moral plight of the people of Israel, and the standard and motivation of the divine pathos worked in them in similar fashion, the prophets may react in the same mode as God, in sorrow or indignation, in love or anger."[64] When Jesus thinks of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and sees the result of sin — the death of Lazarus, Jesus reflects the same reaction that God had in the prophets in sympathy with him, he too expresses God's pain.

The second is fellow feeling, or sympathy *for* God.[65] "There is in this relationship a direct correspondence between the divine pathos and the human sympathy, the character of the latter depending upon the character of the former. The prophet remains conscious of the fact that his feeling is a fellow feeling with God."[66] Since Jesus is God in the flesh, and to see him is to see the Father, the groaning and weeping of Jesus express the pain of God.

Heschel says that emotion is "inseparable from being filled with the spirit, which is above all a state of being moved. Often the spirit releases passion, an excessive

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[63]Ibid., 93.

[64]Ibid., 94.

[65]Ibid., 93.

[66]Ibid., 94.

discharge of nervous energy, enhanced vitality, increased inner strength, increased motor activity, a drive."[67] The true meaning of the religion of sympathy is to feel the divine pathos as one feels one's own state of the soul.[68] Jesus did and he was moved in his spirit and burst into tears.

Heschel says the "prophet is a person who is inwardly transformed: his interior life is formed by the pathos of God, it is *theomorphic*. Sympathy, which takes place for the sake of the divine will, and in which a divine concern becomes a human passion, is fulfillment of transcendence."[69] Pathos in all its forms "reveals the extreme pertinence of man to God, His world-directness, attentiveness, and concern. God 'looks at' the world and is affected by what happens in it; man is the object of His care and judgment. The basic feature of pathos and the primary content of the prophet's consciousness is a *divine attentiveness and concern*. Whatever message he appropriates, it reflects that awareness. It is a divine attentiveness to humanity, an involvement in history, a divine vision of the world in which the prophet shares and which he tries to convey. And it is God's concern for man that is at the root of the prophet's work to save the people. The great secret is God's hidden pathos. A divine attachment concealed from the eye, a divine concern unnoticed or forgotten, hovers over the history of mankind."[70] Sympathy opens man to the living God. Unless we share His concern, we know nothing about the

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[67]Ibid., 96.

[68]Ibid., 99.

[69]Ibid.

[70]Ibid., 263.

living God.[71] This is a profound description of the impact of Jesus' tears of sympathy in the Lazarus story — people were opened up to the living God in Christ.

Paul Fiddes observes that in Jeremiah, "we notice that the prophet does not simply find that God is sharing in the suffering of his people: he finds that he, the prophet, is called to share in the suffering of *God* who is grieved for his people. That is, the prophet finds himself caught up into the situation of a God who is in pain, and only thus does he discover the true plight of his fellow men."[72]

The Pathos of God in the Rest of the Old Testament

The character of God that is revealed in the prophets is consistent with the God revealed in the rest of the Old Testament and in the New. Walter Brueggemann observes that "Jewishness is characterized by dialogical-dialectical modes of discourse, whereas Western Christianity has long practiced a flight to the transcendent. Moreover, one cannot say that the Old Testament everywhere and at all times shuns the transcendental. But I shall insist that it characteristically does so. By this I mean that the God of Israel is characteristically 'in the fray' and at risk in the ongoing life of Israel. Conversely the God of Israel is rarely permitted, in the rhetoric of Israel, to be safe and unvexed 'above the fray.' Even where God is said to be elsewhere, this 'elsewhere' is most often in

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[71]Ibid., 264.

[72]Fiddes, 20-21.

response to Israel's life, either negatively or positively."[73]

Brueggemann thinks this idea of God in the Old Testament continues in the New Testament: "[The] move from covenantal fidelity to costly pathos is a primary articulation of Yahweh in the Old Testament. . . . It is possible, in the horizon of Christian interpretation in the New Testament, to say that around the person of Jesus, Christian witnesses discerned that the pathos of Yahweh moved the next step to incarnation; that is, God came to be personally and fully engaged in the center of the life of the world."[74] He suggests "that the move toward incarnation, no doubt made in Hellenistic rhetoric, is in some inchoate way already present in Yahweh's radical decision for covenantal solidarity with Israel and more radical decision toward pathos with Israel. . . to recognize that whatever may be claimed for the radicality of God in the New Testament is already present in all its radicality in these Jewish witnesses to the character of Yahweh."[75] The weeping of Jesus does not reveal something new about the character of God — Jeremiah also revealed it — but it does reveal the pathos of God in an even more intimate and immediate way. God in Jesus weeps with those who mourn as is clearly illustrated in John 11:35.

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[73]Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 83.

[74]Ibid., 302.

[75]Ibid., 302.

The Issue of Anthropomorphic Language

> What will. . . pass away is theology,
> which — on the basis of the divine revelation —
> reduces God to language in the inadequate material of this world,
> which is imprisoned in futility.
>
> Jürgen Moltmann[76]

When the prophets and other biblical works describe God in human terms are they guilty of projecting human desires onto God or are they describing truths about God expressed in human terms because of his relation to humanity? Some theologians are critical of attributing human emotions, like grief, to God because they are concerned that to do so is to degrade God, to create him in our image, to blur the distinction between God and the world. Thus they would define the human attributes of God as anthropomorphisms and dismiss them as no more revealing about God then a child's explanation, that rain is the world crying, reveals the hydrologic process.[77] The concern is genuine and well intended and must be addressed if it is true that Jesus' tears of grief not only communicate something about the humanity of Jesus, but also reveal something

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[76]Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: A New Theology of Creation and the Spirit of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 65.

[77]Paul Helm illustrates the concern when he asserts that: "The metaphysical or ontological or strictly literal data must control the anthropomorphic and anthropopathic data, and not *vice-versa*. The alternative is quite unacceptable, namely, a theological reductionism in which God is distilled to human proportions." Paul Helm, "The Impossibility of Divine Passibility," in *The Power and Weakness of God: Impassibility and Orthodoxy*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 129.

true about the character of God.

Terence Fretheim points out that virtually all of the language used in the Bible to refer to God is metaphorical. Some of the images are drawn from the natural world, both animate (God is an eagle, Deut. 32:11) and inanimate (God is a rock, Ps. 31:2-3). However, the majority of the metaphors in the Old Testament are drawn from the human realm — both body and experience, including emotions. God is described in human form as walking and talking and he has a hand, a back, face, eyes and ears (2 Kings 19:16). He has human emotional states and is described as experiencing joy, anger, pain and grief. God is also described as having human roles such as father, mother, king, and shepherd. These are anthropomorphic metaphors which speak of God from human experience. Fretheim notes that "anthropomorphic metaphors predominate in Israelite talk about the deity in a way that is not the case elsewhere in the ancient Near East. . . . This preponderant tendency is thus a point of distinctiveness in the OT understanding of God."[78]

Fretheim makes the important point that metaphors have varying degrees of correspondence between the two terms of the metaphor. He suggests that one might speak of degrees of revelatory capacity: "There are those with a low capacity (God as dry rot, Hos. 5:12; God as lion, Hos. 5:14; God as whistler, Isa. 7:18), with a moderate capacity (God as rock, Ps. 31:2-3; God's arm, Isa. 53:1), and with a high capacity (God as parent, Hos. 11:1)."[79] Fretheim says that the metaphors with high correspondence are

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[78]Fretheim, 6.

[79]Ibid., 10.

communal, and the most common are the interpersonal metaphors. The metaphors drawn from the human relationship to the nonhuman are also rich because the God/human relationship is primarily in view. Fretheim states: "Rather than accommodating God to the level of the human or raising human characteristics to the nth degree, the human is seen to be fashioned in the likeness of God. Hence, the human is seen in theomorphic terms, rather than God in anthropomorphic terms. Thereby, the essential metaphorical process is revealed to us. The 'image of God' gives us permission to reverse the process and, by looking at the human, learn what God is like."[80] How much more then, when we look to God in the flesh and see him weep, do we learn what God is like.

Robinson agrees when he says of revelation about God in the Bible: "We start definitely and avowedly with a human experience, for that is all that any book can give us in the first place. We bring to it a faith that man is somehow made in the image of God, that there is a kinship between human and divine spirits, so that what is true of the less will also be in some sense true of the greater. Without this faith, we can never dare to say anything about God, for we have no means of knowing anything about Him if He is not in some way like ourselves."[81] As Heschel observes, "God can be understood by man only in conjunction with the human situation. For of God we know only what He means and does in relation to man."[82]

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[80]Ibid., 10-11.

[81]Robinson, 175.

[82]Heschel, 2:265.

It is in the incarnation that God becomes in many ways like ourselves, the Word became flesh. Malina and Rohrbaugh argue that we "may presume that for the author of the Gospel of John, as for us, statements about entities other than human beings are often based on analogies with the human. This holds notoriously true for theological statements about God; all such statements are anthropomorphic analogies. Thus, the 'Word' that was with God in the beginning must be something like a human word."[83] They suggest that the Word is God's utterance, hence it is a creature from God's point of view. The fact this Word produces all created reality, indicates that it is surely divine from a creature's point of view. God's word, unlike human words, is always creative and powerful (Gen. 1). It is found throughout creation, which is itself a part of God's self-revelation. John said that this creative and powerful Word was to be found in Jesus of Nazareth, Israel's Messiah.[84]

John Sanders says the metaphorical and anthropomorphic language of the Bible must be taken seriously because it is through the idiom of Scripture and its various metaphors that we understand and relate to God. Sanders points out that metaphors help us to make sense of things with which we are unfamiliar. He says: "Metaphors have the peculiar quality of saying that something 'is' and 'is not.'"[85] God is like a rock, but he is also not a rock. Metaphors about God are reality depicting in that they tell us of a real

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[83]Malina and Rohrbaugh, 35.

[84]Ibid. 31.

[85]John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 15.

relationship between God and the world. Sanders argues that "all the language we employ to speak of God is human language and this is tinged with anthropomorphism."[86]

Sanders observes that Jesus is the consummate anthropomorphism. If Jesus is God incarnate, then it does not seem that God is especially concerned about having human characteristics predicated of him. In the biblical language there is a clear ontological distinction between God and the world — God is not the world. However, we know nothing of a God unrelated to us. Sanders concludes: "If the incarnation is true and the divine Son experienced full human life, then God in this way relates to the world in precisely the same way we do. Jesus is the consummate revelation of God in human form."[87]

When we see that Jesus responded to the death of his friend and the suffering of his family by weeping and grieving in sympathy with them, we can safely conclude from the evidences of the pathos of God in the prophets, that this is how God too responds to sin, suffering and death. The difference then between divine and human mourning is not that we mourn and God does not. The difference is that while we must accept the reality of the power of death, God's mourning is followed by the transformation of death into life, of grief into joy.

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[86]Ibid., 19.

[87]Ibid., 26. See also Clark Pinnock et al, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 16-18.

Divine Pathos in Greek Culture

We have seen that there has been resistance to understanding the weeping of Jesus to be an expression of genuine grief because of Greek and Platonic ideals of masculinity which have influenced western culture. In the history of the church there has also been a much more profound resistance to understanding the weeping of Jesus to be an expression of the character of God. If the weeping of Jesus was thought about at all, it was attributed to the human nature of Christ and not the divine. The Old Testament has many references to emotions in God, including grief, and yet they have rarely been taken seriously because they do not fit with the Greek philosophical ideals of what God must be like.

For God to experience grief there would need to be a change in God. Plato argues that change is only change for the worse and so "it's impossible. . . for a god to want to alter himself, but since, as it seems, each of them is as fair and as good as possible, he remains forever simply in his own shape."[88] He thinks a god is simple and never changes from his own idea.[89] God is perfect: "the god and what belongs to the god are in every way in the best condition."[90] He asks: "'Does he transform himself into what's better and fairer, or what's worse and uglier than himself?' 'Necessarily into what's worse,' he

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[88]Plato, *Republic*, II, 381c.

[89]Ibid., II, 380d.

[90]Ibid., II, 381b.

said, 'if he's altered at all."[91]

Plato was critical of the portrayal of weeping men in Homer, and in a similar way he is critical of Homer's portrayal of the gods who change in appearance and tell lies. As Sanders observes, he "dismissed the Greek poets' stories of the gods as anthropomorphic and searched for the perfect, the timeless and the immutable."[92] Just as he wanted to edit Homer to remove the references to men weeping so as to protect his ideal philosopher kings from such inappropriate, womanly behaviour, Plato wants to edit Homer and his depiction of the grief of the gods: "we'll ask them under no condition to make gods who lament."[93]

Aristotle agrees that God is perfect and does not change, "for God at least needs nothing."[94] Aristotle compares a god to his ideal man who does not need friendship. He says: "For the independent man neither needs useful people nor people to cheer him, nor society; his own society is enough for him. This is most plain in the case of a god; for it is clear that needing nothing, he will not need a friend, nor have one, supposing that he does not need one."[95] Aristotle's god is the perfect, unmoved mover, who has no needs, not even for friendship. It follows that a god cannot mourn.

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[91]Ibid., II, 381c.

[92]Sanders, 27.

[93]Plato, *Republic*, III, 388b.

[94]Aristotle, *Ethica Eudemia* in *The Works of Aristotle Translated into English*, ed. W.D. Ross (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), 1249b.

[95]Ibid, 1244b.

Amuluche Gregory Nnamani points out that the "morality of God is important to the Greeks. And it is exactly the moral, and not the ontological question, that initially influenced the conception of divine apatheia. Scared by the immoral conducts of the gods in the Greek mythologies, the philosophers, especially Plato, are pushed to conceive God as the wholly other, as the very opposite of everything human. The concern to free the divinity from moral imperfection gives rise in turn to the need of conceiving the ontological perfection of God. Indeed, the roots of the Greek disparagement of passions and the overall tendency to negate what is worldly, are imbedded in the Hellenistic sense of morality."[96]

In the biblical concept of God, "His transcendence is taken to mean ultimately His overwhelming presence and indwelling (immanence) among His people. At the background of the Jewish conception of God, therefore, is a paradoxical approach to reality, different from the Greek way of negation, and more subtle than the Aristotelian analogy. Unlike the Greeks, the Jews emphasise the human likeness of and relation with God more than the human-God-difference, so that, it has become possible to speak of their theomorphic view of themselves rather than their anthropomorphic conception of God."[97]

Abraham Heschel points out that for "more than two thousand years Jewish and later Christian theologians have been deeply embarrassed by the constant references in

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[96]Amuluche Gregory Nnamani, *The Paradox of a Suffering God: On the Classical, Modern-Western and Third World Struggles to Harmonise the Incompatible Attributes of the Trinitarian God* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 37-38.

[97]Ibid., 57.

the Bible to the divine pathos. . . . The opposition, it seems, was due to a combination of philosophical presuppositions which have their origin in classical Greek thinking."[98] In contrast to the biblical God, the "perfect example of an impassive deity is the God of Aristotle."[99] Heschel concludes that the notion of God as a perfect Being is not of biblical origin. It is not the product of prophetic religion, but of Greek philosophy.[100] He argues that "Plato thinks of God *in the image of an idea*; the prophets think of God *in the image of personal presence*."[101]

In contrast, Heschel makes the point that while the "ideal state of the Stoic sage is apathy, the ideal state of the prophet is sympathy."[102] In the prophets, "passion was regarded as a motive power, a spring, and incentive. Great deeds are done by those who are filled with *ruah*, with pathos."[103] The prophets, the psalmist, the authors of the books of Wisdom, all of whom were powerfully sensitive to the uniqueness and transcendence of the living God, seem to have had no apprehension that the statements of divine pathos might impair their understanding for the one, unique, and transcendent God.[104]

Nnamani says "In the Old Testament, God's repentance is aroused both by human

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[98]Heschel, Vol. 2, 27.

[99]Ibid., 31.

[100]Ibid., 54.

[101]Ibid., 55.

[102]Ibid., 38.

[103]Ibid.

[104]Ibid., 48.

sin and also by God's own compassion and mercy. In either case it presupposes heart-felt pain, sorrows and anger in God, which are in no way signs of weakness, but signs of His determination to continue His work of salvation. God's pain is never caused by the agency of a superior power or demon, but by the resolved steadfastness of His love. His anger gives expression to the power of this steadfast love. Accordingly, His compassion stems from an infinite love and readiness to help, which subdues every resistance. In view of these facts, it is argued that God's pathos differs from that of human beings. Unlike the pathos of gods and human beings, which are invariably induced by a superior and external force against which they are mostly helpless, God's pathos is always ultimately induced by His love; it is within His control and, thus, cannot overpower Him."[105]

Heschel asks: "Is it more compatible with our conception of the grandeur of God to claim that He is emotionally blind to the misery of man rather than profoundly moved? In order to conceive of God not as an onlooker but as a participant, to conceive of man not as an idea in the mind of God but as a concern, the category of divine pathos is an indispensable implication. To the biblical mind the conception of God as detached and unemotional is totally alien."[106] Yet, this was to become the conception of God in Christian theology.

In summary, the Old Testament has many examples of God experiencing grief and mourning which reach their height of expression in the prophets, especially

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[105]Nnamani, 44.

[106]Heschel, 2: 37.

Jeremiah. The prophets reveal the pathos of God, the anger of God, and the sympathy of God in ways that are consistent with the picture of God in the rest of the Bible and as revealed in the tears of Jesus, *the* prophet Moses said would come. All language used in the Bible to refer to God is metaphorical including the images Greek philosophy deems appropriate for the character of God and the depictions of mourning and grief. Since the metaphors from the human realm, especially the metaphors of relationships, have a higher degree of revelatory capacity than the images of God as a rock, there is no reason to conclude that the descriptions of the grief of God should be excluded from the biblical picture of God revealed in the life and tears of Jesus.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE WEEPING OF JESUS AND THE APATHY AXIOM

The God of the Bible is the almighty creator and the passionate lover of his creatures. The God revealed in his covenant fidelity, prophetic pathos, and in the incarnation is a God who is involved in the world and responds to his people with suffering love which includes anger and sympathy. Yet, as the Christian doctrine of God developed from its Jewish roots in the context of Greek culture, these qualities of God were replaced in importance by notions of his asiety, immutability and impassibility — the attributes of God that were important to Greek philosophy. Logically, these attributes also applied to God in Christ. One of the results of this post-biblical understanding of God is that the rich theological tradition of the pathos of God, communicated in the weeping of Jesus as he grieves at the death of his friend, is lost.

African theologian Amuluche Gregory Nnamani makes some important observations about the doctrine of God shaped by Greek philosophy. He thinks there is an imbalance in the use of the metaphors that describe the character of God. He notes that God was mainly "conceived as a detached Being, whose aseity, immutability and impassibility counted more than His pathos. Even though God was believed to have been involved in the world and to have allowed the crucifixion of His Son on the Cross, the idea that He might have equally suffered sympathetically had always seemed heretical to

the classical theologies."[1]

Nnamani asserts: "The Christian world has inherited two apparently conflicting ideas of God. On the one hand, it was bequeathed with the image of Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament Jews, who, by virtue of His activities in history, is known as a pathetic and sympathetic lover of His people. Yahweh can be angry, jealous, sorrowful and regretful when His love is not reciprocated. On the other hand, Christianity has adopted a notion of God from the philosophers and theologians of Greek antiquity. Unlike the God of the Bible, the 'God of the philosophers' is, among other things, impassible, that is to say, beyond the influence of any external force or agent. The issue of harmonising these two prevalent conceptions of God has plagued theology since the onset of Christianity."[2]

T.E. Pollard points out that the "idea of impassibility appears in some of the earliest post-apostolic writings of the Church, and. . . it appears as a presupposition; it is a position which is assumed rather than argued for."[3] Pollard is very critical of the apathy axiom. He thinks that "Christian theology as a whole, and the doctrine of God in particular, have suffered because of the lack of caution which theologians in every age have shown in their too ready acceptance of the gifts which the Greeks have brought."[4]

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[1]Nnamani, 17.

[2]Ibid., 23.

[3]T.E. Pollard, "The Impassibility of God," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 8 (1955), 357.

[4]Ibid., 353.

He argues that "those religious ideas which had sprung out of the Semitic soil of Palestine were so radically transformed by their contact with the philosophy of the Greeks that they became almost unrecognisable."[5] Pollard says the Greek philosophical idea of the impassible God is alien: "So alien is this idea, so foreign is it to Hebraic-Christian thought, that it makes nonsense of the revelation of God in the Old Testament, it makes the Incarnation no real Incarnation, and it reduces the sufferings and death of Christ to a purely human work."[6]

Pollard says when impassibility is ascribed to God, the Incarnation of God in Jesus Christ is no real incarnation: "If we take the impassibility of the Son to its logical conclusion we end in gross Docetism." "The witness of the NT is that it is Jesus Christ, who lived in Palestine, who talked, and walked, and hungered, and was thirsty, and suffered and died on the Cross, who is the Son of God; all that is said of Him there is said of Him not only as human but as divine, not only as Son of Man but also as Son of God. To say that the Son of God, as divine, is impassible is to assert that the divine in Christ was unaffected by the human; and therefore that there is no real Incarnation, or if there is an Incarnation, it is meaningless. . . . If then God is impassible, and the divine impassibility applies to the divine in Jesus Christ, Christ's death on the Cross is the death of a man and no more than that, and we have no salvation through Him."[7]

Pollard says the doctrine of divine impassibility leads to the denial of the

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[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid., 356.

[7]Ibid., 362-363.

personality of God. He thinks that the transcendence of God, His perfect moral freedom and His perfect blessedness and pure joy can be maintained and safeguarded adequately from within the Hebraic-Christian tradition, with its assertion "that God, though far above all suffering and fickleness of emotion, has stooped low in Christ to participate in the sufferings and sorrows and disappointments of man, submitting to them as Victim, but rising from them as Victor over sin and suffering and death."[8] Jesus wept, Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. Jesus suffered and died, Jesus rose from the grave.

The Apathy of God

The apathy axiom continued into the seventeenth century and a good example of its application is the Puritan theologian, Stephen Charnock. For him, "it is the essential property of God, not to have any accession to, or diminution of, his essence or attributes, but to remain entirely the same. He wants nothing; he loses nothing; but doth uniformly exist by himself, without any new nature, new thoughts, new will, new purpose, or new place."[9] All that we consider in God is unchangeable because mutability belongs to contingency, therefore whatsoever is immutable by nature is God; whatsoever is God is immutable by nature.[10]

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[8]Ibid., 364.

[9]Stephen Charnock, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 317.

[10]Ibid., 318-319.

Charnock says that "because he is a Spirit, he is not subject to those mutations which are found in corporeal and bodily natures; because he is an absolutely simple Spirit, not having the least particle of composition; he is not capable of those changes which may be in created spirits."[11] The obvious challenge to this notion of spirit is what about the incarnation — what happens when the spirit takes on flesh. Charnock's response is: "There was no change in the Divine nature of the Son, when he assumed human nature. There was an union of the two natures, but no change of the Deity into the humanity, or of the humanity into the Deity: both preserved their peculiar properties."[12]

What about the scriptures that speak of God with human emotions like grief, anger and repentance? Charnock asserts that: "Repentance and other affections ascribed to God in Scripture, argue no change in God."[13] This is because "Repentance is not properly in God. He is a pure Spirit, and is not capable of those passions which are signs of weakness and impotence, or subject to those regrets we are subject to. . . . God doth not act but upon clear and infallible reason; and a change upon passion is accounted by all so great a weakness in man, that none can entertain so unworthy a conceit of God. Where he is said to repent (Gen. vi. 6), he is also said to grieve; now no proper grief can be imagined to be in God."[14] Charnock concludes that "Therefore, repentance in God is

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[11]Ibid., 319-320.

[12]Ibid., 339.

[13]Ibid., 340.

[14]Ibid., 340-341.

only a change of his outward conduct, according to his infallible foresight and immutable will."[15] Since "Repentance in us is a grief for a former fact, and a changing of our course in it; grief is not in God."[16] So Charnock can claim with assurance that "God is not changed, when of loving to any creatures he becomes angry with them, or of angry he becomes appeased. The change in these cases is in the creature; according to the alteration in the creature, it stands in a various relation to God."[17]

A contemporary example of the apathy axiom at work is the understanding of God in the thought of Norman Geisler. He affirms: "God is without passion. For passion implies desire for what one does not have. But God, as an absolutely perfect being, has everything. He lacks nothing. For in order to lack something he would need to have a potentiality to possess it. But God is pure actuality. . . with no potentiality whatsoever. Therefore, God has no passion for anything. He is completely and infinitely perfect in himself." This is a striking contrast to the God we have seen revealed in the prophets. Geisler goes on to attempt to soften this hard image of God: "However, to say that God is impassible in the sense that he has no passions or cravings for fulfillment is not to say that he has no feeling. God feels anger at sin and rejoices in righteousness. But God's feelings are unchanging. He always, unchangingly, feels the same sense of anger at sin. And, likewise, he never ceases to rejoice in goodness and righteousness.

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[15]Ibid., 341.

[16]Ibid., 342.

[17]Ibid., 345.

Thus, God has no changing passions, but he does have unchanging feelings."[18] At best, this a paradox and worst, this is nonsense. If feelings involve changes in emotions, how is it helpful to speak of God as having unchanging feelings and no changing passions?

Geisler's idea of God is clearly based in neo-Platonic thought. He writes: "Now since creatures are truly dependent on God but God is not truly dependent on them, they are related as real to an idea. That is, God *knows* about the relationship of dependence but he does not *have* it. Thus, when there is a change in the creature there is no change in God. Just as when the man changes his position from one side of the pillar to the other, the pillar does not change; only the man changes in relation to the pillar. So, while the relationship between God and creatures is real, God is in no sense dependent on that relationship."[19]

For Geisler, instead of the image of God in the prophets who is so concerned and moved by his creatures, God is better understood as a pillar, an unchanging monolith, oblivious to and unaffected by anything that goes on around him. It would seem that for Geisler, the metaphor describing God as a rock reveals more about God than the metaphors of God as father, mother or lover.

On this assumption, Geisler concludes that in the "Incarnation the divine *nature* did not become a human nature or vice versa. Rather, the divine *person* — the second person of the Trinity — became man. Notice carefully the words of Scripture. 'The

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[18]Norman Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man? The New "Open" View of God — Neotheism's Dangerous Drift*, (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997), 29.

[19]Ibid., 35.

word was God. . . . And the *Word* was made flesh, and dwelt among us' (John 1:1, 14, KJV). It does not say that *God* became flesh. It is as impossible for God to become man as it is for an infinite to become finite or an uncreated to become created."[20] The implications of this idea of the incarnation for understanding the weeping of Jesus is significant. Even though John presents the Word as God and Jesus as a unity, as one person, Geisler must envision a split that separates the two natures in such a way that they have no affect on each other.

The Apathy Axiom in Christology

The cattle are lowing/ the baby awakes
but little Lord Jesus/ no crying he makes.

Away in a Manger
Christmas Carol

Christmas carols are not theological treatises and we should never read too much into songs of celebration for the birth of the Saviour, but the popular carol 'Away in a Manger' contains an example of a theological assumption that has been part of Christian theology since the scriptures were read in the context of first century Greek thought. Why does the infant Jesus not cry like any other baby would when awakened by the cattle? Perhaps it is because Christians are not comfortable thinking about God as a helpless crying infant. Surely God did not really become like any other baby who cried

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[20]Ibid., 103.

when he was hungry or frightened. It is hard to imagine the Saviour of humanity weeping or experiencing excruciating pain on the cross. If it is difficult to think of Jesus crying as a baby, how much more difficult is to think of him as a grown man being overcome with emotion and crying "like a baby" at the grave of a friend?

In the Old Testament, God is revealed in the prophets and in images and metaphors of his concerned relationship with humanity and in the New Testament God is revealed in Jesus in his relationship with people. Yet, for some reason, it has been difficult to think of Jesus, God in the flesh, as being like us in our weaknesses.

Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng agrees in this observation:

> Within orthodoxy (unlike the Docetists, who radically denied Christ's suffering) it was impossible to dispute the fact that according to the gospels the *one* Jesus Christ suffered hunger and thirst, weariness and blows, joy and sadness, love and anger, and in the end troubles and pains, Godforsakenness and death. Not only with heterodoxy however, but also with orthodoxy, we encounter a variety of attempts to tone down, restrict, re-interpret and even profoundly to question these gospel statements. Over and again in the patristic age we find an inclination to attribute to Christ an *apatheia*, an impassibility, as far-reaching as possible, either merely in the sense of painlessness or even general lack of feeling. What is the source of this peculiar phenomenon, so much the more peculiar since the gospels contain no statements on these lines but (like the epistles and the Johannine writings) are marked by an outspoken realism of suffering?[21]

Küng says that in Classical Christology "the suffering of the one and entire Christ was too frequently not taken seriously enough and the fear of infringing the principle of impassibility was stronger than the fear of mutilating the gospel image of Christ; far too

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[21]Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology*, trans. J. R. Stephenson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 520. See also 512-558.

often the statements about suffering were toned down or restricted without more ado to the humanity of Christ."[22] Placher says the idea of divine impassibility served two functions — it ruled out vulgar passions and at the same time preserved divine power.[23] Jürgen Moltmann says "a mild docetism runs through the christology of the ancient church."[24]

Warfield observes that there has been a tendency to derive the ethical idea from the Stoa "which conceived moral perfection under the form of ἀπάθεια, naturally wished to attribute this ideal ἀπάθεια to Jesus, as the perfect man."[25] Warfield points out that the tendency to minimize his affectional movements "may run some risk of giving us a somewhat cold and remote Jesus, whom we can scarcely believe to be able to sympathize with us in all our infirmities."[26] Despite this risk, through much of the history of the church the essential apathy and impassibility of God and of God in Jesus has been an axiom on which the scriptures were read and christology developed.

The application of the apathy axiom is why it is difficult to think of Jesus

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[22]Ibid., 522.

[23]Placher, 5.

[24]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 89.

[25]Warfield, 93. G.K. Chesterton says of Jesus: "His pathos was natural, almost casual. The Stoics, ancient and modern, were proud of concealing their tears. He never concealed His tears; He showed them plainly on His open face at any daily sight, such as the far sight of His native city." (Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, (New York: Image Books, 1990), 160)

[26]Ibid., 94.

experiencing emotions and passions. Jürgen Moltmann says the idea of *"the passion of the passionate God* controverts the fundamental axiom of Aristotelian, philosophical theology, which was God's essential apathy."[27] According to Moltmann, "Christian theology acquired Greek philosophy's ways of thinking in the Hellenistic world; and since that time most theologians have simultaneously maintained the passion of Christ, God's Son, and the deity's essential incapacity for suffering — even though it was at the price of having to talk paradoxically about 'the sufferings of the God who cannot suffer'. But in doing this they have simply added together Greek philosophy's 'apathy' axiom and the central statements of the gospel. The contradiction remains — and remains unsatisfactory."[28]

Moltmann says that since "the shaping of Christian dogmatics by Greek thought, it has been the general custom to approach the mystery of Jesus from the general idea of God in Greek metaphysics: the one God, for whom all men are seeking on the ground of their experience of reality, has appeared in Jesus of Nazareth — be it that the highest eternal idea of goodness and truth has found its most perfect teacher in him, or be it that in him eternal being, the Source of all things, has become flesh and appeared in the multifarious world of transience and mortality. The mystery of Jesus is then the incarnation of the one, eternal, original, true and immutable divine Being." These ideas were adopted in the Christology of the ancient Church. Its problems accordingly resulted

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[27]Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, x.

[28]Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 22. Moltmann points out that Origen is the only Father who dares to talk theologically about God's suffering.

from the fact that the Father of Jesus Christ was identified with the one God of Greek metaphysics and had the attributes of this God ascribed to him. If, however, the divinity of God is seen in his unchangeableness, immutability, impassibility and unity, then the historic working of this God in the Christ event of the cross and resurrection becomes impossible to assert.[29]

The Two Natures of Christ

In the first centuries of the Christian Church, there was much debate about the relation of the divine in Christ to the divine in the Father and many different ideas. For example, the Ebionites believed that Jesus Christ was a man who had a special call from God, but they had no teaching on the Holy Spirit and left out the soteriological doctrine of the New Testament. There were Christian Gnostics, like Ptolemy and Valentinius, who affirmed a transcendent and unknown God and thought salvation was the acquisition of knowledge about God. The Marcionites thought the harsh God of the Old Testament was not the same as the good God in the New Testament. Some Christians affirmed adoptionism which held that Jesus was a mere man in whom God dwelt in a special way. Others, called Monarchians, Patripassianists or Sabellians, did away with the distinction of persons in God and held that the Father and Son were the same and the Spirit was the same as the Father.

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[29]Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 140.

Many ante-Nicene authors thought the Son was subordinate to the Father. Tertullian taught that the Father is one person, the Son is another, and both are the one God and Athanasius thought that all that is said of the Father is also to be said of the Son, except that the Son is Son, and not Father. Origen understood the Father and Son as two hypostases — the Father is immaterial and the Son, who was Son by nature and not adoption, was the invisible image of God. The Arians held that the Son was a creature and were opposed by the supporters of the council of Nicea (325) who thought the Son was of the same substance (*ousia*) as the Father. The proponents of the council of Chalcedon (451) held that the Son is consubstantial with the Father in respect of his deity and consubstantial with us in respect of his humanity. Most of these options can be subdivided to reflect stages in their development, geographical and political differences and other variations. Other options could be added along with the many other councils and creeds developed at various times and places and the result is a picture of a time of great complexity and confusion.[30] William Rusch points out that through "all the turmoil and tomes, there is one basic issue at the center of the debate: What is the relation of the divine in Christ to the divine in the Father?"[31]

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[30]For a helpful summary of the first Christian centuries see William G. Rusch, ed., *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 2-24. For a more detailed examination of the issues and options see Bernard Lonergan, *The Way to Nicea: The Dialectical Development of Trinitarian Theology*, trans. Conn O'Donovan (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 18-137.

[31]Rusch, 1.

The Christology of the Fathers

A brief look at some of the Fathers will reveal the application of the apathy axiom in their theology. Nnamani asserts that the "adoption of the Greek concept of divine apatheia is characteristic of the theologies of the first three centuries of the Church. It can indeed be seen as the basic theological presupposition of the patristic Christology and the doctrine of God."[32] He argues that in general terms, "the doctrine of divine impassibility occupies such a central position in the patristic theologies of the second and third centuries, and particularly in their reflections during the Christological controversies, that one can justifiably assume, that it was, in their context, the distinguishing characteristic of the Christian God, in the face of which the biblical anthropomorphism must have seemed merely metaphorical or purely 'fallacious' and 'blasphemous'."[33] In contrast to this view, Nnamani notes that in the New Testament "not the slightest attempt is made to attribute impassibility to Jesus Christ: emotions and passions are characteristic of his person."[34]

For example, the second century Father Ignatius of Antioch wrote to Polycarp: "Look for Him who is above all time, eternal and invisible, yet who became visible for our sakes; impalpable and impassible, yet who became passible on our account; and who

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[32]Nnamani, 59.

[33]Ibid.

[34]Ibid., 60.

in every kind of way suffered for our sakes."[35] Pollard says that for Ignatius the divine is impassible, yet in the incarnation becomes capable of suffering human emotions and passions: "No attempt is made to explain the paradox thus created by the introduction of the idea of impassibility, which nowhere appears in the NT, into the doctrine of the Incarnation."[36]

Nnamani comments that Ignatius, despite his accepting the Greek concept of apatheia, "admits that God suffered in Jesus Christ. The biblical idea of a God whose nature is paradoxical must have led him to affirm that God is paradoxically passible and impassible at the same time."[37]

Nnamani says that the "Apologists helped immensely to Christianise the concept of apatheia. For, not only do they intensify its use, they also completely avoid the application of 'pathos' — with the exception of compassion — to God."[38] He thinks that "it is typical of the Apologists to use the concept of apatheia, albeit as freedom from suffering and passions, to differentiate God from the mythological gods. In the process, however, they distance themselves from the biblical image of God as much as they intensify the predication of the Christian God with the concept of apatheia."[39]

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[35]Ignatius, 'Epistle to Polycarp' in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1 eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), III, p94.

[36]Pollard, "Impassibility," 357.

[37]Nnamani, 62.

[38]Ibid., 63.

[39]Ibid., 65.

The third century Latin Father Tertullian was greatly influenced by Stoicism. Nnamani says that for Tertullian, "God is intrinsically immutable and impassible. To that effect, he argues that the biblical assertions of the repentance, anger and compassion of God should not be taken at their face values. If at all God can be angry, His anger cannot be said to affect Him, His intrinsic immutability would not allow it [to] constitute a danger for Him. In this way Tertullian pushes the claim to divine apatheia to a level unknown to his predecessors; for not only does he consider all negative feelings unworthy of God, he also refuses — like nobody before him — to attribute sympathy or compassion to God."[40]

Tertullian wrote of Jesus: "You have Him exclaiming in the midst of His passion: 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?' Either, then, the Son suffered, being 'forsaken' by the Father, and the Father consequently suffered nothing, inasmuch as He forsook the Son; or else, if it was the Father who suffered, then to what God was it that He addressed His cry? But this was the voice of flesh and soul, that is to say, of man — not of the Word and Spirit, that is to say, not of God; and it was uttered so as to prove the impassibility of God, who 'forsook; His Son, so far as He handed over His human substance to the suffering of death."[41]

Tertullian thinks that in the two natures of Christ, "the poverty of each nature is so wholly preserved, that the Spirit on the one hand did all things in Jesus suitable to

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[40]Ibid., 70.

[41]Tertullian, "Against Praxes" in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol.3, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), XXX, pp.626-627.

Itself, such as miracles, and mighty deeds, and wonders; and the Flesh, on the other hand, exhibited the affections which belong to it. It was hungry under the devil's temptation, thirsty with the Samaritan woman, wept over Lazarus, was troubled even unto death, and at last actually died."[42]

Tertullian writes: "Now if the Father is incapable of suffering, He is incapable of suffering in company with another; otherwise, if He can suffer with another, He is of course capable of suffering. . . . [T]he Spirit of God, whatever suffering it might be capable of in the Son, yet, inasmuch as it could not suffer in the Father, *the fountain of the Godhead*, but only in the Son, it evidently could not have suffered, as the Father. But it is enough for me that the Spirit of God suffered nothing as the Spirit of God, since all that It suffered It suffered in the Son. . . not that He Himself suffers in our suffering, only He bestows on us the power and capacity of suffering."[43] Pollard observes that Tertullian "is the first to assert the impassibility of the divine in Christ."[44]

The Latin Father Lactantius takes a different approach: "For it cannot fail to be, that he who is just and good is displeased with things which are bad, and that he who is displeased with evil is moved when he see it practised. Therefore we arise to take vengeance, not because we have been injured, but that discipline may be preserved, morals may be corrected, and licentiousness be suppressed. This is just anger; and as it is necessary in man for the correction of wickedness, so manifestly is it necessary in God,

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[42]Ibid., XXVII, p. 624.

[43]Ibid., XXIX, p. 626.

[44]Pollard, "Impassibility," 358.

from whom an example comes to man."[45]

Nnamani says that for "Lactantius, passions and feelings are not incompatible with the perfection of God. He tries accordingly in the *De Ira Dei*, (to an extent unknown to his predecessors), to give emotion a place in the nature of God."[46] He thinks Lactantius' "view of divine anger definitely tends to strike a balance between divine perfection and emotion. It constitutes a radically new approach to the problem, which anticipates the interpretation of divine anger as an expression of love. In this way, Lactantius tries to preserve the biblical paradoxical view of divine attributes, notwithstanding his Greek influence."[47]

Clement was head of the catechetical school at Alexandria and taught that God is transcendent, ineffable, and incomprehensible. He writes: "But in the case of the Saviour, it were ludicrous [to suppose] that the body, as a body, demanded the necessary aids in order to its duration. For He ate, not for the sake of the body, which was kept together by a holy energy, but in order that it might not enter into the minds of those who were with Him to entertain a different opinion of Him; in like manner as certainly some afterwards supposed that He appeared in a phantasmal shape (δοκήσει). But He was entirely impassible (ἀπαθής); inaccessible to any movement of feeling — either

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[45]Lactantius, 'A Treatise on the Anger of God' in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), XVII, 274.

[46]Nnamani, 72.

[47]Ibid.

pleasure or pain."[48]

Clement values the Stoic notion of apatheia much more than any theologian before him and gives it a prominent place in his theology, especially in his doctrine of God. For Clement, God's absolute apatheia is as the difference between the divine and human modes of perfection. This leads him to an allegorical method of interpretation which he uses to purge the Bible of all the anthropopathetic expressions. Even Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is believed to not have really suffered any emotion, not even hunger. As Nnamani observes, "one would have expected that by becoming flesh, the Logos also made Himself subject to passion. However, according to Clement, He never suffered, because He trained the flesh 'to habitual impassibility'. Despite Clement's attack on Docetism, therefore, his views are ironically Docetist: For although he speaks of Christ who suffered for us, he does not believe that Christ suffered in reality. His views on the notion of divine impassibility are undoubtedly inconsistent."[49]

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[48]Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata" in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 2, VI,ix, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 496.

[49]Nnamani, 73. Indeed, Clement does say: "It is not, then, from hatred that the Lord chides men; for He Himself suffered for us, whom He might have destroyed for our faults." Clement says "the feeling of anger (if it is proper to call His admonition anger) is full of love to man, God condescending to emotion on man's account; for whose sake also the Word of God became man." ("The Instructor", I,ix, 228) He makes this admonition "Follow God, stripped of arrogance, stripped of fading display, possessed of that which is thine, — faith towards god, confession towards Him who suffered, beneficence towards men, which is the most precious possession." ("The Instructor", II, iii, 247) Clement says "But on the Scriptures being opened up, and declaring the truth to those who have ears, they proclaim the very suffering endured by the flesh, which the Lord assumed, to be 'the power and wisdom of God.'" ("The Stromata" VI, xv, 510) Clement writes "He who for our sakes assumed flesh capable of suffering" and "But neither does envy touch the Lord, who without beginning was impassible; nor are the

Clement says this about the Son: "For the Son is the power of God, as being the Father's most ancient Word before the production of all things, and His Wisdom. He is then properly called the Teacher of the beings formed by Him. Nor does He ever abandon care for men, by being drawn aside from pleasure, who, having assumed flesh, which by nature is susceptible of suffering, trained it to the condition of impassibility."[50] Nnamani says of this passage that "Here, one cannot avoid getting the impression, that Clement doubts the humanity of Jesus Christ."[51]

Clement seems to want to contrast God with the Greek deities "Now, as the Greeks represent the gods as possessing human forms, so also do they as possessing human passions."[52] Clement says: "As, then, God is not circumscribed by place, neither is ever represented by the form of a living creature; so neither has He similar passions, nor has He wants like the creatures, so as to desire sacrifice, from hunger, by way of food. Those creatures which are affected by passion are all mortal."[53] As Pollard concludes, in Clement the "paradox has disappeared and the Greek idea of divine impassibility has conquered."[54]

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things of men such as to be envied by the Lord." ("The Stromata" VII, ii, 524)

[50]Clement, "The Stromata", VII, ii, 524. See also "the habit of impassibility" VII, ii, 525 and VII, iii, 526.

[51]Nnamani, 73, n. 79.

[52]Clement, "The Stromata", VII, iv, 528.

[53]Ibid., VII,vi, 531.

[54]Pollard, "Impassibility," 358.

Origen succeeded Clement as head of the catechetical school in Alexandria and moved beyond him in constructing a theological system using the categories of Middle Platonism. Origen writes "But when we read either in the Old Testament or in the New of the anger of God, we do not take such expressions literally, but seek in them a spiritual meaning, that we may think of God as He deserves to be thought of."[55] Origen held an to an allegorical interpretation of scripture which allowed him to contend "that the biblical accounts of God's anger, repentance and jealousy are to be judged like other utterances about His sleep and bodily activities: they should not be understood literally."[56]

Athanasius developed his understanding of God in opposition to the Arian understanding of Jesus as a created body sent to suffer.[57] Nnamani says that Athanasius thinks of "the unity of the Natures of Christ in terms of the Logos-sarx-model, according to which the Logos became flesh merely as a 'garment' and remained untouched by the exigencies of the body. Hence his argument that although the Logos put on human flesh, the affections of the body 'did not touch Him according to His Godhead'. Accordingly, the human nature of Christ suffered, but his divine nature remained impassible."[58]

Athanasius says "And in the case of Lazarus, He gave forth a human voice, as man; but divinely, as God, did He raise from the dead. These things were so done, were

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[55]Origen, "De Principii" in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* vol. 4, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), II, iv.4, 278.

[56]Nnamani, 74.

[57]See Appendix One for a brief survey of the Arian Christ.

[58]Nnamani, 81.

so manifested, because He had a body, not in appearance, but in truth; and it became the Lord, in putting on human flesh, to put it on whole with the affections proper to it; that, as we say that the body was His own, so also we may say that the affections of the body were proper to Him alone, though they did not touch Him according to His Godhead."[59]

Athanasius says "the expressions used about His Godhead, and His becoming man, are to be interpreted with discrimination and suitably to the particular context. And he that writes of the human attributes of the Word knows also what concerns His Godhead: and he who expounds concerning His Godhead is not ignorant of what belongs to His coming in the flesh: but discerning each as a skilled and 'approved money-changer,' he will walk in the straight way of piety; when therefore he speaks of His weeping, he knows that the Lord, having become man, while he exhibits his human character in weeping, as God raises up Lazarus."[60]

Pollard says Athanasius retains the idea of divine impassibility and he asserts that it is the human in Christ which suffers. Pollard says that Athanasius asserts "the Impassible Word 'obliterates and destroys these affections so that men, their passions as if changed in the Impassible, henceforth become themselves also impassible'; and he equates 'passions' with 'sins'."[61]

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[59]Athanasius, "Four Discourse Against the Arians," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), IV, 32.

[60]Athanasius, "On the Opinion of Dionysius," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* vol. 4, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 9

[61]Pollard, "Impassibility," 359.

The Capadocian Father, Gregory of Nazianzen clearly understands Jesus to have two completely separate natures: "What is lofty you are to apply to the Godhead, and to that Nature in Him which is superior to sufferings and incorporeal; but all that is lowly to the composite condition of Him who for your sakes made Himself of no reputation and was Incarnate — yes, for it is no worse thing to say, was made Man, and afterwards was also exalted. The result will be that you will abandon these carnal and grovelling doctrines, and learn to be more sublime, and to ascend with His Godhead, and you will not remain permanently among the things of sight, but will rise up with Him into the world of thought, and come to know which passages refer to His Nature, and which to His assumption of Human Nature."[62] His admonition to be more sublime and rise up into the world of thought has a clear connection to a Platonic ideal of the nauture of God.

The Creed of Chalcedon

The relation of the divine in Christ to the divine in the Father was settled for the church at the council of Chalcedon. The Creed of Chalcedon said: "This one and the same Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son [of God] must be confessed to be in two natures, unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly, inseparably [united], and that without the distinction of natures being taken away by such union, but rather the peculiar property of each nature being preserved and being united in one Person and subsistence, not

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[62]Gregory of Nazianzen, *On the Son*, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, ed. Philp Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody: MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), XVIII.

separated or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son." The creed also said that the holy, great, and ecumenical synod: "it repels from the sacred assembly those who dare to say that the Godhead of the Only Begotten is capable of suffering; it resists those who imagine a mixture or confusion of the two natures of Christ."[63]

Grillmeier writes: "The Chalcedonian unity of person in the distinction of the natures provides the dogmatic basis for the preservation of the divine transcendence, which must always be a feature of the Christian concept of God. But it also shows the possibility of a complete immanence of God in our history, an immanence on which the biblical doctrine of the economy of salvation rests. The Chalcedonian definition may seem to have a static-ontic ring, but it is not meant to do away with the salvation-historical aspect of biblical christology, for which, in fact, it provides a foundation and deeper insights."[64]

The Christology of Divine Identity

The static-ontic ring that Grillmeier has identified is a problem because it does

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[63]See Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. *The Seven Ecumenical Councils* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* II, vol. 14 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 264-265.

[64]Grillmeier, 491. Fiddes points out that "we ought to notice that the Fathers themselves had problems with the suggested distinction between 'nature' and 'person'; the formula of Chalcedon makes no attempt to define these terms or to provide a metaphysical account of their relationship, but uses them in a rather doxological fashion as sign posts to truth." (p. 28)

not fit with the biblical witness of the dynamic, personal God who grieves and weeps with those who suffer. The two natures doctrine served an important place in the history of the church. It allowed for an understanding of Jesus that did not err on the side of Arian creature or the Patripassian absorption of the Father in the Son. However, it fails in its inability to do justice to the message revealed in the weeping of Jesus because the Chalcedonian definition cannot allow the suffering of grief in the human nature of Jesus to affect the divine nature — a problem that the New Testament authors did not have. There is another option for understanding the humanity and divinity of Christ in a way that avoids the errors of the heretics and the unbiblical static God of Greek philosophy used in orthodoxy.

Richard Bauckham provides a way to understand Jesus in a way that does justice to the biblical witness and upholds the idea that Jesus could truly grieve at the death of Lazarus and raise him from the dead. The apathy axiom is based on the assumption that the doctrine of God should begin with ontology, the question of the nature of God, and with the ideas inherited from Greek philosophy answers the questions of what God is — God is immutable, impassible and so on. Applied to Jesus, the answer to what Jesus is, is that he is two distinct natures — one human capable of suffering and grieving and one divine which must be impassible because God is impassible. In John's Gospel, rather than asking about the nature of the one they saw performing great signs, the people instead asked "who is this?" Is this Jeremiah? Is he the one they had been expecting?

Bauckham works with the key category of the identity of the God of Israel which focuses on who God is rather than what divinity is. He argues that early Judaism had

clear and consistent ways of characterizing the unique identity of the one God thus distinguishing the one God absolutely from all other reality. He thinks that when New Testament Christology is read with this Jewish theological context in mind, it becomes clear that, from the earliest post-Easter beginnings of Christology onwards, early Christians included Jesus, precisely and unambiguously, within the unique identity of the one God of Israel.[65]

Bauckham thinks the advantage of this approach is that when we think in terms of divine identity, rather than divine essence or nature, "we can see that the so-called divine functions which Jesus exercises are intrinsic to who God is. This Christology of divine identity is not a mere stage on the way to the patristic development of ontological Christology in the context of a trinitarian theology. It is already a fully divine Christology, maintaining that Jesus Christ is intrinsic to the unique and eternal identity of God. The Fathers did not develop it so much as transpose it into a conceptual framework

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[65]Richard Bauckham, *God Crucified: Monotheism and Christology in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), vii. Longenecker agrees that in the earliest Christian thought there was a "decided tendency to think first in functional and then in ontological categories. The dogmatic treatments of christology have invariably followed the logical order of considering first the person of Christ and then his work as is immediately obvious in leafing through the volumes on systematic theology which have been written since the apostolic period. . . . But for the Jerusalem Christians the functional had epistemic priority, even though ontological categories may be logically prior and were inherent in the substratum of their thought. For them, Jesus was first understood and proclaimed principally in terms of his redemptive activity on behalf of man, and only through their own reflections and circumstance arising as catalytic challenges to thought (both, I believe, providentially directed) were the implications of those earliest commitments explicated in regard to his person." Longenecker, *Christology*, 154.

constructed more in terms of the Greek philosophical categories of essence and nature."[66]

Since Jesus is the revelation of God, Bauckham suggests that the inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity had implications not only for who Jesus is but also for who God is. If it is taken seriously, as it was in the major forms of New Testament theology, that not only the pre-existent and the exalted Jesus but also the earthly, suffering, humiliated and crucified Jesus belong to the unique identity of God, then it had to be said that Jesus reveals the divine identity — who God truly is — in humiliation as well as exaltation, and in the connexion of the two." God's own identity "is revealed in Jesus, his life and his cross, just as truly as in his exaltation, in a way that is fully continuous and consistent with the Old Testament and Jewish understanding of God, but is also novel and surprising. While the Fathers successfully appropriated, in their own way in Nicene theology, the New Testament's inclusion of Jesus in the identity of God, they were less successful in appropriating this corollary, the revelation of the divine identity in Jesus' human life and passion."[67]

Bauckham thinks that since the biblical God has a name and a character, since this god acts, speaks, relates, can be addressed, and in some sense known, the analogy of human personal identity suggests itself as the category with which to synthesize the biblical and Jewish understanding of God. He has a personal identity and the identity of God, in the Jewish understanding, breaks out of the human analogy, but its starting-point

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[66]Ibid., viii.

[67]Ibid., viii-ix.

is clearly the analogy of human personal identity.[68]

Bauckham says identity concerns who god is; nature concerns what God is or what divinity is. Greek philosophy, "in a way that was to influence the Christian theological tradition in the period after the New Testament, typically defined divine nature by means of a series of metaphysical attributes: ingenerateness, incorruptibility, immutability, and so on. . . . That God is eternal, for example — a claim essential to all Jewish thinking about God — is not so much a statement about what divine nature is, more an element in the unique identity, along with claims that God alone created all things and rules all things, that God is gracious and merciful and just, that God brought Israel out of Egypt and made Israel his own people and gave Israel his law at Sinai, and so on."[69]

Bauckham says the acts of God and "the character description of God combine to indicate a consistent identity of the One who acts graciously towards his people and can be expected to do so. Through the consistency of his acts and character, the One called YHWH shows himself to be one and the same."[70] He thinks that "the intention of New Testament Christology, throughout the texts, is to include Jesus in the unique divine identity as Jewish monotheism understood it. The writers do this deliberately and comprehensively by using precisely those characteristics of the divine identity on which Jewish monotheism focused in characterizing God as unique. They include Jesus in the

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[68]Ibid., 7-8.

[69]Ibid., 8.

[70]Ibid., 9.

unique divine sovereignty over all things, they include him in the unique divine creation of all things, they identify him by the divine name which names the unique divine identity, and they portray him as accorded the worship which, for Jewish monotheists, is recognition of the unique divine identity. In this way they develop a kind of christological monotheism which is fully continuous with early Jewish monotheism but distinctive in the way it sees Jesus Christ himself as intrinsic to the identity of the unique God."[71]

Bauckham writes that the "unique divine sovereignty is a matter of *who God is*. Jesus' participation in the unique divine sovereignty is therefore also not just a matter of what Jesus does, but of *who Jesus is* in relation to God. Though not primarily a matter of divine nature or being, it emphatically *is* a matter of divine identity. It includes Jesus in the identity of the one God. When extended to include Jesus in the creative activity of God, and therefore also in the eternal transcendence of God, it becomes unequivocally a matter of regarding Jesus as *intrinsic* to the unique identity of God."[72]

Bauckham says that the assumption "usually is that whereas first-century Jewish monotheists could attribute divine 'functions' to Jesus without difficulty, since this would not infringe Jewish monotheism, they could not easily attribute divine 'nature' to him without raising difficult issues for monotheism with which only later trinitarian developments could cope (successfully or not). However, this is to misconstrue Jewish monotheism in Hellenistic terms as though it were primarily concerned with *what*

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[71]Ibid., 26-27.

[72]Ibid., 41.

divinity is — divine nature — rather than with *who YHWH, the unique God, is* — divine identity. The whole category of divine identity and Jesus' inclusion in it has been fundamentally obscured by the alternative of 'functional' and 'ontic', understood to mean that either Christology speaks simply of what Jesus does or else it speaks of his divine nature."[73]

For the early Christians, Bauckham thinks, "the inclusion of the exalted Jesus in the divine identity meant that the Jesus who lived a truly and fully human life from conception to death, the man who suffered rejection and shameful death, also belonged to the unique divine identity. What did this say about the divine identity?"[74]

If we consider Jesus as the revelation of God, Bauckham thinks the most profound "points of New Testament Christology occur when the inclusion of the exalted Christ in the divine identity entails the inclusion of the crucified Christ in the divine identity, and when the christological pattern of humiliation and exaltation is recognized as revelatory of God, indeed as the definitive revelation of who God is. Such a revelation could not leave the early Christian understanding of God unaffected, but at the same time the God whose identity the New Testament writers understood to be now defined by the history of Jesus was undoubtedly the God of Israel."[75] The inclusion of the earthly Jesus and his death in the identity of God means that the cross reveals who God is.[76]

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[73]Ibid., 42.

[74]Ibid., 46.

[75]Ibid., 46-47.

[76]Ibid., 63.

In the New Testament, Bauckham says: "Here God is seen to be God in his radical self-giving, descending to the most abject human condition, and in that human obedience, humiliation, suffering and death, being no less truly God than he is in his cosmic rule and glory on the heavenly throne. . . . The divine identity is known in the radical contrast and conjunction of exaltation and humiliation — as the God who is Creator of all things, and no less truly God in the human life of Jesus; as the God who is Sovereign over all things, and no less truly God in Jesus' human obedience and service; as the God of transcendent majesty who is no less truly God in the abject humiliation of the cross."[77]

Bauckham makes two points: first, the New Testament writers clearly and deliberately include Jesus in the unique identity of the God of Israel; and second, the inclusion of the human life and shameful death, as well as the exaltation of Jesus, in the divine identity reveals the divine identity — who God is — in a new way.

It was not Jewish but Greek philosophical categories which made it difficult to attribute true and full divinity to Jesus. A Jewish understanding of divine identity was open to the inclusion of Jesus in the divine identity. But Greek philosophical — Platonic — definitions of divine substance or nature and Platonic understanding of the relationship of God to the world made it extremely difficult to see Jesus as more than a semi-divine being, neither truly God nor truly human. Nicene theology was essentially an attempt to resist the implications of Greek philosophical understandings of divinity and to re-appropriate in a new conceptual context the New Testament's inclusion of

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[77]Ibid., 68.

Jesus in the unique divine identity. The conceptual shift from Jewish to Greek categories was from categories focused on divine identity — who God is — to categories focused on divine being or nature — what God is.

Bauckham suggests that if the patristic development of dogma secured for a new conceptual context the New Testament's inclusion of Jesus in the unique divine identity, the Fathers were much less successful in appropriating the second key feature of New Testament Christology — the revelation of the divine identity in the human life of Jesus and his cross. Here, "the shift to categories of divine nature and the Platonic definition of divine nature which the fathers took for granted proved serious impediments to anything more than a formal inclusion of human humiliation, suffering and death in the identity of God. That God was crucified is indeed a patristic formulation, but the Fathers largely resisted its implications for the doctrine of God."[78]

In summary, the Greek philosophical idea of the impassibility of God became such an important part of Christian doctrine of God that apathy was the axiom on which the doctrine of God was based. The classical Christian doctrine of the two natures of Christ tends to posit a disunity of the human and divine natures of Christ in the unity of Christ by positing an impenetrable barrier between the human and divine to ensure that the divine in Christ is not affected by the feelings and sufferings of the human. The

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[78]Ibid., 77-79. Gregory of Nazianan writes: "We needed an Incarnate God, a God put to death, that we might live. We were put to death together with Him, that we might be cleansed; we rose again with Him because we were put to death with Him; we were glorified with Him, because we rose again with Him." He goes on to say: "God crucified. . . for it was fitting that the creatures should suffer with their Creator." *The Second Oration on Easter* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* II, vol. 7, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), XXVIII, XXIX.

genuine concern of the Fathers to develop a doctrine of God that would avoid the extremes of the heretics led them to an understanding of God different from the unity of Jesus and God in the New Testament and the Christology of the early Jewish Christians. The advantage of the Christology that Bauckham has outlined is that it allows the humanity of Jesus, including his weeping and suffering, to be included in the divine in Christ. It allows the tears of Jesus to communicate the grief of God in continuity with the Old Testament prophets because his grief is part of the divine identity, just as it was in Jeremiah. The apathy axiom is the reason why it has been difficult for many to see the weeping of Jesus as an expression of the tears of God.

This raises some important questions. As Nnamani observes, if anthropomorphic metaphors in the Old Testament suggesting divine passibility point to the reality of God and if Jesus Christ reveals God absolutely, the possibility of divine suffering must be taken for granted. "Our question is therefore not *whether* God suffers, but *how* He suffers."[79] We affirm that "He suffers in a divine way; this means that His suffering is an expression of His freedom; for He is not just touched by suffering, He *allows* suffering, in His freedom, to touch Him. He does not suffer like creatures out of a deficiency in being, He suffers out of and in His love, which is the abundance of His being. Thus, the point of discontinuity between God and humankind is not that God does not suffer, but that He suffers differently: Whereas human beings suffer out of deficiency, even when they suffer for the sake of love, God suffers freely and solely out of and in the fullness of

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[79]Nnamani, 390.

His love."[80]

[80]Ibid.. 391.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE REQUIREMENT OF AN EMPATHY AXIOM

Thy Maker lay and wept for me,
Wept for me, for thee, for all,
When He was an infant small.

William Blake
"A Cradle Song"

In contrast to the impassible Jesus reflected in the carol 'Away in a Manger', Blake's 'A Cradle Song' supposes another way of thinking about the God revealed in Jesus as weeping for humanity in the manger just as he would later weep for Jerusalem and at the death of Lazarus. The tears of Jesus communicate the love of God. This suggests an idea of God in Jesus not based on an axiom of the essential apathy of God but one based on the love of God for his creatures, a love that caused Jesus to empty himself, take on the form of a servant and become obedient to death (Phil. 2:6-11). This is a love that shares in the suffering that is the result of sin — a love based on empathy. In contrast to the apathy axiom, this view of God is based on an axiom of empathy, because love requires involvement and participation, pathos and sympathy.

In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine describes how he was deeply affected by the death of his childhood friend Nebridius. He says to God: "For whithersoever the soul of man turns itself, unless towards Thee, it is affixed to sorrows." He concludes that sorrow is the inevitable result of giving his heart to anyone or anything but God, and the only way for love to be a blessing and not misery, it must be for the only Beloved who will not

pass away.[1] C.S. Lewis says these words of Augustine bring tears to his eyes, but he heartily disagrees with Augustine's conclusion that we should (or can) prefer only safe investments with our love. Lewis writes: "I think that this passage in the *Confessions* is less a part of St. Augustine's Christendom than a hangover from the high-minded Pagan philosophies in which he grew up. It is closer to Stoic 'apathy' or neo-Platonic mysticism than to charity. We follow One who wept over Jerusalem and at the grave of Lazarus, and, loving all, yet had one disciple whom, in a special sense, he 'loved.'"[2]

Lewis asks, "Even if we were granted that assurances against heartbreak were our highest wisdom, does God Himself offer them? Apparently not. Christ comes at last to say 'Why hast thou forsaken me?'"[3] Lewis concludes from this that there can be no escape from the sufferings of love like that which Augustine suggests. Lewis thinks: "To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one. . . . It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."[4]

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[1]Augustine, *Confessions* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* I, vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), IV. 7-12.

[2]C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Glasgow: Fount Paperbacks, 1989), 111.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid., 11-12.

Lewis believes that "bereavement is a universal and integral part of our experience of love."[5] This is also true for the love of God, but this in no way implies that God is weak. Lewis concludes: "If the immutable heart can be grieved by the puppets of its own making, it is Divine Omnipotence, no other, that has so subjected it, freely, and in a humility that passes understanding."[6]

This is a profound and eloquent critique of the apathy axiom. The kind of empathic, vulnerable love of God, which takes risks is at the heart of many contemporary theologies including Moltmann and Jung Young Lee.[7] Even Godly love requires risk, vulnerability, and bereavement because God is love (1 Jn. 4:8).

Lewis is correct — believers do follow the One who wept over Jerusalem and at the grave of Lazarus. It would be wrong to conclude from this biblical witness of a passible God that God is not sovereign but so dependent on and affected by the world that he is powerless over it.[8] In the Lazarus story the weeping of Jesus is followed by the raising of Lazarus from the dead — a profound witness to the power of God, even over death. The weeping of Jesus does not reveal weakness but love. When the Judeans saw

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[5]C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Bantom Books, 1976), 58-59.

[6]C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London: Fount Paperbacks, 1998), 35.

[7]See also Clark Pinnock, et al, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994); John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998).

[8]This is a description of process theology. For a discussion of the differences between process and the kind of theology we are describing, see John B. Cobb Jr., and Clark H. Pinnock, eds., *Searching for an Adequate God: A Dialogue Between Process and Free Will Theists* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

the tears, they responded by observing "See how he loved him!" (Jn. 11:36) The empathic love revealed in the tears of Jesus is not the weakness of God but the power of God to transform mourning into joy.

The notion of the vulnerable love of God is expressed well by Gregory Boyd. He says: "This is the omnipotent Creator who 'flexes his omnipotent muscle,' as it were, by being born in a stable, growing up with the stigma of being an illegitimate child, hanging out with sinners, and dying a God-forsaken death on the cross! To the natural understanding, this is foolishness. . . . God is so sovereign, he chooses to save the world by allowing himself to become weak. Since Jesus is for believers the very definition of God (John 1:18; 14:7-10; Heb. 1:3), we must not think of the cross as an exception to the way God really is. Rather, the cross constitutes the supreme example of the way of God. God rules by love, not control. God's unchanging gracious character leads him to change in response to us. God's glory is displayed in his allowing himself to be affected by us."[9]

There is no weakness in freely choosing to suffer. H. Wheeler Robinson says that "It is only when suffering is brought into relation with God that its larger significance can be seen. More especially. . . it is the suffering of God Himself, revealed through Jesus Christ, which throws most light on the suffering of man, and bestows most strength on the sufferer."[10]

Robinson argues that it is obvious "that the personality of Jesus as known in the

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[9]Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 68-69.

[10]H. Wheeler Robinson, *Suffering Human and Divine* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1940), 45.

days of His flesh will profoundly influence the conception of God which we derive from Him. However we conceive the relation of the human to the divine in Him, His is at least the kind of life that can reveal God. One of its outstanding features is that it is a life of suffering in the years that are known to us, and of a particular reaction to that suffering."[11] Part of his suffering was the pain of bereavement at the loss of a dear friend.

Robinson argues that when Semitic faith moved to Greek ways of thinking about God, one of which was as impassible, God was "removed from any capacity to suffer, indeed to feel, as men do. It was taken for granted by Christian theologians that the Biblical ways of speaking about divine emotion were no more than figures of speech. As for the divine in Christ which apparently shared His human suffering, a sharp line came to be drawn between the human and the divine natures. The suffering belonged to the human side of Him, but not to the divine, for how could the divine suffer?"[12]

Robinson says that only "in the modern world, with its revived interest in the humanity of Jesus, and its reaction from what has seemed to many the artificiality of this kind of distinction between the human and the divine, has there been a return to the language of the Bible. From the suffering Christ, and with more or less explicit emphasis on the unity of His personality as seen in the earlier Gospels, men have looked up to a suffering Father. It has seemed to them monstrous to think of God as unmoved by the

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[11]Ibid., 161.

[12]Ibid., 164-165.

sufferings of humanity, for some of which He is responsible in having created them."[13]

Robinson points out that the "more we appeal to the love of Christ for man, in life and in death, as revealing the love of the Father, the more we seem driven to ascribe the sacrificial quality of that love, its very essence and core, to the Father as well as the Son."[14] He argues that the "human *love* of Jesus was necessary as the effective language of the divine; is not the human *cost* inseparable from the love?"[15] The weeping of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus, which is a prelude to his suffering in Gethsemane and the cross, illustrates the deep cost of his love.

The Empathy Axiom in Contemporary Theology

Jung Young Lee

It is revealing of the pervasiveness of Greek philosophical ideas in Western thought that to find a theology that is more in tune with the biblical witness of the God who feels, suffers and mourns we have to go to a Korean Lutheran theologian who does not begin with the traditional western assumptions about what God must be like.[16] In his

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[13]Ibid., 165.

[14]Ibid., 177.

[15]Ibid., 179.

[16]Henri Blocher makes an important point when he says that "we become easily critical of past generations: we are amazed that they could imbibe so naively Platonic prejudices — obvious axioms to them. . . . Too zealous an attempt to remove the ontological speck from our fathers' eyes should make us suspicious of ourselves! We are in danger of falling into the *same* trap — on the other side." Henri Blocher, "Divine

book *God Suffers for Us*[17] he proposes an Eastern understanding of God based on the *I ching*.[18] This is not to suggest that Lee's system is necessarily any better or worse than classical Christian theology.[19] It is, however, interesting that by beginning without the apathy axiom that is such an important part of western theology and using insights from eastern philosophy, Lee is able to construct a picture of God and his relationship to humanity that is more compatible with the biblical witness of the God who mourns, grieves, and suffers than has much of Christian theology.

Lee's study of the suffering of God is based on the conviction that "God as the Ultimate reality is essentially love, which is 'the drive toward the reunion of the separated.' This drive for reunion makes God participate in the world. This act of the divine love to participate in the world of sin or the empathy of God creates the passibility

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Immutability," in *The Power and Weakness of God: Impassibility and Orthodoxy*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1990), 4.

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

[18]See Warren McWilliams, *The Passion of God: Divine Suffering in Contemporary Protestant Theology* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1985), 150-156 for a discussion of Lee's use of the *I ching*.

[19]Warren McWilliams points out that Lee's use of the *I ching* pushes him toward a monistic, mystical understanding of God, especially in his later work. McWilliams says: "My concern is that Lee's later thought may be governed too much by the *I ching's* metaphysic rather than the biblical revelation. Anyone who proposes a new understanding of the Christian faith in light of a different world view expects this type of criticism. Lee is not wrong to try an Eastern interpretation of the Christian faith. The problem is in allowing the Eastern view to distort the biblical witness. Lee attempts to uphold the integrity of the Christian faith and the Eastern mentality, but on this issue he seems to sacrifice the former to the latter."(p.168) See also 166-172.

of God."[20] We will call this starting place for relationship with the world the empathy axiom in order to contrast it with the apathy axiom.

Lee argues that empathy is a function of agape, not sympathy. He says it has been commonly accepted that, if God suffers at all, He must suffer in pure sympathy because "God, whose nature is perfect and self-sufficient, does not suffer for Himself but suffers vicariously and sympathetically for the suffering of His children. . . . Sympathy is one's identification of himself with the feeling of others without an actual participation in it." This definition of sympathy causes him to question whether the concept of sympathy is compatible with that of *Agape*.[21] Lee suggests the idea of the empathy of God is better because, in the Bible, "God does not relate to us in terms of sympathetic identification but in terms of empathic participation."[22] It might be added that the weeping of Jesus at the grave of Lazarus expresses it well.

Lee defines the empathy of God "as the participation of divine feeling (or pathos) into human feeling that the unity of feeling (not the imaginary identity) is attained."[23] This unity of experience between God and man is possible through the empathy of God because God and man are united and become one in *experience*. Thus, the empathy of God makes it possible for God to be united with man in experience. This unity of experience through the unity of feeling is possible only in participation. This is precisely

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[20]Lee, 3.

[21]Ibid., 10.

[22]Ibid., 12.

[23]Ibid.

why the empathy of God is differentiated from the sympathy of God because it is not the identification of divine pathos but the participation of it into the world that makes the unity of experience between man and God possible.

In this participation the experience of God is united with the experience of man. It is not the merger of God and man; but the unity of them is possible because of the unity of their experience in empathy. Thus, "in the empathy of God, God fully participates in us as the Person without losing His essential nature as the divine, so that we can also participate in His participation as persons without losing our essential nature as a human being. Therefore, this genuine personal relationship between God and man (or the 'I-Thou' participation) is possible because of divine empathy."[24]

Lee makes a contrast between suffering and pain. He suggests that pain is bound to the body which puts us in touch with things while suffering occurs when the bonds which relate us to others are threatened or destroyed. Suffering deals with psychological and spiritual dimensions of life even though it is inseparable with pain, which deals with the physical dimensions of life.[25] This is why he concludes that since "God is Spirit, the category of pain, which we have understood in terms of a sensation bound to the physical body, does not belong to Him. Therefore, the concept of suffering is a legitimate form only of divine experience."[26]

Lee says that "the potentiality of divine suffering is to be understood in terms of

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[24]Ibid., 13.

[25]Ibid., 17.

[26]Ibid.

the intimacy of His love which works though His empathy, the participation of His pathos."[27] He suggests that the destruction of a loving relationship may produce the most severe suffering, which we often experience when our closest one leaves us alone by death or separation.[28] This is true for God too because the God whose nature is *Agape* is capable of suffering.[29]

Lee says "*Agape*, then, suffers only in relation to what is being estranged from God. In other words, *Agape* suffers *only* in the empathy of God on account of the sin of the world. That is, God suffers only in the participation of His pathos in the world of sin."[30]

Lee says "the 'Servant of the Lord' is a characteristic symbol of divine suffering"[31] which becomes historical reality in Jesus Christ. Since *Agape* is the nature of God, passibility is a divine attribute on the basis of *Agape*. Lee defines the "empathy of God as the participation of divine pathos or feeling in human feeling, which unites both divine and human experience."[32]

Even though Lee comes from the east, he is well aware of what we have called the apathy axiom and is very critical of it for distorting the biblical picture of God. He

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[27]Ibid., 18.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid., 19.

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid., 20.

[32]Ibid., 23.

observes: "One of the characteristics of Greek philosophy is the degradation of passion. Thus God, who is the Good, cannot be considered to possess the element of passion of feeling in His own nature."[33] Lee says "Plato associates passion with an animal instinct of man, which is rather commonly observed in the behavior of children. Consequently, the divine who represents the perfection of the highest good must be free from any element of pathos."[34]

Lee thinks that the undue emphasis on the unity of the Father and the Son by modalistic monarchians and the undue emphasis on the distinction of the Son from the Father of the anti-patripassians are errors that are pointed out by the empathy of God: "The archetype of divine empathy signifies the paradoxical unity of experience between the identity and distinction of 'persons' in the Godhead. It functions as to unite both the Father and the Son without destroying their unity. In other words, the 'I-Thou' relationship between the Father and the Son in the form of empathy is neither a mutual identification nor a mutual distinction but a mutual involvement through a unity of their experience."[35]

This is why Lee is critical of the idea that the two natures of Christ are completely separate with no affect on each other. He argues that if "Christ's divine nature is incapable of experiencing the suffering of His humanity, it implies that the former is also unable to share and to participate in the latter. According to the empathy of God, the

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[33]Ibid., 28.

[34]Ibid., 29.

[35]Ibid., 37.

relationship between the human and divine in Christ is not only mutually inclusive but also mutually participant, in order to unite both of them in the oneness of action and being of Jesus Christ. In other words, in this paradoxical union of experience between the divine and the human in Christ, what the man Jesus experiences is also in the experience of divine nature. It is decisively so, because 'God's deity does not exclude, but includes His *humanity*.'"[36]

Since the deity of God includes the humanity of Jesus, the real meaning of incarnation is "the faithful and unbroken relationship between God and man through the complete and perfect participation of the divine pathos in human experience."[37] It is the perfect analogy of divine empathy because in "incarnation both divine and human are not only united in will and thought but in pathos."[38] In fact, "the incarnation was the consequence of divine passibility."[39]

This is why, for Lee, the "denial of the suffering of the Father in spite of the suffering of His Son is also the denial of the intimate relationship between the Father and the Son through the Holy Spirit. If we believe that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit are so completely and perfectly participating in one another as to be one in experience, the suffering of Christ ought to be the suffering of the Father and the Holy Spirit as well. . . . To say it simply, the suffering of Jesus Christ was the suffering of the triune God

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[36]Ibid., 38.

[37]Ibid., 52.

[38]Ibid., 54.

[39]Ibid., 56.

Himself. Therefore, we must radically repudiate the doctrine of impassibility in the light of the divine Trinity as the archetype of divine empathy."[40]

The empathy of God has great relevance to the problem of human suffering. Lee says that the "New Testament answer to the problem of suffering is the Cross, which transcends all the logical protests against the great and unjust sufferings in the world."[41] The empathetic suffering of God in the cross thus gives meaning to human suffering because all suffering is also God's suffering, and suffering that has meaning can provide strength to endure. For Lee, "the fellowship of divine and human suffering sustains in us the hope of anticipation, that is, the coming of the joy of eternal glory."[42] This is why even though our "temporal suffering is so oppressive and grievous, the joy of eternal glory, which is yet to come, still outweighs the temporal suffering."[43]

Lee says: "To sum up, our suffering can be overcome only in the fellowship of divine and human suffering, which sustains in us an ability to see the positive significance in our suffering, strength to endure the present moment of suffering, and the hope of anticipation in the joy of eternal glory."[44] What a beautiful description of the fellowship of Jesus who mourned with those who mourned and revealed the hope by raising Lazarus from the dead. For Lee, "genuine empathy with the suffering of others

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[40]Ibid., 75.

[41]Ibid., 81.

[42]Ibid., 85.

[43]Ibid., 86. See also McWilliams, 165.

[44]Lee, 87.

requires some experience of suffering, even though it may not be a similar experience."[45]

The weeping of Jesus at the death of Lazarus communicates the empathy of God.

Kazo Kitamori

Another theologian from the east who questions the application of Greek philosophical categories to the God of the Bible is the Japanese Lutheran theologian, Kazo Kitamori.[46] In his book *Theology of the Pain of God*, Kitamori says "no concept is so *remote* from the biblical concept of God as 'essence.' Those who know God as revealed to Jeremiah and Paul notice immediately that God defined as 'essence' is missing one vital point: his *real* essence, his true heart. The pain of God which Jeremiah saw, the love in the cross which Paul saw — this is the essence of God, this is the heart of God. Consequently, the 'essence' of God presented in classical Trinitarian doctrine may be called an *essence without essence*."[47]

In contrast to Lee who does not think pain can be attributed to God, who is spirit, Kitamori thinks that in "the gospel the final word is the *pain of God.* In trying to reveal

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[45]Ibid., 89.

[46]See McWilliams, 99-118 for a helpful analysis of the theology of Kitamori. Kitamori says "non-Western theology can claim its own unique contribution to the understanding of the gospel. . . . Ecumenical theology is concretely, not abstractly universal. That is, it is the universal mediated by the particular. Thus, for example, Greek theology is a particular theology." (p. 7) This is why he thinks it is legitimate for Japanese theology, as a non-Western theology freed from the particularity Greek theology, to approach the Bible from a fresh point of view. (p. 8)

[47]Kazo Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1965), 46.

his own pain to us as human beings, God communicates through human pain."[48] Despite the difference in terminology, he does understand the category of pain to reveal the empathetic suffering of God. Thus, when he reads Jeremiah (for example Jer. 31:20) he concludes that "Jeremiah must have seen in God the same condition of the heart which the prophets and psalmists themselves experienced. What kind of condition? The pain! The pain of God!"[49]

Kitamori says "By serving as witness to the pain of God, our pain is transformed into light; it becomes meaningful and fruitful. By the pain of God which overcomes his wrath, our pain, which had hitherto been the reality of the wrath of God, ends in salvation from this wrath."[50] God is in pain because of the conflict within himself between his love and wrath.[51] He says the "'pain' of God reflects his will to love the object of his wrath."[52] He thinks that "Man's pain and God's pain are qualitatively different. . . . Man's pain is unproductive; it is darkness without light. God's pain is productive; it is darkness with the light of salvation. (This is why God's 'pain' is connected with his 'love.') But in spite of the difference between these two kinds of pain, they still correspond. Their nature is different, but they have common ground. Standing on this common ground of pain (we are experiencing it now!), we glimpse the image of what is

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[48]Ibid., 47.

[49]Ibid., 153.

[50]Ibid., 52-53.

[51]Ibid., 59.

[52]Ibid., 21.

taking place in God's grace. God is in pain. The personification of God's pain is Jesus Christ."[53] Kitamori concludes: "'Love rooted in the pain of God' cannot be observed objectively outside of our human experience. There is no way to see it other than experiencing it in our own life."[54]

Kitamori says "God continues to live in the person of the Father while dying in the person of the Son. The death of God the Son can be called the pain of God because the person of the Father lived. Pain can only be experienced by the living, not by the dead who are already freed from suffering."[55]

Kitamori thinks that "we must speak about the things of God by using our human experience. This is essentially the meaning of 'witness.' Witness is possible only when such an experience is given in human language, not in God's terms, for our witness is intended for all mankind. In witnessing, men's affairs serve the things of God. In witnessing to God's pain, man's pain serves this purpose."[56]

Kitamori's theology of the pain of God applies well to the weeping of Jesus and the raising of Lazarus. In this view, the deep emotional response of Jesus in John 11:33 and the tears of Jesus in verse 35 reveal the pain of God as his love encounters the result of his wrath — death and the pain of bereavement. Kitamori's idea that the pain of God is productive is illustrated well in the raising of Lazarus. God's pain is darkness resulting

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[53]Ibid., 167.

[54]Ibid., 167.

[55]Ibid., 115.

[56]Ibid., 147.

in light and life. The pain of God revealed in the tears of Jesus ends in salvation from his wrath in the resurrection to life.

Like Lee's theology, Kitamori's non-Western view of God is not necessarily better overall than any other theological system,[57] but it is a good illustration of how the apathy axiom in theology can distort the picture of God in the Lazarus story.

Jürgen Moltmann

In contrast to the differences in cultural presuppositions in the theologians from the east — Lee and Kitamori — German theologian Jürgen Moltmann came to challenge the traditional axiom of the apathy of God through his personal experience. As a young man he was imprisoned in an allied prisoner-of-war camp as his hometown of Hamburg lay in ruins from the violence of the Second World War.[58] His experiences led him to the Bible and he came to realize that the God he found there was not static and apathetic. This was revealed most clearly to him through the cry of Jesus on the cross "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34) He realized that this was his cry too and felt that the suffering Jesus understood his suffering and this gave him hope and the courage to live.

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[57]Warren McWilliams suggests that "Kitamori's perspective would be more cogent and perhaps more biblical if he complemented the pain of God with an emphasis on divine sorrow or empathy. . . . An examination of all of God's feelings (e.g., joy, sorrow, etc.) would put his discussion of divine pain in a broader spectrum." McWilliams, 116.

[58]For an autobiographical account of Moltmann's wartime experiences and their affect on his faith see *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 2-3.

Although his understanding of God is primarily based on the revelation of God in the suffering of Jesus on the cross, Moltmann's theology is consistent with the idea that the empathic love of God is communicated in the weeping of Jesus. For example, he writes: "For me, faith in the resurrection is the faith in God of lovers and the dying, the suffering and the mourners. So it is no myth. The resurrection faith acquires its meaning in the struggles of love against death. We already experience resurrection here and now, in the midst of life, when we rise up against death in life, against the oppressions and the hurts to which life here is subjected. In love, resurrection is not merely expected; it is already experienced."[59] This is a very good description of John 11.

For Moltmann, "God goes with us, God suffers with us. So where Christ, God's Son, goes, the Father goes too. In the self-giving of the Son we discern the self-giving of God. If this were not so, the Gospel of John could not say 'He who sees me sees the Father' (John 14.9)."[60] Moltmann says "God always helps first by suffering with us. 'Even in hell you are there.' So no suffering can cut us off from this companionship of the God who suffers with us. The God of Jesus Christ is the God who is on the side of the victims and the sufferers, in solidarity with them."[61]

Moltmann argues that if we follow the fashion of Greek philosophy and ask what attributes are 'appropriate' for God, differentiation, diversity, movement, and suffering all have to be excluded from the divine nature. The divine substance is incapable of

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[59]Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 4.

[60]Ibid., 38.

[61]Ibid., 40.

suffering; otherwise it would not be divine. Impassible, immovable, uncompounded, and self-sufficing, the Deity stands over against a moved, suffering, divided, and never self-sufficient world. For the divine substance is the founder and sustainer of this world of transitory phenomena; it abides eternally; and so it cannot itself be subjected to this world's destiny.

Moltmann says that if we turn instead to the theological proclamation of Christian tradition, we find at its centre the history of Christ's passion. The Gospels tell us about the sufferings and death of Christ. He asks, if deity cannot suffer, then how can Christian faith see Christ's passion as the revelation of what God is?

Moltmann thinks that right down to the present day the apathy axiom has left a deeper impression on the fundamental concepts of the doctrine of God than has the history of Christ's passion. To be incapable of suffering evidently counts as the irrelinquishable attribute of divine perfection and bliss. He asks, does this not mean that right down to the present day, Christian theology has failed to develop a consistently Christian concept of God and that it has leaned instead on the metaphysical tradition of Greek philosophy?[62]

For Moltmann, the ability to identify God with Christ's passion dwindles in proportion to the importance that is given to the apathy axiom in the doctrine of God. If God is incapable of suffering, then logically speaking, Christ's passion can only be viewed as a human tragedy. And anyone who can only see in Christ's passion nothing more than the suffering of the good man from Nazareth must inevitably view God as the

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[62]See also Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 21.

cold, silent and unloved heavenly power.

Moltmann points out that numerous attempts have been made to mediate christologically between apathy and passion so as to preserve the apathy axiom; but he thinks it would seem more consistent if we simply stopped making the axiom of God's apathy our starting point and started from the axiom of God's passion instead, so as to understand Christ's suffering as the passion of the passionate God.

Moltmann suggests two reasons why the patristic church held to the apathy axiom even though Christian devotion adored the crucified Christ as God and Christian proclamation was able to talk about God suffering. First, God's essential incapacity for suffering distinguishes him from human beings and all other non-divine things, which are subject to suffering as well as to transience and death. Second, if God confers salvation on human beings by giving them a share in his eternal life, then this salvation also confers on human beings immortality, non-transience, and with it the incapacity for suffering too.

Apathy is therefore the very essence of the divine nature, and the purest manifestation of human salvation in communion with God. Moltmann thinks that logically the argument falls short because it takes account of only a single alternative: either an essential incapacity for suffering, or a fateful subjection to suffering. He thinks there is another, third form of suffering too: active suffering, the willingness to open oneself to be touched — moved — affected by something other than oneself; and that means the suffering of passionate love. If God were in every way incapable of suffering, he would be incapable of love. If he is capable of loving something other than himself,

then he opens himself for the suffering which love for the other brings him, while still remaining master of the pain which is the consequence of his love: "God does not suffer out of deficiency of being, like created beings. But he does suffer from his love, which is the overflowing superabundance of his being. And in this sense he can suffer.[63]

For Moltmann, the God who has become human has made our lives part of his life and our sufferings his sufferings. That is why when we feel pain we participate in his pain, and when we grieve we share his grief.[64] Moltmann says the "God who is not part of nature but stands over against it independently as its Creator makes human beings, as his image, correspond to him in standing over against both the visible creation and themselves."[65] He thinks that "theologically, the human being's likeness to God is not based on the *qualities* of human beings. It is grounded in their relationship to God."[66] He argues that a "God who cannot feel suffering cannot understand us. A God who cannot suffer cannot love either."[67]

Moltmann thinks the human being is "God's indirect manifestation on earth. To be an image of something always means letting that something appear, and revealing

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[63]Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 42-45. See also *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 23.

[64]Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 45-46.

[65]Jürgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 80.

[66]Ibid., 84. See also 98-99, 101.

[67]Ibid., 184.

it."[68] Moltmann says "Hope finds in Christ not only a consolation *in* suffering, but also the protest of the divine promised *against* suffering. . . . Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it."[69]

Moltmann observes: "At the moments of God's profoundest revelation there is always suffering: the cry of the captives in Egypt; Jesus' death cry on the cross; the sighing of the whole enslaved creation for liberty."[70] It might be added that this is also true of the weeping of Jesus where God is profoundly revealed in the suffering tears of Jesus.

For Moltmann, in "the sending, the Son is wholly understood in the light of the Father, and in this sending the Father is revealed as the Father through the Son."[71] This is why "the incarnation reveals the true humanity of God. That is not an anthropomorphic way of speaking, which is therefore not in accordance with God's divinity; it is the quintessence of divinity itself."[72] Moltmann thinks that in "the incarnation of the Son the triune God enters into the limited, finite situation. Not only does he enter into the state of being man; he accepts and adopts it himself, making it part of his own, eternal self.

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[68]Moltmann, *God in Creation* 219.

[69]Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 21. For more about the image of God in creation, see *God in Creation*, 77-78.

[70]Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 4.

[71]Ibid., 72.

[72]Ibid., 118.

He becomes the *human* God."[73]

Moltmann argues that an "immovable and apathetic God cannot be understood as the foundation of human freedom. An absolutist sovereign in heaven does not inspire liberty on earth. Only the passionate God, the God who suffers by virtue of his passion for people, calls the freedom of men and women to life."[74] The passion of God is revealed in the tears of Jesus.

Moltmann says Jesus' "sufferings and humiliation came from his actions, from his preaching of the imminence of the kingdom as a kingdom of unconditional grace, from his freedom towards the law, and from his table-fellowship with 'sinners and tax-collectors'. Jesus did not suffer passively from the world in which he lived, but incited it against himself by his message and the life he lived."[75] This insight applies well to the Lazarus story.

Moltmann says "For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved. Suffering and injustice do not affect him. And because he is so completely insensitive, he cannot be affected or shaken by anything. He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being. Aristotle's God cannot love; he can only be loved by all non-divine beings by virtue of his perfection and beauty, and in this way draw them to him. The 'unmoved Mover' is a

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[73]Ibid.

[74]Ibid., 218.

[75]Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 51. See also 214-216.

'loveless Beloved'."[76]

Moltmann says "the theology of the early church knew of only one alternative to suffering and that was being incapable of suffering (*apatheia*), not-suffering. But there are other forms of suffering between unwilling suffering as a result of an alien cause and being essentially unable to suffer, namely active suffering, the suffering of love, in which one voluntarily opens himself to the possibility of being affected by another."[77]

In Moltmann's theology, the biblical language that God grieves can be fully realized. He thinks that in the death of the Son on the cross the Father suffers the death of the Son in the infinite grief of love. The grief of the Father is just as important as the death of the Son.[78] It is therefore not surprising that Jesus grieves the death of a friend.[79]

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[76]Ibid., 222.

[77]Ibid., 230.

[78]Ibid., 243.

[79]Moltmann's understanding of God and his revelation in the Son is compatible with what we have called the empathy of God or the empathy axiom, yet despite his strong criticism of the traditional doctrine of the impassibility of God, Moltmann chooses to retain the misleading term. He reasons that in "Christian theology the apathy axiom really only says that God is not subject to suffering in the same way as transitory beings. So it is no real axiom at all; it is the statement of a comparison. It does not exclude the possibility that in another way God can certainly suffer and does suffer." (*Jesus Christ for Today's World*, 44) As Nnamani says, in "contrast to common opinion, Moltmann maintains that God is both passible and impassible. If passibility means a state whereby God is acted upon, he agrees that God is impassible, but if it means the ability to take up suffering on oneself and suffer voluntarily, he contends that God is passible." (Nnamani, 183) Nnamani says "that Moltmann is not so much rejecting as reinterpreting the axiom of the divine impassibility." (Nnamani, 173)

In a similar way, Richard Creel wants to redefine impassibility and suggests that there are eight different ways to understand impassibility. 1. Lacking all emotions (bliss not an emotion); 2. In a state of mind that is imperturbable; 3. Insusceptible to distraction from resolve; 4. Having a will determined entirely by oneself; 5. Cannot be affected by

The empathy axiom is at the heart of biblical theology. It is clear that God's experience is more than an idea of imaginative suffering, without being changed. As Fiddes points out that "the idea of a merely imaginative response of God to the suffering of his world hardly does justice to the religious experience of the Old Testament prophets, who believed that *they* were being called into sympathy with *God's* unique pain."[80] The weeping of Jesus expressed the empathy of God.

In summary, love requires vulnerability, risk and bereavement. The witness of the Bible in general, and the weeping of Jesus at the death of Lazarus in particular, reveal that this is true for God as well as humans. Thomas Oden says: "No more complete revelation of God's empathic love is possible than this: that God shares our human frame, participates in our human limitations, enters into our human sphere."[81] One of the most obvious examples of God's empathic love is that God weeps with us in our sufferings and grief as He prepares to transform them into joy. "Jesus wept" is a

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an outside force; 6. Cannot be prevented from achieving one's purpose; 7. Has no susceptibility to negative emotions; 8. Cannot be affected by an outside force or changed by onself. See Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 9. He says "an incorporeal personal being could conceivably be impassible with regard to his *nature*, his *will*, his *knowledge*, or his *feelings*." (p. 11) He too wants to argue for impassibility on some points and passibility at other points.

One wonders why the term 'impassible,' which by definition means incapable of suffering or feeling, should be retained to describe the God of the Bible. It is at best misleading and at worst contrary to the character of God revealed in the weeping of Jesus. Surely there is a better way to explain the "both/and" of God's feelings than with a word that suggests He is not affected by the world and his creatures.

[80]Fiddes, 59.

[81]Oden, 100.

revelation of God's empathic love.[82] In the weeping of Jesus we see "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." (2 Cor. 1:3-4)

As Fiddes writes, "God experiences our history and our future in a way that is both like and unlike the way we do. In his journey from suffering to glory along the path of his desire there is, however, another way in which his experience transcends ours: he has victory over suffering. If it is essential that a God who helps us should sympathize with our suffering, it is also essential that he should not be overcome or defeated by suffering."[83] This is exactly what the story of Jesus' weeping and then raising Lazarus demonstrates.

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[82]The empathic love of God revealed in the weeping of Jesus as he mourns with those who mourn is beautifully depicted in the poem "On Another's Sorrow" by William Blake, *The Works of William Blake* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 67.

He doth give His joy to all:
He becomes an infant small;
He becomes a man of woe;
He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not thou canst sigh a sigh,
And thy Maker is not by;
Think not thou canst weep a tear,
And thy Maker is not near.

O! He gives to us His joy
That our grief He may destroy;
Till our grief is fled and gone
He doth sit by us and moan.

[83]Fiddes, 100.

Fiddes concludes: "It is the suffering of God, we may say, that has the power to alter human attitudes to God and to other people, and there can be no stronger power than that. Such influence enables us not only to cope with our own suffering, but also to destroy the causes of needless suffering in the world."[84]

The empathy axiom revealed in the weeping of Jesus is a challenge to Chalcedon. As Robinson says, ascribing costly love involving suffering to God is evaded "in the resort to the Chalcedonian doctrine of two distinct natures in Christ. His costly love is then relegated to the human nature, whilst the divine does not suffer at all. This is the usual method adopted by orthodox theology when it denies suffering in God. Jesus Christ by His human nature shares in the suffering of man, but by His divine nature in the unmixed joy of God. . . . The presentation of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels gives no evidence of such a cleavage."[85]

Love is not just activity on others but involvement with others in which one is

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[84]Ibid., 146. There is a fascinating parallel to the power in the suffering of Jesus in Zen Buddhism. In *The Wisdom of the Zen Masters* (London: Sheldon Press, 1975), Irmgard Schloegl points out that the Buddha taught the Middle Way and declared: "'Suffering I teach, and the Way out of Suffering.' This we have to consider carefully. The Middle Way, even in this wording, does not imply rejection of suffering, but a way through suffering, as it were a thoroughfare, to the end of it." (p. 9)

Schloegl tells the story of a Zen master: "Master Shaku Soen liked to take an evening stroll through a nearby village. One day he heard loud lamentations from a house and, on entering quietly, realized that the householder had died and the family and neighbours were crying. He sat down and cried with them. An old man noticed him and remarked, rather shaken on seeing the famous master crying with them: 'I would have thought that you at least were beyond such things.' 'But it is this which puts me beyond it,' replied the master with a sob." (p. 21)

[85]Robinson, *Suffering*, 177.

moved and affected. Vulnerability to suffering is essential to it.[86] As Bauckham says, "God in the Old Testament suffers empathetically *with* his people in their sufferings. He also suffers grief *because* of his people when they reject him and are lost to him. Finally, both these kinds of suffering constitute a redemptive suffering *for* his people. In Jesus God's identification with people in their sufferings reaches a new and absolute depth. He goes beyond empathy to an act of solidarity in which he suffers as one of the godless and the godforsaken, sharing their fate and abandonment. But this identification of God with those who suffer (in the person of the Son) at the same time causes him grief (in the person of the Father). In the Father's suffering of the death of Jesus God's grief at the loss of those who are estranged from him reaches a new and absolute depth."[87] Jesus, the God-man, wept as he grieved the loss of a friend.

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[86]Richard Bauckham, "In Defence of *The Crucified God*," in Cameron, 95.

[87]Ibid., 115.

CONCLUSION

"Jesus wept," and in this short verse that is so easily overlooked by the dramatic raising of Lazarus, there is much theological meaning. Tears are a language and the tears of Jesus communicate genuine grief and sorrow at the death of a beloved friend in a way that is entirely consistent with mourning in the rest of the Bible. The tears communicate more than anger, his human nature, or even sympathy. The tears of Jesus also reveal the empathy of God, which is consistent with the picture of the God who mourns and grieves, who is most clearly expressed in the prophetic pathos of God. The weeping of Jesus challenges the idea of the impassibility of God.

The critics of the idea of the passibility of God would be correct that a God who suffers is no help to humanity if the story of Lazarus ended with Jesus weeping at his tomb. The resurrection of Lazarus changes everything. It reveals a God who suffers with humanity and yet who has the power to transform mourning into joy and death into life. The weeping of Jesus reveals the pathos of God, the sympathy of God, and the empathy of God. God knows what it feels like to lose someone dear to Him — he lost his only Son. God also knows what it is like to weep, mourn, and grieve. The raising of Lazarus is proof that God's mourning is not exactly like ours.

There are at least two important points that the study of the story of the weeping of Jesus and the raising of Lazarus has revealed. First, western cultural ideals about gender roles and appropriate displays of emotion should not be allowed to cloud the

understanding of the weeping of Jesus at the death of his friend with those who loved him. There is every reason to conclude that the tears of Jesus are the result of the experience of genuine grief and mourning, just as his ancestors did when they lost loved ones.

Second, and far more importantly, especially in the witness of the prophets, God himself grieved, mourned, and wept at the loss of those dear to him. To allow a Platonic ideal of masculinity and attributes appropriate to God to obscure the rich theological meaning of the weeping of Jesus is a great loss. To allow the ideal of the apathy of God to colour the biblical picture of God is to miss the God of empathic love, who chose to risk painful estrangement and emotions to create humanity. Placher says "in writing of a God who is vulnerable in love, Christian theologians are only reclaiming their own birthright, for it is just such a God that is encountered in the biblical narratives."[1]

Mark Buchanan expresses the importance of the shortest verse well, when he says "never has so much theology been so clearly distilled as here. Never have such riches been rendered with such economy. The fullness of the Incarnation, Christ's coming among us — to be with us, to be one with us — is gathered up and pressed into a single subject and verb. The starkness of it contains a cosmic pageantry; the sparseness of it holds a theological galaxy. Here is love, mercy, passion, compassion, grief, and anger over our condition, our frailty, our vulnerability, chiseled down to two words: Jesus wept."[2]

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[1]Placher, 7.

[2]Mark Buchanan, "Jesus Wept," *Christianity Today*, 5 March 2001, 62-63.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead was not permanent — he died again and no doubt he was mourned again.[3] His resurrection pointed to the resurrection of Christ which ensures the resurrection of all who believe.[4] In a similar way, the weeping and mourning of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus pointed to the anguish of Gethsemane (Heb. 5:7). John 11:1-44 is usually entitled "The Raising of Lazarus" but it should be called "The Weeping of Jesus and the Raising of Lazarus." With this name, the story encapsulates the Incarnation — passion and resurrection, and points to the future when: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." (Rev. 21:4)

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[3]C.S. Lewis made an interesting observation about Lazarus' second death while he was mourning the death of his beloved wife. Lewis concludes that it would be cruel to wish his dear wife back: "Having got once through death, to come back and then, at some later date, have all her dying to do again? They call Stephen the first martyr. Hadn't Lazarus the rawer deal?" (Lewis, *Grief*, 47-48)

[4]As John Donne wrote: "One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,/And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die." Holy Sonnets, X in *The Works of John Donne* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 13-14.

APPENDIX ONE:

THE ARIAN CHRIST AND THE SUFFERING OF GOD

One of the most important factors in shaping the christology of the early church in the direction of the transcendent, static, and impassible was the reaction of the Fathers against the understanding of the Son and the relation to the Father in the school of thought that began with the teaching of Arius.[1] Arius (ca. 256-336) was a presbyter in Alexandria and what is often called the Arian controversy began around 319 when Arius publicly criticized the Christological doctrine of his bishop, Alexander of Alexandria as Sabellian. He urged, in opposition, that if the Son were truly a Son He must have had a beginning and so there was a time when He did not exist. In the Arian system, God was not Father until He created the Son out of nothing. The Son has free will and chooses the will of the Father by the gift of God. The Son is not God because he was created, and as a creature he cannot know the Father nor himself completely. The Son was created to create humanity and is united with the Father, not in substance, but in will.

Arianism always assumed that revelation and redemption on the part of God necessitated a reduction or lowering so that they had to be undertaken by a being who, though divine, was less than fully divine (Phil. 2:5-11 is a favourite Arian text). Hanson concludes that for the Arians, "the inferiority of the *Logos* to God the Father was

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[1]For a concise summary of the Arian school of thought see Richard Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 20-23.

necessary for a communication, and particularly for an Incarnation, to take place at all."[2]

The Arians taught that the weakness and limitations of the incarnate Christ applied to the divine Word as well as to the human body; indeed, these weaknesses and limitations were a proof of the inferiority of the Son to the Father.[3] The Arians appealed to biblical texts that spoke of Jesus' humanity, weakness and obedience to the Father. Robert Gregg and Dennis Groh observe that the idea that the Son "had a limited or proportionate experience of the Father seems to have indicated to Arius that Christ, like all other creatures, was cast in the role of an obedient servant living by faith in his Father."[4] They suggest that for the Arians all creatures, including the redeemer, were ultimately and radically dependent on the Creator whose sole method of relating to his creation was by his will and pleasure.[5]

Hanson points out that the "part of Arius' doctrine which most shocked and disturbed his contemporaries was his statement that the Father made the Son 'out of non-existence' (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων). . . . It is likely that Arius, with his usual ruthless logic, decided that as God had created everything out of nothing (a doctrine which was well established by his day), and as the Son was created, so the Son must have been created

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[2]Ibid., 100.

[3]Ibid., 106.

[4]Robert C. Gregg and Dennis E. Groh, *Early Arianism — A View of Salvation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981), 11.

[5]Ibid., 5.

out of nothing."[6] The impact of this conclusion had ramifications beyond Alexandria.

The emperor Constantine had been moving to Christianity in part because he saw it as a means to unify the empire. As Rusch puts it, now "he found that Christianity was in danger of splitting because of a theological question he could not understand. The emperor urged Alexander and Arius to stop their philosophical bickering and live in peace."[7] The emperor decided to call a universal council of the church at Nicea to settle the dispute. It was the first time any attempt had been made to summon a general council of the whole church.[8]

The creed of the council declared that the Son is begotten, not made, and true God, not in title only. The creed said of the Lord Jesus Christ that he is "the son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance [*homoousion*] with the Father." Those who thought the Father preexisted before the Son or that the Son came into existence from nothing were anathematized: "And whosoever shall say that there was a time when the Son of God was not, or that before he was begotten he was not, or that before he was made of things that were not, or that he is of a different substance or essence from the Father or that he is a creature, or subject to change or

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[6]Hanson, 24.

[7]Rusch, 18.

[8]See Hanson, 152-178.

conversion — all that so say, the Catholic and Apostolic Church anathematizes them."[9]

As Rusch observes, the "Council of Nicea clearly went on record against Arius."[10] It was Constantine himself who placed the unscriptural phrase "*homoousions* with the Father" in the creed. This is an important development in the history of the Christian doctrine of God. As Hanson says, the "will of the Emperor was the final authority. . . . Constantine took part in the Council of Nicea and ensured that it reached the kind of conclusion which he thought best."[11] It seems clear that the emperor was the head of the church, as Hanson says the "truth is that in the Christian church of the fourth century there was no alternative authority comparable to that of the Emperor."[12]

ARIUS' PROBLEM: THE SUFFERING OF GOD[13]

Why did Arius have a problem with saying the Son was eternal, preexistent and of the same substance as the Father? Hanson says "Arius dislikes any statement that the Son is 'from' (ἐκ) the Father, because it implies that the Son is 'a consubstantial part of

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[9]For the complete text of the Nicene Creed see Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds. *The Seven Ecumenical Councils* in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers III,* vol. 14 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 3.

[10]Rusch, 19.

[11]Hanson, 849-850.

[12]Ibid., 854.

[13]For more on the Arian and orthodox ideas of the suffering of God see Joseph M. Hallman, *The Descent of God: Divine Suffering in History and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 77-100.

him and like an issue'. And this means that God is composite and divisible and mutable and even corporeal. . . and he thinks that to say that the Son is consubstantial with the Father is to regard him as, so to speak, a broken-off bit of God."[14] For Arius the consequences of describing the Son as consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father is that you are bound to compromise God by exposing him to suffering in the Incarnation.[15] Neither Arius nor Athanasius thought that God could suffer. This is why the Arians regarded the Son as an instrument expressly designed to do the suffering that was necessary in order to carry out God's plan for saving men. They achieved this position by constantly putting forward two doctrines. First, the human limitations and weaknesses of Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, were a sign of his divine inferiority. His divinity was reduced enough to be able to encounter suffering without ceasing to be divine. As Gregg and Groh point out, the "reality of the human body loomed large for the early Arians."[16] Second, they insisted that in becoming incarnate the Son had taken to himself, not a complete human individual, but a body without a soul (σῶμα ἄψυχον). This meant not only a body without a human psychology or a human animating principle, but also a body without a human mind. The Word directly animated and directed the body and dwelled in it.

The Arians wanted to have a God who could suffer, but they could not fit this picture to their idea of God the Father. God the Son must therefore be the God who

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[14]Hanson, 8.

[15]Ibid., 10.

[16]Gregg and Groh, 4. See Athanasius, *Or. c. Ar.*, 3.27.

could suffer, whose divinity was reduced enough to endure suffering. However, a 'mere man' could not have redeemed us by his Passion. Somehow God must have suffered.[17]

Richard Hanson eloquently sums up the Arian position on the suffering of God:

> At the heart of the Arian Gospel was a God who suffered. Their elaborate theology of the relation of the Son to the Father which so much preoccupied their opponents was devised in order to find a way of envisaging a Christian doctrine of God which would make it possible to be faithful to the Biblical witness to a God who suffers. This was to be achieved by conceiving of a lesser God as reduced divinity who would be ontologically capable, as the High God was not, of enduring human experiences, including suffering and death. This might be called an exemplarist soteriology, not in the sense that they presented the example of a man gaining perfection by moral effort, but in the sense that it was an example of God suffering as man suffers, or at least what man suffers, in order to redeem man. Arian writers are fully convinced of the genuine humanity of the body which the *Logos* assumed. . . . Because Arians were determined that the Son of God did genuinely, seriously, undergo human experiences, within the limits of their doctrine they understood the scandal of the Cross much better than the pro-Nicenes. . . . Here Arian thought achieved an important insight into the witness of the New Testament denied to the pro-Nicenes of the fourth century, who unanimously shied away from and endeavoured to explain away the scandal of the Cross. We must give the Arians credit for this insight.[18]

For the Arians, the problem was how to reconcile an incomparable and impassible God with the biblical message that God suffered for man's salvation. They believed that the only way to achieve this was to postulate a lower god related to the higher, a god who could encounter the suffering without compromising the high God. Athanasius was not much interested in God suffering.[19]

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[17]Hanson, 25-26.

[18]Ibid., 121-122.

[19]Ibid., 426.

Hanson helps to place the issue in context. He points out that in the fourth century there came to a head a crisis "which was not created by either Arius or Athanasius. It was the problem of how to reconcile two factors which were part of the very fabric of Christianity: monotheism, and the worship of Jesus Christ as divine. Neither of these factors is specifically connected with Greek philosophy or thought; both arise directly from the earliest Christian tradition."[20] Hanson is correct when he asserts that the theologians of the fourth century "were compelled by the very necessity of doing theology at all to use the terminology of Greek philosophy. We have seen that the truth gradually dawned upon the most intelligent of them. . . that it is impossible to interpret the Bible simply in the words of the Bible. This being so, no alternative vocabulary was open to them than that of late Greek philosophy. They used this vocabulary with a fine disregard for consistency and an eclectic method. . . . Christianity in order to achieve an understanding of itself has always been compelled to borrow, where and as it could, the materials of contemporary philosophy."[21]

We have seen the special sensitivity which the Arians had for those passages of Scripture that emphasize the suffering and creaturely characteristics to be drawn from the ministry of Jesus on earth. Gregg and Groh argue that the fact that the Arians "turned the

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[20]Ibid., xx. Hanson says "many of the issues raised by the controversy were under lively discussion before Arius and Alexander publicly clashed. Eusebius has started from a basically Origenist position, influenced certainly by the concept, widespread in Middle Platonism, of a supreme being who was metaphysically so abstract as to be virtually or actually unknowable, and a second principle, *nous* or *logos* who can take form (εἶδος) and make the higher principle known" (p. 52)

[21]Ibid., 871.

very human characteristics of the savior in the Gospels and Epistles to what they thought were their logical cosmological conclusions does not mean that cosmology or the doctrine of God was their starting point, as almost all modern scholars have contended."[22]

Gregg and Groh argue that it was not a desire to defend pagan philosophy but the endeavour to express and defend the cardinal beliefs of Christianity that caused the Arians to embrace a conceptual and linguistic framework which centered in will and willing, thus depicting the relationship between Father and Son, Creator and creatures in voluntarist terms. Because they were convinced that the "gospel of God's promises in his Son needed to be proclaimed in this way, they were deeply suspicious of a presentation of the divine drama which invoked the problematic language of οὐσια and φύσις. Assertions by Bishops Alexander and Athanasius that the Father and Son were one-in-essence and related through identity of nature seemed to Arian churchmen destructive of core meanings in the record of God's actions in the Testaments."[23] Hanson says Arius "was in his way attempting to discover or construct a rational Christian doctrine of God, and for this his chief source was necessarily not the ideas of Plato or Aristotle or Zeno, but the Bible."[24]

Hanson argues that the Arians "would all have said that they were simply carrying on the teaching of the Bible and the tradition of the Fathers. In fact they were attempting

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[22]Gregg and Groh, 2.

[23]Ibid., 97.

[24]Hanson, 98.

to work out a rational doctrine of God which would be recognizably Christian while remaining true to the Bible and to what they regarded as right reason, as almost all theologians between 318 and 381 were attempting to do. For the Arians this took the form of accepting that the Scriptures witnessed to the suffering of God, and of devising an idea of God which would make such a doctrine possible within the limits of what the fourth century regarded as tolerable."[25]

This is why the Arians, as Gregg and Groh observe, were drawn to the scriptural texts "which emphasized the empirical commonality of the redeemer's characteristics with those of all other creatures. Athanasius' party from the beginning of the controversy instinctively leaned toward showing the difference or distinction between the redeemer's characteristics and ours."[26] The Arian and the pro-Nicene writers are equally insistent upon the unique position of Scripture as a norm of faith.[27]

The early Arians seem to have proceeded from their exegesis of the scriptures to the conclusion that even the preexistent Christ was a creature, no matter how exalted were the results of his creaturehood.[28] Athanasius says "God's enemies the Arians" in "looking at what is human in the Saviour, they have judged Him a creature."[29] He also complains that the Arians "as if not wearied in their words of irreligion. . . while they

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[25]Hanson, 128.

[26]Gregg and Groh, 8.

[27]Hanson, 827.

[28]Gregg and Groh, 2.

[29]Athanasius, *Or. c. Ar.*, 3.35.

hear and see the Saviour's human attributes in the Gospels, they have utterly forgotten. . . the Son's paternal Godhead."[30]

Gregg and Groh suggest that the Arians thought "they had taken up the proper biblical notion of sonship and drawn the right conclusions about the Son's perceptual limitations."[31] The issue is interpretation, not biblical faithfulness. Gregg and Groh conclude that "Athanasius' hermeneutic will lead him to attribute all such passages which speak of the creaturely suffering and limitation of the redeemer to the mortal body borne by the Logos or to a 'religious' sense in which Christ asked a question with full knowledge of the matter and of his own imminent response. The Arians took these same passages as obvious proof of the Son's full creaturehood."[32]

It is not accurate to say that the Arians were unbiblical. They were perhaps too literalistic in their reading of scripture but all of their core doctrines have biblical support. The issue is not biblical versus unbiblical but rather a difference of opinion about interpretation of the texts. Hanson says it was only very slowly "that any pro-Nicenes recognized that in forming their doctrine of God they could not possibly confine themselves to the words of Scripture, because the debate was about the meaning of the Bible, and any attempt to answer this problem in purely Scriptural terms inevitably leaves still unanswered the question 'But what does the Bible mean?'"[33]

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[30]Ibid., 3.26.

[31]Ibid., 9-10.

[32]Ibid., 10.

[33]Hanson, 848.

The Arian system had to be rejected because it failed to provide a way to understand the unity of the Son and the Father that included Him in the divine identity, as did the writers of the New Testament, or the divine nature as the Fathers did with the idea of like natures. What is particularly interesting is that the Arians, despite their devaluation of the Son, were able to understand the significance of the weeping of Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus in a more biblical way than were the Fathers, who had to downplay the emotions of Jesus because of their adoption of the apathy axiom, and thus had to attribute the tears of Christ to his human nature only. The Arian controversy should stand as a reminder that the majority is not always right and that even "heretics" can make important points that should not be lost in the rush to correct their errors.

As Nnamani points out that "amazingly, the re-examination of heresies has exposed certain basic truths and lost articles of faith which now appeal to modern believers and enrich the main body of theological understanding. Through this exercise, it has therefore become abundantly clear that some of the stones rejected by the early builders of Christianity could become the corner stone for today's theologies."[34] The suffering of Christ that the Arians recognized more clearly than the orthodox has become a corner stone for theologies today, particularly in the post-Auschwitz context.

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[34]Nnamani, 16.

APPENDIX TWO:

THOMAS WEINANDY: *DOES GOD SUFFER?*

Thomas Weinandy is an example of a contemporary theologian who works from the apathy axiom in his understanding of God and his relationship to the world. He uses it as the basis for refuting any idea of suffering in God.[1] Weinandy is critical of the contemporary theologies that stress the suffering of God in contrast to the God of classical Christianity. He is aware of the work of Lee, Kitamori, Moltmann and others, and in his book *Does God Suffer?* he seeks to argue for the traditional doctrine of the impassibility of God. We will survey his understanding of God and challenge it with the God revealed in the weeping of Jesus.

Weinandy defines impassibility as meaning that "God is impassible in the sense that he cannot experience emotional changes of state due to his relationship to and interaction with human beings and the created order."[2] This does not fit well with the God portrayed in the prophets.[3]

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[1]Another good example of a defence of impassibility is William J. Hill, *Search for the Absent God: Tradition and Modernity in Religious Understanding,* ed. Mary Catherine Hilkert (New York: Crossroad, 1992). See 159-161 for an argument similar to Weinandy.

[2]Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 38.

[3]Weinandy is well aware of Heschel's picture of God in the Hebrew prophets and observes that Heschel's writings have greatly influenced many contemporary theologians who hold a passible, suffering God. He does not think that "these theologians have interpreted Heschel in an entirely correct manner." (p. 64) He says many "interpret Heschel's idea that God's pathos is not human pathos as indicating the similarity

Weinandy understands why a suffering God may have some intellectual and emotional appeal for Christians today in the post-Auschwitz context, and he thinks the appeal is often more emotional than intellectual. He is concerned that "such an understanding of God is philosophically and theologically disastrous in its consequences. It may give the appearance of providing consolation to the innocent victims of sin and evil, but ultimately it throws into complete disarray the whole philosophical and theological structure upon which an authentic biblical understanding of God and of his loving relationship to creation and to humankind is based. Thus, one must conclude that a suffering God is not only philosophically and theologically untenable; the concept is also religiously devastating, for it is at least emotionally disheartening if not actually abhorrent."[4]

Weinandy uses his interpretation of Aquinas to conclude: "God is perfectly compassionate not because he 'suffers with' those who suffer, but because his love fully

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between God and man. Both God and man are characterized by pathos. In actual fact, Heschel uses the idea to emphasize the dissimilarity between God and man. God's pathos *is not* man's pathos, and therefore God is different from man." (p. 66) Weinandy reads Heschel to say: "On the one hand, Heschel wishes to uphold the true biblical notion that God is attentive to human history and is intimately involved within the lives of human beings. He is not like the God of Greek philosophy. His pathos is expressed in his love, kindness, mercy and compassion — even to the point of speaking, as Heschel and the Bible do, of his grief and suffering. On the other hand, Heschel, equally faithful to biblical revelation, does not want such pathos to be conceived in an anthropomorphic manner, as if to attribute such characteristics of God, one were saying that God's pathos — his love, compassion, grief and suffering — could be conceived in a psychological manner similar to that of humans. For Heschel, it is precisely the otherness of God's pathos which gives it its true and full significance." (p. 67) Weinandy says he is confident that this is Heschel's true position even though he is inconsistent in the manner in which he expresses it.

[4]Ibid., 158.

and freely embraces those who suffer. What human beings cry out for in their suffering is not a God who suffers, but a God who loves wholly and completely, something a suffering god could not do."[5] This raises the question of how we are to understand the biblical ideas of the suffering, grief and tears of God.

Weinandy argues that while such ideas of love as compassion, mercy, grief, and sorrow are ascribed to God, in one sense, metaphorically, in so far as they predicate within human beings changeable and passible emotional states as well as suffering, yet they are truly and really facets of God's fully actualized love and are experienced as such by human beings. God truly grieves over sin and actually is sorrowful over injustice not because he has lost some good (which would imply a self-centred grief and sorrow) and so suffers, but rather because, in his love, he knows that the one he loves is suffering due to the absence of some good. Sadness and grief do not spring from or manifest suffering within God, but rather they spring from, manifest and express the fulness of his completely altruistic, all-consuming and perfect love for his creatures.[6]

Weinandy says: "Because God is ontologically distinct from the created order, and thus is not entrapped within the evil and suffering contained within that order, and because his goodness and love are fully actualized, he is able to act compassionately within the created order so as to dispel the evil and suffering within it."[7] The problem with this idea is that it fails to appreciate the incarnation. Jesus was entrapped in the

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[5]Ibid., 164.

[6]Ibid., 164-165.

[7]Ibid., 167.

created order and still acted to dispel the evil and suffering by raising Lazarus, which pointed to his own resurrection and the final resurrection and the destruction of evil. This is quite compatible with Weinandy's point that "God's mercy is most fully manifested by his dispelling evil and in his restoring good through his almighty power."[8] The incarnation is proof that His power is not limited by his suffering, tears and grief.

The absence of suffering in God, Weinandy asserts, "not only preserves the wholly otherness of God, but it also simultaneously preserves the full reality of his wholly-other love, and it does so not solely for his own sake, but also for the sake of the created order, particularly and especially for the sake of human beings."[9] The problem with this view is that the God of the Bible is never *wholly other* — he is always partly present and in the incarnation God is most certainly not wholly other — God is here. Nor is God's love ever wholly other for it is experienced here and now and can be even seen in the love between creatures.

Weinandy thinks that sorrow and grief are attributed to God "not by way of predicating a passible emotional change within him, but rather by way of denoting that he is all-loving and good. Because he is perfectly loving and good, he finds sin and evil repugnant, and so he can be said to sorrow and grieve in the light of their presence. God does not grieve or sorrow because he himself experiences some injury or the loss of some good, nor that he has been affected, within his inner being, by some evil outside cause, but rather he grieves or sorrows only in the sense that he knows that human persons

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[8]Ibid., 168.

[9]Ibid.

experience some injury or the loss of some good, and so embraces them in love. This sorrow and grief ascribed to God could contain the note of suffering only if we mean that, as all-loving, he is intensely concerned with the reality of sin and evil, and the suffering that ensues from them."[10] Yes, the biblical witness is that God is intensely concerned with sin, suffering, and evil and that God experiences those things.

Weinandy concludes that "it would be better, for the sake of clarity and consistency, not to predicate suffering to God at all."[11] The problem with this view is that the Bible has no such fear of the loss of clarity and consistency. It can just as easily be said that perhaps it would be better not to predicate impassibility to God but rather to start from the biblical witness of God who feels deeply and has the power to transform suffering into joy. By likening God to human experience which we can know, this approach could make our picture of God much more clear and much more consistent with the biblical witness to God and the revelation of God in Jesus who experienced emotions, pain, and grief.

Weinandy criticizes modern theologians who "are so consumed with championing a God who suffers in himself, that they fail to grasp the full significance of the Incarnation and the transforming effects of Christ's redemptive suffering. The significance of Christ's suffering and death is no longer found in their historical truth and in the present and future efficacy that these actual events have upon human beings and their relationship to God, but rather, as is exemplified in the case of Moltmann, it is

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[10]Ibid., 169.

[11]Ibid., 170.

diminished to a mythological expression or symbol of what is happening transcendentally and ahistorically to and within God as God."[12] The raising of Lazarus is a good example of the transforming effects of Christ's redemptive suffering.

Weinandy says: "If one wishes to say in truth that the Son of God actually experienced and knew what it was like to be born, eat, sleep, cry, fear, grieve, groan, rejoice, suffer, die, and most of all, love *as a man*, and it seems this is precisely what one does want to say, then the experience and knowledge of being born, eating, sleeping, crying, fearing, grieving, groaning, rejoicing, suffering, dying, and again most of all, loving must be predicated of the Son of God solely and exclusively *as a man*."[13] Weinandy is advocating the ancient schism of Jesus into two distinct and completely separate natures. Why only as a man? Why not as God as the prophets so often do? The Johannine Jesus is not two-souled or of two natures. He is one person who weeps and raises the dead, who eats and who miraculously feeds the five thousand. Weinandy thinks that "the Son of God did not suffer as God in a man, for to do so would mean that he was not a man. The Son of God suffered as a man."[14] The flip side of this is that therefore the sacrificial death of Jesus was only as a man and not God. This is very close to the ancient Arian heresy of an exemplorist Christology which sees Jesus as nothing more than a good man.

Weinandy argues that: "Strange as it may seem, but not paradoxically, one must

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[12]Ibid., 173.

[13]Ibid., 204.

[14]Ibid., 205.

maintain the unchangeable impassibility of the Son of God, one in being with the Father, who truly suffers as man. As man the divine Son of God was deprived, as are we, of human goods which did cause him, like us, to suffer."[15] Weinandy is right, this does seem very strange, and unnecessary. The biblical writers did not find it necessary to hold this paradox.

Weinandy thinks that many contemporary theologians, who posit suffering within God's divine nature, "give the impression that once they have demonstrated this, they have done all that is required and significant. The soteriological import of divine suffering remains barren. It does not achieve any end other than to register that God does indeed suffer in solidarity with humankind, and so comfort can be taken from this. Why we should be comforted by a suffering God remains unclear, especially if he, like us, can now do little to alleviate it and is rendered helpless in vanquishing its actual causes."[16] The story of the weeping of Jesus and the raising of Lazarus is a case in point of God suffering with humanity and then overcoming the cause of the suffering while foreshadowing the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the end of all suffering. In this context the idea that God suffers in solidarity with humankind is the cause of hope.

Weinandy is correct that it is "in the dispelling of evil, and so of the suffering caused by it, that God properly manifests his grief, sorrow, compassion and mercy." This is true, but it does not follow, as Weinandy says, that: "Thus God's compassion and

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[15]Ibid., 205.

[16]Ibid., 214.

mercy, which contain no suffering are of greater significance than human compassion and mercy, which do contain suffering. Unlike human beings, who are often incapable of relieving the evil which is causing the suffering, God is capable of vanquishing the evil and the suffering that was lost through the evil suffered."[17] However, this is precisely the point of the story of the raising of Lazarus which is in no way diminished if God, in some sense, weeps with Mary and Martha. There is no reason to conclude from the story that God's compassion cannot include suffering.

Weinandy is certain that his conclusion that God does not suffer is necessary to preserve the traditional doctrine of God, and he may be correct that contemporary theology threatens it. The question is why it is important to defend this idea of God that is so incompatible with the God of the prophets and the God revealed in the tears of Jesus. The question for Weinandy then is, given the character of God in the Bible, why does he want to say God does not suffer?

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[17]Ibid., 229.

APPENDIX THREE:

A SURVEY OF *THE OPENNESS OF GOD*

An example of a theology that is based on the empathy axiom rather than the apathy axiom is what is called by its holders "openness theology" or "openness theism," which stresses the openness of God to the world in his desire to have responsive relationships with his creatures. Openness theism arose in evangelical theology from Arminian and Wesleyan roots and is a challenge to Calvinistic determinism and the classical doctrines of immutability, and impassibility that support it. Openness theism entered into the evangelical theological arena with the publication of *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), by Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger.

The central tenant of openness theism is that "God, in grace, grants humans significant freedom to cooperate with or work against God's will for their lives, and he enters into dynamic, give-and-take relationships with us. . . . God does not control everything that happens. Rather, he is open to receiving input from his creatures. In loving dialogue, God invites us to participate with him to bring the future into being."[1]

Richard Rice outlines the biblical support for the openness of God by arguing that love is the most important quality we attribute to God. Love involves care and

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[1]Clark Pinnock, et al. *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 7.

commitment and response. God's relation to the world is dynamic as God influences his creatures and they exert influence on him.[2] With this in mind, openness theism seeks to restore the biblical metaphors of divine suffering and divine repentance to the biblical understanding of God. Rice explores the biblical evidence that affirms that God is responsive to what happens in the world and is affected by it as well as the statements that assert creaturely freedom. Rice argues that the "statement that *God is love* is as close as the Bible comes to giving us a definition of the divine reality."[3] In the Old Testament God's life is described as having a social and dynamic character with emotions, intentions, and actions. God is described as having feelings of joy, grief, anger, and regret. God repents and relents sometimes in response to human actions and requests. God is identified by his actions and He experiences changes in time. In the New Testament these characteristics of God are revealed in Jesus. "The cross is a divine experience as well as a divine action."[4] Rice concludes that the biblical material supports the idea that "God's experience is open and that his relation to the creaturely world is one of dynamic interaction. The most fundamental theme is divine love, God's unswerving commitment to the welfare of his creatures and his profound sensitivity to their experiences."[5]

In the second chapter, John Sanders outlines the history of the change from the

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[2]Ibid., 15.

[3]Ibid., 18.

[4]Ibid., 45.

[5]Ibid., 57-58.

openness of God in the biblical text to another interpretation based on Greek philosophical ideas used in the development of the traditional doctrine of God. He argues that the early fathers used Hellenism to achieve the "biblical-classical synthesis" which has become commonplace. He thinks the Greek metaphysical system "boxed up" the God described in the Bible.[6] Sanders examines the Greek philosophical conceptions of deity as perfect and impersonal and without anthropomorphism, which made their way into Plato. Aristotle saw God as a metaphysical principle, an "unmoved mover." These ideas made their way into Christian theology through the fathers and Sanders traces them through Augustine, the middle ages, and the Reformation, to modern theology and conservative Protestantism today. He then outlines the movement to modify classical theism to a more open view of God.

Clark Pinnock proposes a "more biblical and coherent doctrine of God" in the third chapter on systematic theology. He says "I want to overcome any distortions caused by excessive Hellenization and allow biblical teaching to operate more normatively."[7] He suggests that there are two common models of God — an aloof monarch and a caring parent. The second one is the open view of God as living and active, involved in history, relating and changing in relation to the world.[8] Pinnock argues that theology must hold the transcendence and immanence of God in proper balance. This can be done by understanding the Trinity as a community of persons in an

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[6]Ibid., 60.

[7]Ibid., 101.

[8]Ibid., 104.

open and dynamic structure. Divine power is better understood as the power that enables God to deal with any situation that arises. God shares power and has voluntarily chosen to limit his power by delegating some to the creature.[9] Immutability ought to focus on the faithfulness of God as a relational, personal being.[10] The impassibility of God must mean that God is impassible in nature but passible in his experience of the world to be consistent with the strong biblical theme of the suffering or pathos of God. God is eternal in that he transcends our experience of time, is free from our inability to remember and with us in time, experiencing the succession of events with us.[11] God knows all that can be known.[12] Pinnock says the "open view of God stresses qualities of generosity, sensitivity and vulnerability more than power and control. . . . It portrays God as the author of history who delights in meaningful interaction with creatures as his purposes for the world are realized."[13]

In the fourth chapter, William Hasker provides a philosophical explication of the issues to show the rational coherence of the theology of divine openness, and to show where it is superior to competing ways of understanding God and his works.[14] He argues for the view that God is temporal because he thinks it is biblical while divine

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[9]Ibid., 115.

[10]Ibid., 117.

[11]Ibid., 120.

[12]Ibid., 121.

[13]Ibid., 125.

[14]Ibid., 126.

timelessness is strongly dependent on neo-Platonic metaphysics. Hasker explores the nature of God's power and knowledge and then critically examines process theology, Calvinism, Molinism, the theory of simple foreknowledge in relation to openness theism.

In the last chapter, David Basinger considers the practical implications of the open view of God. He thinks petitionary prayer that holds that God hears and changes things makes most sense in the open view of God. Prayer is "an activity that can initiate unilateral divine activity that would not have taken place if we had not utilized our God-given power of choice to request his assistance."[15] Similarly the idea of God's guidance — that God shares his thoughts and concerns with us — makes more sense in the open model. The openness of God can help to understand human suffering and provide a theodicy that sees evil as the byproduct of a world containing freedom.[16]

Openness of God theism is an example of an understanding of God that is consistent with the idea that the weeping of Jesus communicates the empathic love of God to his creatures.

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[15]Ibid., 162.

[16]Ibid., 171.

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