EXISTENTIAL DIMENSIONS OF THE CONTEMPORARY IMPASSIBILITY DEBATE: A PASTORAL APPROACH TO THE QUESTION OF DIVINE SUFFERING WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICALISM
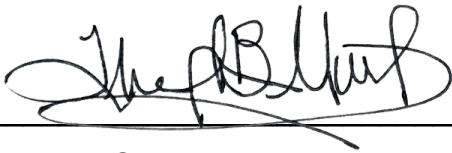
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DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this dissertation is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

Thomas SB Mount

Chico, CA, USA

Christmas Day, December 25, 2014

Joyfully dedicated to my family—

Lynn, Lauren, Bobby, Joseph, Jesse, Natalie,

Art and Lorraine, Gracie and Weston—

for your understanding, love and unflagging support

without which this project would not

have been possible. I love you all!

ABSTRACT

The hegemony of passibilist theological construals since the last quarter of the twentieth century has garnered a mixed response from within the conservative evangelical subtradition, from outright rejection, to widespread acceptance, to various qualified (im)passibilist *via media*. The seismic shift from impassibilist to passibilist ways of representing the God-world relationship has been documented, as have the historical-critical and philosophical developments that contributed to the shift. However, the existential dimensions of the phenomenon have not been extensively inventoried and assessed. This project seeks to address this lacuna. Following the Loyola Institute of Ministry (LIM) practical-theological model, the work surveys the more important contemporary (post-1973) literature; proposes a typology of existential considerations (denominated devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional); critically assesses these five species of argument by means of two benchmark Biblical texts (Acts 17:24-28 and Hebrews 2:17-18) and twin core conservative evangelical theological foci (God's transcendence and God's relatedness) and evaluates the impact of passibilist proposals on conservative evangelicals, including scholars, leading opinion-shapers and rank-and-file believers. The hypothesis is that passibilist arguments are unsustainable Biblically and theologically, that qualified impassibilist existential arguments are more compelling than their counterparts and that an impassibilist account best meets the Biblical and theological demands of the conservative evangelical academy as well as the existential needs of rank-and-file church members. The research confirmed the hypothesis. The dissertation concludes with practical suggestions for teaching a more balanced theology of divine transcendence-relatedness that honors the Biblical witness and makes use of the conceptual resources within the inherited Tradition, including a Chalcedonian two-natures Christology and a Cyrillian *communicatio idiomatum*.

A song of ascents. Of David.

O LORD, my heart is not proud, nor my eyes haughty;

Nor do I involve myself in great matters,

Or in things too difficult for me.

^{2} Surely I have composed and quieted my soul;

Like a weaned child rests against his mother,

My soul is like a weaned child within me.

^{3} O Israel, hope in the LORD

From this time forth and forever.

– Psalm 131, NASB

"There may be great lawyers, doctors, natural scientists, historians, and philosophers. But there are none other than *little* theologians..."

Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It has often been noted that the production of any publication is a group effort. The present one is no exception: more than any other section of the dissertation, this one acknowledges the unabashedly communal character of the theological enterprise. I understand the unpayable debt I owe to those who have borne with my reclusive lifestyle and inordinate preoccupation with often arcane scholarly pursuits the last several years. They all deserve medals. But there are a few, in particular, to whom I want to express my special thanks.

First, I want to honor, extol, and thank the exquisite triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit—for your unfailing goodness shown me. Your luminous beauty and incomparable compassion have afforded me the richest possible subject for sustained and reverent reflection, equaled in wonder only by the personal kindness you have extended to me throughout my life. *Dominus meus, tu autem eras superior summo meo et interior intimo meo!*

Next, to my extraordinarily patient and understanding wife, Lynn: heartfelt thanks! You uncomplainingly tolerated my long absences, unsightly stacks of books in every corner of the house (including bathrooms) and a myriad of other indignities—concomitants of the scholarly life—that no human being should be made to endure. Thank you for loving me with that *agape* with which the Lord loves us. More than any other, you embody His grace in extraordinary ways.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The nature of God's relationship to human suffering has occasioned considerable debate since the late twentieth century. With an established pedigree extending back to the patristic era, the conversation is formally cast in terms of the God-world relationship and has, historically, often assumed an abstractly theoretical tone, trading on such metaphysical notions as God's aseity, (im)mutability, eternality, omniscience, perfection, sovereignty and ontological distinctness (e.g., Augustine 1952; Barth 1957; Calvin 1960; Bray 1978, 1993, 1999; Charnock 1979; Weinandy 1985, 2000, 2001; Dodds 1986, 1991; Blocher 1990; Helm 1990; Forster 1990; Wells 1990; Sarot 1990, 1996, 2002; Rice 1994; Hasker 1994; Basinger 1994; Nnamani 1995; Boyd 1997, 2000, 2001; Scrutton 2010, 2013; Pool 2009, 2010; Olsson 2012; Anselm 2013; Aquinas 2013). For nineteen hundred years, the orthodox consensus was that God was "impassible", meaning that—although He truly suffered in His humanity in Christ—God did not suffer *qua* God within the divine nature and is, indeed, invulnerable to such suffering.

Late in the twentieth century, however, this consensus began to be seriously challenged, principally among Protestant and Anglican—but also among some Catholic and Orthodox—theologians. The reasons for this theological seachange are multiform and complex. Suggested causal factors include the impact of higher criticism in the field of Biblical studies, a self-conscious shift away from ostensibly "static" (Aristotelian) metaphysical categories toward more "dynamic"

(Hegelian) ontologies, late modern notions of love and sympathy, and—in the wake of two world wars and the Shoah—changing sensibilities regarding the priority of existential concerns within the field of theological discourse (Schilling 1977:253-254; Nnamani 1995; Fiddes 1998, 2000; McGrath 2003:274-279; cf. Herdt 2010).

This fourth factor is particularly evident in the weight assigned in recent passibilist proposals to the problem of human suffering as a starting point for discourse about divine (im)passibility. The literature clearly indicates a tendency among contemporary passibilists to approach the question of divine (im)passibility "from below" rather than "from above" (e.g., Moltmann 1974a, 1974b; Sölle 1975; Young 1979; House 1980; Surin 1983; Fretheim 1984; Bauckham 1984, 1990, 1999; McWilliams 1985; Wolterstorff 1987; Taliaferro 1989; Sarot 1991; Clark 1992; Sia 1996; Simoni 1997; Taylor 1998; cf. Robinson 1930). Indeed, it seems fair to say that, among many contemporary passibilists, existential concerns outweigh metaphysical ones. By contrast, impassibilists tend to privilege ontological considerations over existential ones when framing the debate (e.g, Muller 1983; Creel 1986, 1997; Cook 1990; Helm 2005, 2007).

Whatever conclusions one draws about its causal factors, one thing is inarguable: in the late twentieth century, a seismic shift in theological discourse occurred, moving away from impassibilist accounts of God toward passibilist construals. This shift was so pronounced that, by the late 1980s, passibilism was famously dubbed by one scholar the "new orthodoxy" (Goetz 1986:385). Interestingly, the literature of the last ten to fifteen years shows a resurgence of interest in impassible interpretive schemes (Gavrilyuk 2004; Heaney 2007; Keating and White 2009; Castelo 2009, 2010a, 2010b; Vanhoozer 2010; D'Souza 2012; Lister 2013; Smith 2012). It remains to be seen whether this resurgence gains momentum and results in a corrective movement back toward a more nuanced account of the God-world relationship within Christian

scholarship and the Church at large. Are we on the cusp of a new "new orthodoxy"?

In general, self-identifying conservative evangelical theologians have been amenable to this reexamination of divine impassibility. Their responses, however, have varied considerably. Some (e.g., DeYoung 2006; Castelo 2009; Lister 2013, et al.) have retained the ancient doctrine as a necessary safeguard to divine transcendence whilst clarifying the precise nature of God's emotivity and relationality and insisting on His empathic involvement with His creation. Others (e.g., Erickson 1985, 1988; Clark 1992; Frame 2002; Cole 2011; cf. Gunton 2003) have modified the doctrine in more or less significant ways, allowing for some sort of real suffering within the divine nature, whilst avoiding more extreme predications of theopaschitism (e.g., Moltmann's idea of an inner Trinitarian rupture; Moltmann 1974a, 1974b). Another group avoids extended discussions of the concept, appearing confused about its actual claims and dismissive of its merits (e.g., Lewis and Demerest 1987; Grudem 1994; Carson 2000, 2003; Lewis 2001a, 2001b). Still others (e.g., Stott 1986; Ngien 1997, 2004; House and Grover 2009) have rejected the doctrine of impassibility outright, believing it to be an unhelpful qualifier on divine relationality.

A number of proponents of the third and fourth positions believe the doctrine to be symptomatic of a larger, more pervasive and intractable problem—that is, the alleged patristic tendency to subordinate the Biblical witness to Greek philosophical constructs. This Hellenising hypothesis was popularised by Adolf von Harnack (1961) and is widely cited in the passibilist literature. In recent years, however, Harnack's theory has come under increasing critical scrutiny and no longer enjoys the scholarly traction it once possessed (cf. Weinandy 2000:19-20; Gavrilyuk 2006:21-46; Castelo 2009:2; Lister 2013:41-106).

The lack of scholarly consensus on the issue of (im)passibility has contributed to widespread confusion among rank-and-file evangelical Christians, many of whom struggle with what to believe about God's relationship to their own suffering. Whilst the scholarly factionalism is not the sole contributing cause to the confusion in the pew—other factors include late modern notions of love, sympathy and theodicy—it is, nonetheless, an important one. The Christian academy, responsible for producing the Church's pastors and other opinion-shapers, exerts a powerful influence over churchgoers. As Charles Malik (2000) famously observed, what is taught in the classroom to the present generation invariably shapes the hearts and minds of succeeding generations.

These observations bring into relief two particularly problematic features of the current state of affairs. The first is the confusion within the conservative evangelical academy. As noted above, evangelical scholars are divided on how to respond to recent passibilist proposals. The concern here, however, is not so much the lack of consensus as it is the actual confusion—that is, the lack of coherence and logical consistency—that characterises the thinking of certain scholars. There are a number of related problems in this regard, both contributing to the confusion and resulting from it. These include definitional ambiguity, capitulation to passibilist presuppositions, an abdication of conservative evangelical theological commitments and a lack of continuity with historic orthodoxy.

With regard to this last point, it is troubling to observe the ease with which certain evangelical theologians and other opinion-shapers have disavowed a doctrine so integral to the received theological tradition. Impassibility is an essential member of a constellation of attributes (e.g., aseity, immutability, omniscience, perfection, eternality, etc.) that have historically been predicated of God in order to safeguard the divine transcendence (e.g., Kärkkäinen 2004:51-59, 120-122). In many cases, these theologians have uncritically accepted passibilist

Christological formulations and notions of sympathy, love, Hellenistic influences and existential sensibilities. In doing so, these scholars have attributed suffering to God in ways that undermine the God-world ontological differential.

The second troubling feature, intimated above, is the resultant confusion in the average church pew. Many evangelical believers today are uncertain about what to think regarding God's relationship to human suffering. Is God, like Aristotle's "unmoved mover", indifferent and unperturbed in His hermetically sealed ontological bubble, isolated from the trials that mark our lives? Is He, at the opposite extreme, more akin to Whitehead's "fellow sufferer": so enmeshed in the cosmic order that He continually shares human pain during His own process of becoming? (Whitehead 1929). Or does He, instead, occupy a kind of metaphysical middle ground: ontologically distinct from creaturely limitations yet sympathetically available to those whom He has made (Castelo 2009; Lister 2013; cf. Walsh and Walsh 1985)?

In the best of circumstances, these questions are important, being central to one's concept of God and exerting a formative influence on how one relates to Him. But they take on added weight in the midst of personal suffering, when musings—which appear to some as mere theological abstractions—rise to the level of acute existential dilemmas. On such occasions, pastors and other ecclesial practitioners need to teach with clarity, for it is essential that—in their pain—Christians be able to assert unambiguously those truths affirmed in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures: that, through Christ, God understands them, cares for and empathises with them and helps them by ameliorating their suffering through compassionate solidarity and—sometimes—restorative "intervention". In the absence of a Biblically sound, carefully articulated theology of God's relationship to human suffering, it is difficult for believers to possess this kind of confidence. This is why it is so critical that believers be taught—through

preaching, counselling and various discipling venues—a Biblically balanced approach to the doctrine of (im)passibility.

As a pastor of twenty-seven years within conservative evangelical churches, the author has witnessed firsthand the deleterious effects of an ambiguous theology of God's relationship to human suffering. And as a seminary instructor in theology, the author interacts with students and other scholars whose confusion on these issues is both pronounced and problematic. Given the ubiquity of human suffering, these problems will persist. As such, it is vital that pastors, theologians and other Christian leaders be clear about God's relationship to suffering in general and to human pain in particular. These concerns motivate the present work.

A preliminary literary search revealed a significant body of contemporary literature on the subject of (im)passibility, particularly since the late twentieth century. The literature review included online sources, books, journals, dissertations, theses and sermonic material. The research revealed that, in general, impassibilist accounts (e.g., Creel 1986; Helm 1990; Bray 1993, 1999; Hart 2002, 2003, 2005, 2009; Vanhoozer 2010) tend to focus on the metaphysical dimensions of the subject whilst passibilist proposals (e.g., Moltmann 1974a, 1974b; Sölle 1975; Fiddes 1988, 2000; Sarot 1996, 2002, et al.) often deal with practical or pastoral considerations by examining the subject's existential dimensions. Significantly, the author found few impassibilist works that discuss existential dimensions in any detail, no extended critical examinations of passibilist existential claims, and no works set explicitly within a conservative evangelical context. This project attempts to address these lacunae.

1.2 Problem

The increased acceptance of passibilist construals of the God-world relationship late in the twentieth century has resulted in considerable confusion within conservative evangelical circles, both among academic theologians and ordinary believers. Consequently, there is a pressing need for clarity—in the academy and pew alike—with regard to God's relationship to suffering. To date, there have been no extended treatments dealing with the existential dimensions of the subject from an impassibilist perspective, nor sustained engagement with passibilist existential proposals.

A dissertation is designed around a primary research question and its subsidiary, derivative questions (Smith 2008:127). The primary research question motivating the present work is summarised as follows:

- What are the key pastoral implications, as understood from a conservative evangelical perspective, of contemporary passibilist accounts of God's relationship to suffering?

The following five questions derive from the main research question and have served to guide the research:

- What is the current state of scholarship in the contemporary (im)passibility literature, particularly with regard to existential concerns?
- What are the key theological tenets of conservative evangelicalism that inform theological discussions of (im)passibility?
- What is the historical and contemporary framework for passibilist teachings?

- What are the key Biblical teachings and theological commitments required to appropriately evaluate passibilist teachings?
- What are the pastoral implications of passibilist teachings within a conservative evangelical setting?

1.3 Objectives

The research objectives correspond with the research questions, stated above. The primary objective of this study is:

- To examine the key pastoral implications, as understood from a conservative evangelical perspective, of contemporary passibilist accounts of God's relationship to suffering.

The following five subsidiary objectives derive from the main objective and have guided the research:

- To examine the current state of scholarship in the contemporary (im)passibility literature, particularly with regard to existential concerns (situation analysis by means of a literature review: Chapter 2).
- To consider the key theological tenets of conservative evangelicalism that inform theological discussions of (im)passibility (contextual analysis: Chapter 3).
- To examine the historical and contemporary framework for passibilist teachings (Chapter 4).
- To examine the key Biblical teachings and theological commitments required to appropriately evaluate passibilist teachings? (Biblical and theological foundations: Chapter 5).

- To explore the pastoral implications of passibilist teachings within a conservative evangelical setting (Chapter 6).

1.4   Theological and practical value of the study

A dissertation is designed to add to the fund of current knowledge about a particular subject (Vyhmeister 2001:185). The main purpose of this study is to examine the pastoral implications of the debate surrounding the doctrine of (im)passibility. This entails the evaluation of passibilist claims that their proposals best satisfy the existential needs of Christians. This study looks at how these claims have affected theologians and others who self-identify as evangelicals. It also makes specific recommendations for addressing the problems resulting from an accommodation of certain passibilist assumptions. The project contributes to the existing literature in the following four ways.

1.4.1   Typology of existential arguments

First, the study develops a typology of the varied existential considerations raised by both passibilists and impassibilists. The hope is that this apparatus will provide a guide for further exploration of the kinds of relational, doxological, psychological, ethical and apologetic issues inherent in this debate.

1.4.2   Analysis of passibilist claims

Second, the study examines in detail a number of passibilist arguments that seek to make the case that their accounts offer more satisfying answers to the existential needs of Christians. These claims are contrasted with counterclaims

by impassibilist scholars, and both are critically evaluated Biblically and theologically. Because this has yet to be done in a systematic way, the present study should help define future research in this area.

1.4.3 Practical recommendations

Third, the study makes specific recommendations intended to address problems resulting from the adoption of certain passibilist assumptions by members of the conservative evangelical community. The hope is that these prescriptions will be of practical value to both scholars and non-scholars who identify with this tradition, so as to move from the current state of affairs to a preferred future.

1.4.4 A model for divine relatedness

Fourth, in keeping with its practical theological focus, the study presents a portrait of God as eminently relational: One who loves and is love, One who truly understands the human condition "from the inside" in Christ and who genuinely cares for human welfare and is accessible to sufferers, offering sympathy and help, often in the form of relief. In this regard, the hope is that the study will provide consolation for Christians who might otherwise question the goodness of God when their lives involve significant pain.

In these four ways, then, the present work holds promise to open up new directions for research on both theoretical and practical levels. A discussion of the project's delimitations, definitions of key words, assumptions, design and hypothesis follows.

1.5 Delimitations

No dissertation can address all aspects of a given topic, so a careful delimitation of objectives must be stated at the outset in order to make explicit which aspects will be included and which will be excluded from the study (Smith 2008:141). The present project is delimited in the following five ways.

1.5.1 Existential scope

First, the scope of subject. The present study focuses on the existential dimensions of the (im)passibility debate. Whilst it will necessarily touch on metaphysical elements, the particular interest of this research is the variety of claims made by passibilists asserting the relational, doxological, psychological, ethical and apologetic benefits of their construals. Much exists in the literature about the philosophical issues surrounding the doctrine, yet there is comparatively little about the existential issues. Hence, the rationale for this specific focus.

1.5.2 Contemporary history

Second, the history of the subject. The present study is limited to a consideration of contemporary (im)passibilist proposals—specifically, to those appearing in the literature since the landmark 1974 publication of the English version of Jürgen Moltmann's *The crucified God*. Formal discussions of impassibility within Christian intellectual circles extend back at least to the early fourth century. A number of authors have surveyed the historical development of the doctrine (Mozley 1926; Culver 1996; McGrath 2003, 2007; Kelly 2007; Gavrilyuk 2006; Lister 2012). Because the present work examines contemporary passibilist

proposals, it will limit its focus to approximately the last four decades of scholarship.

1.5.3 Biblical witness

Third, the Biblical witness to the subject. The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures contain innumerable references to God's wrath, jealousy, delight and other apparent emotional responses—references relevant to those discussions of (im)passibility centreed on divine emotivity. The Bible also contains data (e.g., God's apparent changes of mind, His answers to prayer, His "repenting" of bringing judgement, etc.) germane to those discussions of God's (im)mutability, a correlate of (im)passibility. Whilst reference is made to some of these passages, the present work concentrates its attention on those portions of Scripture pertinent to its intended focus: the existential issues related to whether or not God suffers.

1.5.4 Ecclesial setting

Fourth, the ecclesial setting for the subject. The researcher has situated his reflections within his own faith tradition: conservative evangelicalism. This is not meant to suggest other traditions are less important or have little to say on the subject. In fact, some of the most influential works on (im)passibility have been produced by Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican and non-evangelical Protestant scholars. The present work critically interacts with these sources, but it limits its pastoral reflections and recommendations to a conservative evangelical context, in keeping with its practical theological approach (Smith 2008).

1.5.5 Practical approach

Fifth, the purpose of the research. Because this project is situated within the field of practical theology, it attempts to accurately assess the present situation within contemporary conservative evangelicalism, describe a preferred scenario and then prescribe specific recommendations to move from the present situation to the preferred one (Smith 2008:205-06). Accordingly, it takes a transformative rather than a contemplative approach to theology (Cowan 2000; cf. Ahrens 2009). As such, its contribution to the descriptive literature is limited principally to its systematic analysis of (im)passibilist existential considerations.

1.6 Definitions

Since scholarly research uses technical vocabulary to denote precise meanings, it is important that a researcher give an account of how he/she understands the key terms under discussion. Whilst it is not essential that others agree with these definitions, it is critical that they know what they are (Smith 2008:143).

For the purposes of this dissertation, three important terms admit of multiple attested meanings and nuanced understandings. They therefore require definitional clarification as to how the researcher uses them.

1.6.1 Impassibility

Impassibility: the teaching that God is incapable of suffering within the divine nature. Note that this definition leaves open the possibility that God can in some way "experience" suffering by means of the hypostatic union, in the passion of Jesus Christ.

1.6.2 Passibility

Passibility: the teaching that God can suffer within the divine nature. In his trenchant work on the subject, Richard Creel (1986) offers no fewer than eight categories of (im)passibility. Because of its focus on existential issues, the present work employs a narrow definition for passibility/impassibility (I_7 in Creel's scheme) consistent with that focus.

1.6.3 Conservative evangelical

Conservative evangelical: a Christian who identifies with certain core convictions and devotional practices inherited from the Protestant Reformers and their heirs. According to the oft-quoted David Bebbington (1989), these evangelical commitments include: conversionism, activism, Biblicism and crucicentrism. Alister McGrath (1995) expands the list to include six "controlling convictions": (1) the supreme authority of Scripture, (2) Jesus as God and savior, (3) the lordship of the Holy Spirit, (4) the need for personal conviction, (5) the priority of evangelism and missions and (6) the importance of Christian community. The modifier "conservative" generally denotes a mistrust of certain claims of higher critical approaches to the Bible. Those evangelicals who do not self-identify as "conservative" typically are more amenable to these approaches (Naselli and Hansen 2011). Conservative evangelicals also tend, in contrast to their non-conservative counterparts, to demonstrate a greater appreciation for the received theological tradition, characterised by an unwillingness to make sweeping changes to historically accepted theological categories (Pinnock 2006:383; Greggs 2010:1-10; Hays 2010:216-218; McDermott 2013:363).

1.7 Presuppositions

Vyhmeister (2001:44) states the importance of recognising how personal biases affect the way researches think and write. Therefore, any presuppositions that materially influence one's research ought to be identified and stated up front (Smith 2008:146). In this vein, below are five assumptions that, collectively, comprise the present researcher's most pertinent biases.

1.7.1 Epistemic modesty

First, the author understands God's nature to be known only through God's self-disclosure in human history. An authoritative narrative of God's self-revelation is preserved for humanity in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, the Bible (more on this below). This narrative is truthful and trustworthy. However, it is not comprehensive—that is, it does not tell us everything we might wish to know about God and His interactions with His creation. This acknowledgment is made, or at least suggested, in Scripture itself (e.g., De 29:29; Is 55:8-9; Jn 1:18; 1 Co 13:12). Therefore, humility is called for when making truth-claims about God and His ways, and a profound modesty should characterise theological discourse. Because the conversation surrounding the doctrine of impassibility has frequently occasioned strident claims by both sides concerning what God is like or not like—often based more on *a priori* assumptions than on sound Biblical arguments—the ongoing discussion could benefit from a fresh infusion of humility, reverence, modesty and fear: humility in recognition of our epistemic limits and the analogical interval that obtains between God and ourselves, reverence for the sacred text and rhetorical modesty when engaging in God-talk. And if a holy and healthy fear of the Lord is indeed the beginning of wisdom (Ps 111:10; Pr 9:10), theologians would do well to make it both their starting point and controlling posture when engaged in debate.

1.7.2   Biblical authority

Second, the author holds the Bible to be God's only infallible and authoritative source of self-disclosure. Humans can, to be sure, know something of God generally through nature and history—what is historically referred to as "general revelation". Both Old and New Testaments attest to this fact (e.g., Ps 19:1-4; Ro 1:19-20). However, this revelation is limited, admits of diverse interpretations and is insufficient for salvific knowledge (cf. Jn 14:6-10; Ro 10:5-15). The Bible, on the other hand, self-identifies as being God's unique revelation, breathed by God as its authors were "carried along by the Holy Spirit" and, therefore, trustworthy to inform our belief and practice (2 Tm 3:15-17; 2 Pe 1:20-21). The author believes that these and other verses imply that the Bible, authored by a God who "does not lie" (Tm 1:2; cf. Nu 23:19), is therefore inerrant in its original autographs and can be recognised as such when its authorial intent, literary types and cultural features are properly accounted for.

1.7.3   Christological restraint

Third, the author believes in the need for a balanced understanding of God's self-disclosure in Christ. God's revelation of Himself in Christ is unique and unparalleled. However, some theologians with passibilist sensibilities have made the Christ event so definitive in revealing God's inner nature that other modes of revelation are not given their due weight. Theologically, this has the effect of collapsing the immanent Trinity into the economic Trinity in an extreme application of Rahner's Rule (Hart 2002, 2003; Lister 2012:135ff.). Biblically, this runs the risk of producing a "canon within the canon", privileging the testimony of the four Evangelists at the expense of the rest of the Biblical witness. In this researcher's view, it seems best to assert that, whilst God is revealed preeminently in Jesus Christ, He is not revealed exclusively so. For example, the

Old Testament encounters with God—whether in voice, image, dream, theophany, angelic visitation, etc.—all disclose something important about God. The same could be said of the other portions of Scripture, whether epistolary, wisdom, prophetic or apocalyptic.

1.7.4   Predicative balance

Fourth, the author recognises a dual emphasis in Scripture respecting God's relationship to His creation requiring balance when making predications of Him. First, He is clearly represented as being transcendent vis-à-vis the world (e.g., Is 40:12-25; Ro 11:33-36; 1 Tm 6:15-16). Second, and in tension with the first claim, God is represented as choosing to live in intimate relationship with His creation (e.g., Ps 145:7-20; Mt 5:45; 6:25-26; Ac 14:17; 17:24-28)—particularly His covenant people—over whom He watches with a vigilant, generous providence (e.g., Ge 12:2-3; De 6-9). Thus, these twin truths comprise a binary, both of whose poles must be honoured for a Biblically balanced theology. The literature demonstrates the dangers of emphasising one pole at the expense of the other. Generally speaking, passibilists tend to emphasise God's relationality whilst impassibilists put the accent on God's transcendence. Safeguarding both truths is essential.

1.7.5   Historical continuity

Fifth, the researcher admits his bias for preserving a degree of historical continuity with the received theological tradition. Not in a slavish way, however, which squelches legitimate creativity and imagination. Such a path leads invariably to dogmatic ossification, obscurantism and, frequently, a sterile nominalism. Instead, the author believes we should maintain a "critical fidelity" to

the historical orthodox formulations of theological reflection (Cook 1990:72; cf. Barth 1992:43), particularly with respect to the decisions of the early ecumenical councils (especially the first four). As an evangelical Protestant, the researcher is sympathetic to the various Lutheran and Reformed confessions but also to certain Anglican, Pietist, Baptist and revivalist theological understandings. The author's bias for historical continuity becomes most apparent in discussions of Chalcedonian two-nature Christology and Cyril's *communicatio idiomatum*, both of which are critical—in his opinion—for a proper attribution of suffering to God.

1.8   Design and methodology

Dissertations seek to answer a single research question by following a suitable design and employing appropriate methodologies given the nature of the main question and the subsidiary questions that derive from it (Smith 2008:125). As stated in Section 1.2, the primary research question being investigated in the present study is as follows: What are the key pastoral implications, as understood from a conservative evangelical perspective, of contemporary passibilist accounts of God's relationship to suffering?

1.8.1   Transformative LIM model

Because this project fits within the discipline of practical theology, it employs a transformative—rather than a contemplative or descriptive—approach to theological study (Cowan 2000). As the name implies, a transformative approach seeks to change a given problem, not merely analyse it. There are a number models for conducting transformative research including Praxis, Fuller, Zerfass and Loyola Institute of Ministries (LIM) models (Cowan 2000; Woodbridge and Song 2007; Smith 2008). Whilst differing in details, each of these shares a basic

three-fold structure: (1) situation analysis, (2) theological reflection and (3) improved practice. The current study follows the contours of the LIM model, whose three structural features involve interpreting the world as it is (situation analysis), interpreting the world as it should be (preferred scenario) and interpreting our contemporary obligations (recommended changes) to improve the situation (Cowan 2000; Smith 2008:206). As is seen below, these three sturctural elements constitute the project's inner logic and rhetorical architecture, moving the project from description to prescription—that is, from analysis to recommended action.

1.8.2 Organisation and threefold structure

The dissertation opens with an introduction (Chapter 1), the purpose of which is to, (1) provide general background information to orient the reader to the nature of the problem, (2) state the problem, (3) present the research objectives, (4) describe the theological and practical value of the project, (5) delimit the research, (6) define key terms, (7) describe the author's assumptions, (8) explain the design and methodology, (9) articulate a hypothesis and (10) summarise the contents of Chapters 2-6.

Following the introductory chapter, the dissertation develops the first of its three structural elements: an assessment of the current situation. This is done by means of three research components, (1) a situational analysis utilising a literature review, (2) a contextual analysis describing the particular ecclesial setting in which the research is set and (3) a historical analysis, exploring the background and contemporary framework of contemporary passibilist teaching. These three components comprise, respectively, the contents of Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The purpose of these chapters is to interpret the world as it currently exists (Smith 2008:207).

The first component is a situational analysis (Chapter 2). Studies in practical theology make use of either empirical research or a situational analysis (Smith 2008:208). For this project, a situational analysis is used, employing a review of the relevant contemporary scholarship on the topic of divine (im)passibility. The literature includes printed (books, journal articles, theses, dissertations, essays, etc.) and online (online bookstores, Google books, Google Scholar, theological blogs, audio recordings, etc.) sources. These various sources were accessed through use of online databases (TREN, JSTOR, EBSCOhost, ATLA, DOAG, individual theological journal archives, etc.), the Duke University Divinity School library, the California State University library system, the Simpson University library and other library holdings available to the researcher. Collectively, they allow the researcher to conduct a review of the current literature (i.e., post-1973) that conforms to established academic standards—that is, exhaustive, objective, current and interpretive (Smith 2008:213-223).

The second component for assessing the current situation is a contextual analysis (Chapter 3). This chapter examines "conservative evangelicalism" as the sociological or ecclesial context for the research. The analysis defines how the term "conservative evangelical" is used in the study. It provides a brief overview of the history of conservative evangelicalism, noting its leading figures, influences, beliefs and its relation to the larger Christian community. It then explores two important theological commitments that ought to guide evangelical reflection on the existential dimensions of (im)passibilism—divine transcendence and divine relationality. As these are trademark evangelical themes, they must both be upheld in any genuinely self-professed conservative evangelical analysis of (im)passibilist interpretive schemes.

The third component for assessing the current situation is an analysis of the historical development and contemporary context of contemporary passibilist

proposals (Chapter 4). The chapter examines the views of leading passibilist theologians. It explores salient factors contributing to the development of passibilist approaches. It analyses five species of existential claims made by these scholars—devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional. And it evaluates the impact passibilist teachings have had on the conservative evangelical community at both scholarly and non-scholarly levels.

Having assessed the current situation, the project now develops the second of its structural features: an interpretation of a preferred scenario (Chapter 5). This is done in two ways. The first is by means of Biblical analysis: two key texts are examined to establish a context and rationale for seeking the preferred scenario. The second is through theological analysis: the researcher examines the five varieties of passibilist existential claims described in Chapter 4 by means of Scripture and the two evangelical theological non-negotiables developed in Chapter 3. The purpose of this chapter is to explore possible Biblical or theological deficiencies within passibilist proposals.

Following a description of the preferred future, the project now recommends a set of prescriptions designed to help actualise that preferred scenario, the third of its three structural features (Chapter 6). The chapter examines important pastoral implications of the research and suggests specific recommendations designed for pastors and theologians working within a conservative evangelical context. These recommendations address the twin troubling features, occasioned by contemporary passibilist teaching, mentioned in Section 1.1—that is, theological confusion in the Christian academy and existential confusion in church pews. First, the researcher suggests three ways to address the confusion among evangelical theologians. Second, the researcher suggests two ways to address the confusion among rank-and-file evangelical believers.

A conclusion completes the project (Chapter 7). In this chapter, a summary of research findings is given along with recommendations for further study. The researcher addresses how this research contributes to the discipline of practical theology and offers some final, concluding comments.

1.9   Hypothesis

The purpose of the hypothesis is to propose a provisional, intelligent deduction that guides one's thinking about the solution of the problem (Leedy 1980:61; Turabian 2007:19).

The author of the present work hypothesises that a careful examination will reveal that many of the passibilist claims to the existential viability of their proposals are unsustainable Biblically and theologically; that qualified impassibilist existential arguments are generally more compelling than their counterparts; and that a carefully qualified impassibilist account of God can best meet the Biblical and theological demands of the conservative evangelical academy as well as the existential needs of rank-and-file church members.

1.10   Summary of chapters 2-6

This section summarises the content of the heart of the present work: Chapters 2-6. As noted in Section 1.8, these chapters form a coherent argument, comprising three structural features: (1) an assessment of the current situation, (2) a depiction of a preferred scenario and (3) a set of recommendations for helping actualise that scenario. The general flow of these chapters is described below, followed by a description of chapter contents.

After an introduction (Chapter 1), the present situation is examined by means of a situation analysis via a literature review (Chapter 2), a contextual analysis of the ecclesial setting (Chapter 3) and a historical review and consideration of the contemporary framework (Chapter 4). The research then shifts its focus to a preferred scenario. This involves a description of that scenario based on Biblical and theological considerations (Chapter 5) as well as a set of explicit recommendations that can help transform the current situation into the preferred scenario (Chapter 6). A conclusion (Chapter 7) with summary and final reflections completes the project. Below is a detailed description of the content of Chapters 2-6.

Chapter 2 begins the situational analysis with a review of the contemporary (im)passibility literature. The analysis includes primary sources and critical reviews from both passibilist and impassibilist perspectives, arranged chronologically. For purposes of this project, the 1974 publication of the English version of Jürgen Moltmann's *The crucified God* is used to demark contemporary passibilist proposals. Following an introduction to the literature and an explanation of the research delimitations, the analysis examines the literature, focusing its attention on fourteen of the most significant contributors. A synthesis of the scholarship is offered next. This includes these fourteen authors and others who have made significant contributions to the conversation. The synthesis will propose a typology of argumentation as a means of classifying the various species of existential claims made by scholars. And it will examine three trends evident in the most recent literature. Next, the chapter will address the relevance of the research by examining the four ways conservative evangelical scholars has responded to the debate, the ways non-scholars have responded and some pastoral concerns raised by these observations. Four current gaps in the literature are then discussed together with the specific ways the present study helps address these lacunae. The chapter concludes with a demonstration of its relationship to the overall research agenda and a summary of its contents.

Chapter 3 continues the situational analysis with an examination of the specific faith tradition or ecclesial context in which the research is situated: "conservative evangelicalism". First, the term "conservative evangelical" is defined, building on the definition offered in Section 1.6. Second, a brief overview of the history of conservative evangelicalism is provided, noting the leading figures, events and influences that have shaped the movement. Its contemporary landscape is also examined, with respect to both current "hot button" issues and its relation to the broader Christian community. Third, two theological non-negotiables are examined that should guide theological reflection on (im)passibilism for self-identifying conservative evangelicals. These two theological themes serve as a kind of measuring rod against which truth claims ought to be examined. The two themes are: (1) God's transcendence (i.e., God's ontological uniqueness, the Creator-creature distinction and the appropriate use of analogical language) and (2) God's relationality (i.e., God's Trinitarian relationality, God's dialogical interactions with humanity and God's covenantal relationships with humanity).

Chapter 4 concludes the situational analysis with a consideration of the historical development and current context of contemporary passibilist formulations. This analysis includes three parts. First, the chapter briefly surveys the history of pre-contemporary passibilist reflection before examining contemporary construals in three phases: 1974-1986, 1986-2000 and 2001- 2014. Second, the five species of passibilist existential arguments are summarised: devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional. Finally, the chapter evaluates the impact passibilist proposals have had on conservative evangelical scholars (e.g., Carson, Grudem, et al.) as well as popular evangelical authors and pastors (e.g., Warren, Eldredge, Yancey) and rank-and-file believers.

In Chapter 5, the project moves away from analysing the present towards conceiving a more amenable future. This depiction of a preferred scenario

involves two strategies. The first is a careful examination of two key Biblical texts that provide benchmarks for assessing passibilist proposals and a rationale for seeking the preferred scenario. Second, employing these Biblical texts together with the two theological themes discussed in Chapter 3 (divine transcendence and divine relationality), the researcher examines the five species of passibilist existential claims (devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional) described in Chapter 4. These arguments are critically evaluated and contrasted with impassibilist counterclaims.

In Chapter 6, the project takes its final turn. Having described the present situation (Chapters 2-4) and the preferred scenario (Chapter 5), the study now recommends a set of prescriptions designed to help actualise that preferred future. By examining important pastoral implications of the research, the chapter proposes a two-pronged strategy for change. First, the researcher suggests three ways to address the confusion among evangelical theologians: (1) providing definitional clarity, (2) reasserting key evangelical convictions regarding divine transcendence and divine relationality and (3) promoting the existential benefits of a Biblically qualified impassibility. Second, the researcher suggests two ways to address the confusion among rank-and-file evangelical believers: (1) teach a carefully articulated impassibility that balances God's transcendent and relational dimensions and (2) teach a nuanced account of God's providential care, including His understanding of, sympathetic solidarity with, and multifaceted compassion for, human sufferers.

The dissertation closes with a short synopsis, giving a brief summary of the research, making recommendations for further study, stating the project's contribution to the area of practical theology and offering a few concluding comments.

CHAPTER 2

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS – THE HISTORY OF THE RESEARCH

2.1   Chapter introduction

In keeping with the Loyola Institute of Ministries (LIM) model, this project employs three structural features for the threefold purpose of interpreting the world as it is (situational analysis), interpreting the world as it should be (preferred scenario) and interpreting our contemporary obligations (recommended changes) to improve the situation (Cowan 2000; Smith 2008:206). The current chapter contributes to the first of these features. It interprets the present situation by means of a literature review, in order to begin answering the primary research question. Chapters 3 and 4 further contribute to the first structural feature by providing, respectively, a contextual analysis of conservative evangelicalism and a historical analysis of passibilist teachings.

As stated in Section 1.2, the primary research question motivating this project is, What are the key pastoral implications, as understood from a conservative evangelical perspective, of contemporary passibilist accounts of God's relationship to suffering? The same section delineates five secondary research questions which derive from the primary question, the first of which is, What is the current state of scholarship in the contemporary (im)passibility literature, particularly with regard to existential concerns? The purpose of this chapter is to address this question by reviewing the relevant literature on divine (im)passibility

for the purpose of evaluating the pastoral implications, from a conservative evangelical standpoint, of passibilist contruals of God's relationship to suffering.

2.2   Introduction to the literature

The vast and varied literature surrounding the question of God's relationship to suffering dates back to the early patristic period. The church fathers debated the subject with those judged to hold heterodox notions of divine passibility in an effort to provide a rationally defensible and Biblically coherent account of how a transcendent being might be said to exhibit compassion toward humanity and, in the person of Christ, experience suffering and death, yet not cease to be God.

These often animated debates involved opponents representing both ends of the (im)passibility spectrum: passibilists who wanted to ascribe some degree of suffering to the divine nature (e.g., theopaschites and patripassians) and unqualified impassibilists who wanted to safeguard God from any involvement in evil and suffering (e.g., Nestorians and Arians). The outcome of their deliberations was a succinct summary of Christological reflection known as the Chalcedonian Confession. This short statement concludes that, in the person of Jesus Christ resided two natures—one human, one divine—"unconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably" (Cross and Livingstone 1990:262-263). Chalcedonian logic maintained that, the event of the incarnation, the divine Logos—second Person of the holy Trinity—was made passible in His humanity whilst remaining impassible in His deity. Thus God could be said to suffer only in a highly qualified Christological sense: in Jesus, God suffered as a man but not as God. Throughout the Orthodox east and Catholic (and later Protestant) west, the Chalcedonian two-natures formula provided the conceptual grammar for later Medieval and Reformation era discussions. These, in turn, have collectively informed modern reflections on the doctrine (cf. Dunn 2001; Crisp 2013:19-41).

2.3   Delimitations and organisation of the review

The present literature review is limited in three respects. First, it focuses exclusively on contemporary scholarship. For purposes of this work, in keeping with the second delimitation enumerated in Section 1.5, the publication of the English version of Jürgen Moltmann's *The crucified God* (1974) is used to demark contemporary scholarship. Whilst prior proposals are touched upon in this and future chapters to the extent they have informed contemporary formulations, the emphasis is on post-1973 treatments of the subject. A brief survey of the pre-contemporary literature is provided in the next section. For those wishing to examine this literature in detail, JK Mozley's excellent study, whilst dated, is still considered an indispensable resource for the discussion up to and including the early twentieth century (Mozley 1926). Other useful surveys, some of which also include the twentieth century include McWilliams (1985:10-24), Steen (1989:69-93), Forster (1990:23-51), Culver (1998:2-8), Weinandy (2000:69-112), Gavrilyuk (2004:47-171), Keating and White (2009:1-26), Castelo (2009:5-14) and Lister (2013:41-168). Additionally, JND Kelly's respected work, *Early Christian doctrines,* contains invaluable historical background material (Kelly 2007:84, 120, 122, 142-143, 169, 291, 299, 312-317, 322, 325, 476).

This review is limited in a second way. Consistent with the first delimitation stated in Section 1.5, the present analysis highlights those works that deal with the existential dimensions of the (im)passibility colloquy. For the purposes of this study, existential dimensions are those that affect Christian existence at a profoundly personal level, impacting, for example, one's devotional life, psychological health, ethical obligations and Christian witness. This review surveys how contemporary passibilist and impassibilist authors have developed their arguments with these considerations in mind. Specifically, it explores how these authors make a case for the existential benefits of their particular understanding of God. Much of the literature concentrates on the metaphysical

dimensions of the debate—these works are not the primary concern here. For example, the most thorough passibilist proposal in recent years is the impressive two-volume (eventually three-volume) work by Jeff Pool of Berea College in Kentucky (Pool 2009, 2010). However, because Pool's focus is on exploring the structure and dynamics of Christian symbol of divine suffering, rather than its existential implications, his work is not featured in the present chapter. The same is true, on the impassibilist side, of the lucid and creative reflections of Kevin Vanhoozer in his important work, *Remythologizing theology*, which explores impassibility from the vantage point of speech-act theory but is, again, light on the existential implications of the doctrine (Vanhoozer 2010:387-468; cf. Vanhoozer 2002). So, whilst the current analysis will touch upon certain metaphysical concerns as part of the larger problem, they will not be its focus. Instead, because the existential dimensions of the (im)passibility debate have not previously been extensively inventoried, this project will seek to address this lacuna in the scholarly literature.

There is a third delimitation to this review. To avoid needless repetition of similar ideas, this analysis will concentrate on fourteen contributors to the post-1973 (im)passibility discussion whose contributions are substantive and original, approaching the subject through one or more of the theological sub-disciplines—philosophical, systematic, Biblical and practical—and from a variety of ecclesial perspectives: Orthodox (Gavrilyuk, Hart), Catholic (Sarot, Weinandy), Reformed (Moltmann), Lutheran (Fretheim, Ngien), Pentecostal (Castelo), Baptist (Fiddes) and conserative evangelical (Lister). Some have proposed quite novel solutions (e.g., Lee 1974; Sarot 1992; Scrutton 2011) and most have written on the subject multiple times. Yet all have informed the debate in significant and creative ways, adding to the fund of existential reflections on (im)passibility. Other contributors besides these fourteen are engaged throughout the remainder this project, including Section 2.6.1 of this chapter. But these fourteen were selected, for the reasons enumerated above, for more detailed analysis.

The review is organised as follows. It begins with a brief overview of the literature prior to Moltmann to locate the contemporary debate (Section 2.4). Then, after surveying the contemporary literature in Section 2.5, the review provides a synthesis of the literature in Section 2.6, including a typology of argumentation and a consideration of three recent trends. In Section 2.7, the relevance of the material to the present project is examined by considering how conservative evangelical scholars and non-scholars have responded to passibilist claims, how these responses inform pastoral reflections on the subject and how this project contributes to filling the scholarly voids in the literature. Section 2.8 discusses the relevance of this chapter to the overall research agenda and Section 2.9 summarises the chapter's contents.

2.4. Overview of the pre-contemporary (im)passibilist literature

References to God's (im)passibility occur quite early in the Church's historical record, beginning with the Apostolic fathers and Apologists. Clement I of Rome appears to affirm divine *apatheia* in his letter to the Corinthian church when he notes God's complete freedom from anger (1Cl 52:1; cf. Dio 8:7), and Ignatius of Antioch speaks in one place of the "Unsuffering, who for our sakes suffered" (IPo 3:2) and in another, of his imitating the suffering of his God (IRo 6.3; cf. IEp 1.1). Pseudo-Barnabas insists on the inability of the Son of God to suffer, "except for our sake" (Brn 7.2). Other ante-Nicene fathers mentioned in the literature who refer to divine impassibility include Aristides, Justin Martyr, Theophilus of Antioch, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen, Novation of Rome, Dionysius of Alexandria, Gregory Thaumaturgus, Methodius, Lactantius and Arnobius (e.g., Weinandy 2000:83-112; Geisler and House 2001:174-178; Castelo 2009:47-60; Lister 2013:67-100). Gregory Thaumaturgus presents an interesting case insofar as the treatise attributed to him (not without

dispute), *Ad Theopompum*, is claimed to support both passibilist (so Hallman 2007:46-48) and impassibilist (e.g., Lister 2013:78-79) conclusions.

In these early years, the principal reasons for employing the axiom were to distinguish the Biblical God from its pagan counterparts, who often were seized by irrational passions, and to defend the Hebrew-Christian God from heretical (e.g., Marcionite or Gnostic) distortions.   The notion of divine *apatheia* was particularly central to the patripassian discussions of the early third century, in which Sabellius and his followers—Praxeus and Noetus—wanted to attribute suffering to God's Being by means of a modalistic monarchian scheme, leading to Sabellius' excommunication by Pope Callixtus I in 220.

The language of (im)passibility also played an important role in the Trinitarian and Christological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries, respectively. The Nicene and post-Nicene fathers articulated their responses to these issues, in part, through the grammar of divine *apatheia*. Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Salvian the Presbyter, Augustine, Cyril of Alexandria and Leo the Great all employed impassibilist logic in their arguments, as did their opponents, whether Arian or, later, Nestorian and monophysite. The Christological solution forged at Chalcedon in 451 similarly assumed *apathetic* reasoning, and it was at the heart of the sixth century theopaschite debates. So, by the late patristic era, impassibility had become an important qualifier on predications of suffering to God and an accepted axiom of orthodox God-talk.

Building on patristic precedent, medieval theological reflection assumed that the divine nature does not suffer. In *Cur Deus homo?* (1.8), Anselm insisted that any attribution of infirmity or humiliation to God must be understood solely in reference to Christ's humanity, not his deity, "which cannot suffer". This affirmation of Chalcedonian Christology is a distinguishing feature of Aquinas' theological project as well. Being incorporeal, God is not subject to passions,

which reside in material bodies. Further, God cannot suffer *in simpliciter*. God may be said to suffer only by means of Chalcedonian logic and a Cyrillian sense of the *communicatio idiomatum*: what happened to one of Christ's natures may not be predicated of the other but only to the common subject or hypostasis, Christ. Thus, the suffering of the human Jesus is rightly attributed to the Son of God, but such suffering is to understood as affecting only His humanity, not His deity (*Summa theologiae* 3.16.4-5).

Early modern theologies tended to reflect this same line of thinking. Zwingli endorsed divine impassibility, as did Calvin, Arminius, Charnock, Turretin, Gill and Edwards. The Thirty-Nine Articles, Westminster Confession and Baptist Confession of 1689 each affirm that God is "without passions", a phrase generally thought to reflect impassibilist impulses. Of the Reformers, only Luther appears to have diverged from the tradition, and his thoughts on the matter are far from clear and a matter of scholarly debate. Ngien argues Luther intentionally reinterpreted the tradition, particularly the communication of properties (Ngien 2004; cf. Weinandy 2000:185; Castelo 2009:61-62; Lister 2013:112-115). Pool believes Ngien misreads Luther and argues the latter remained essentially committed to a Chalcedon understanding of divine suffering (Pool 2009:15; cf. Geisler and House 2001:180-181). Luther's position is problematic because his rhetorical aims, unsystematic reflections and evident love of paradox leave him open to misinterpretation. Whatever his precise position, however, it is clear the impassibilist hegemony was still demonstrably pronounced throughout early modern discourse.

It was in the late modern period that a significant shift took place. Toward the end of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth, an increasing number of pastors and academics took issue with the *apatheia* axiom. JH Hinton and AM Fairbairn in the United Kingdom, IA Dorner and CGA von Harnack in Germany and Americans George Griffen, Horace Bushnell and the Beecher family—

Edward, Chares, Henry Ward, and Harriet Beecher Stowe—were among the early names associated with this shift toward passibilist sensibilities. The reappraisal of impassibility was so widespread that, in England, the Archbishop's Doctrinal Commission sponsored a study, undertaken by JK Mozley, to research its reasons and historical roots. Mozley's monograph, *The impassibility of God*, became the definitive work on the subject. Mozley believed there to be two main reasons for the shift: (1) metaphysics—under which he cites as contributing factors the reaction to Hegel, the philosophy of Lotze and the idea of divine limitation expressed in the works of James Ward, AS Pringle-Pattison and William James and (2) natural science—the rising acceptance of an evolutionary model for biological origins, implying divine participation (hence, suffering) in the struggle for survival (Mozley 1926:124). Mozley identified twenty-two proponents of passibility in the sixty years prior to his essay. In his 1977 work, Schilling identified eight others during this period and an additional forty-two in the years since the publication of Mozley's book (Schilling 1977:251). Some of the more influential pre-1974 twentieth century scholars espousing forms of passibility include BR Brasnet, AN Whitehead, Abraham Heschel, Karl Barth, Wheeler Robinson, Charles Hartshorne, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Kazoh Kitamori. Collectively, they laid the conceptual groundwork for later passibilist projects, most notaby the work of Jürgen Moltmann, considered below.

As this brief overview shows, *apatheia* was an accepted feature of orthodox theological reflection for nearly nineteen hundred years of the Christian tradition, enjoying axiomatic status throughout the patristic, medieval and early modern periods. Then, in late modernity, a shift toward passible models of divine involvement began to gain ground—a shift that accelerated over time, contributing to a significant reevaluation of the classical theistic position.

2.5   Contemporary existential (im)passibilist literature

This section will explore in some detail the more important contemporary contributors to the (im)passibility discussion, focusing on the existential elements in their works. In an effort to preserve the dialogical nature of theological discourse, this review will respect the chronological unfolding of the discussion, beginning with Moltmann's 1974 contribution and continuing with subsequent passibilist proposals and impassibilist counter-proposals up to the present time. Some scholars have made multiple contributions to the colloquy. The date parenthetically appended to each scholar's name in the subsection headings, below, corresponds to their first major contribution to the (im)passibility literature.

2.5.1   Jürgen Moltmann (1974)

One would be hard pressed to find a theologian who would disagree with Daniel Migliori's assessment that Moltmann's *The crucified God* constituted an epic theological event (Migliori 1975). The bold, far-reaching nature and widespread appeal of Moltmann's arguments testify to his unique influence in the area of late twentieth century passibilist reflection. Although others before him anticipated many of his arguments (e.g., Fairbairn 1899; Unamuno 1911; Berdyaev 1919-20; Mozley 1926; Brasnett 1928; Whitehead 1929; Heschel 1936; Robinson 1940; Hartshorne 1941; Kitamori 1946; Pollard 1955; Barth 1957; Woollcombe 1967; Kuyper 1969; Cone 1969), it is Moltmann more than any other who set the tone, established the talking points and determined the existential cast of contemporary passibilist rhetoric.

The details of his project are delineated throughout his impressive and still expanding corpus, beginning with his inaugural work, *Theology of hope* (1967), published the same year he joined the Faculty of Theology at Tübingen

University. But it is his later works, *The crucified God* (1972; English 1974) and *The Trinity and the kingdom* (1981; reprinted 1993), that offer his most cogent reflections on the question of God's passibility. Moltmann's thinking reflects a diverse range of influences, most notably Hegel's philosophy of history, Luther's theology of the cross, Ernst Bloch's philosophy of hope, the passibilist sensibilities of Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, Kazoh Kitamori and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and various insights gleaned from an eclectic assortment of theologians including Otto Weber, Karl Barth and Christoph Blumhardt (e.g., 1974:3, 5, et al.).

To be appreciated, Moltmann's passiblism must be understood within the context of his larger ambitions to radically revise the Christian account of God and God's involvement in the world. Moltmann is convinced that nothing short of a revolution is required if the Church is to once again have a relevant voice in the marketplace of ideas (1974b:6). He argues in *The crucified God* that the two great problems facing Christianity today—the need for relevance and the question of identity—are solved simultaneously at the cross. There, the Church becomes relevant only when it finds its identity in the cross through its solidarity with humanity in our shared *Gottvergessenheit* or "godforsakenness" (1974:4, 7, 204).

Luther's *Crux probat omnia* thus becomes for Moltmann the catchphrase of all legitimate theological discourse (1974a:7). To speak of a "hidden God" apart from the cross, an omnipotent Being of transcendent glory and power, is to revert to a sub-Christian and merely religious "theology of glory" that undermines the uniqueness of the Gospel and legitimises the false gospel of success, power and religiosity that misrepresents the Christian God and imprisons the mass of humanity in the evil, dehumanizing political and economic systems of society (1974a:317-338). God's desire is to set humanity free from these structural

restrictions, but He accomplishes this, not through His power as we might expect, but through His weakness in suffering.

For Moltmann, Jesus' cry of dereliction, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34), is definitive, for it expresses the Son's abject alienation from, and rejection by, the Father in that historic moment of intra-Trinitarian estrangement. It therefore becomes God's point of contact, in the person of the Son, with an alienated humanity, an answer to the common existential cry of all who have ever felt abandoned and godforsaken (1974a:4, 201ff.). The cross underscores not only the abandonment and rejection of the Son by the Father. It also expresses the grief of the Father who "delivers up" (παραδίδοναι) the Son (1974a:241). (Whilst this technically makes Moltmann *patripassian* in the general—as opposed to historical; that is, modalistic monarchian—sense of that term, Moltmann resists the label and prefers instead the coinage *patricompassian* [Sarot 1990:372; cf. McWilliams 1985:21].) Motmann insists the Holy Spirit, too, shares in this suffering, so that the cross truly is a Trinitarian event (1974b:16; cf.1974a:249). Indeed, the cross not only reveals the inner life of God but determines it throughout eternity—God abandoning God, rejecting Himself, taking upon Himself the suffering and eternal death of all who are damned and god-abandoned, opening Himself up to all who are godless and enemies (1974a:203, 249; 1974b:16; 1993:161).

Like others before him, Moltmann argues the Church fathers were guilty of uncritically importing into Christian theology the Greek notion of divine *apatheia*, rendering the dynamic, passionate, Biblical God remote and unfeeling (1993:21-25; cf. 1974b:10-13; Pollard 1955; Woollcombe 1967; Kuyper 1969). And because they sought to safeguard the doctrine at all costs during the fifth century Christological controversies, they developed the Chalcedonian two-natures theology which subverts, in Nestorian fashion, the very real encompassing of the

divine being by the human in Christ, and vice versa. This, in turn, undermines the Biblical account of God's self-humiliation and *kenosis* in Christ (1974a:205-206).

The fathers were wrong to posit just two alternatives with respect to God's relationship to suffering—that is, either essential impassibility or helpless victimisation. There is a third form of suffering, Moltmann believes—the voluntary laying of oneself open to another and allowing oneself to be intimately affected by him. This he calls the suffering of "passionate love" (1993:23). God, he says, is nothing but love (e.g., 1993:32). And this means God must suffer, for suffering is a constituent element of all true love. For Moltmann, this is essential: if God cannot genuinely suffer, then he is fatally impoverished. Famously, in *The crucified God*, Moltmann alleges that a God incapable of suffering is incapable of love, for He cannot be said to be involved with another apart from the ability to feel the other's pain. Such a deficit would render God "poorer than any man", loveless; indeed, demonic (1992: 222; cf. 1974a:274; 1974b:17).

So, what difference does it make to believe in a suffering God? Throughout his corpus, Moltmann teases out the existential implications of passibilism. This is central to his aims, for it was his own personal experiences as a prisoner of war in World War II that prompted his initial search for God and his ruminations on the relationship of God to human sufferers. The loneliness and angst entailed in his POW experience, then, became the soil out of which grew his thoughts about the existential benefits of a passible God. An examination of his works reveals at least four general categories of existential benefits.

First, Moltmann argues that belief in a co-suffering God has devotional advantages, for it makes it easier to relate to God as a God of love. By portraying God as transcendent and impassible, classical theistic accounts remove God entirely from the realm of human suffering. On this view, God does not care about human injustice, estrangement and pain; He is entirely insensitive to the

deepest needs of humanity (1992:222). Not so in passibilist accounts. To the contrary, passibilism renders God accessible and understanding: One who voluntarily enters into the finitude and God-abandonedness of humanity through freely chosen love (1974b:14). This makes it easier to understand and love Him in return.

The second advantage is tied closely to the first—a belief in divine passibility offers psychological benefits, giving solace to those who suffer. This is especially the case with those who suffer without reason and who feel abandoned by God. For them, the fact that God suffers with them makes their pain more tolerable, for they are no longer alone. Their cries are merged with Jesus', the "human God", who cries and intercedes for those who likewise feel godforsaken. Similarly, the Holy Spirit intercedes for them with groans. The sufferer, therefore, is no longer alone in his misery—he enters the "full situation" of God (1974b:16-17).

Third, there are ethical benefits to passibilism. A belief in a suffering God is necessary to make humans loving and vulnerable and hedge against becoming apathetic toward the sufferings of others. If God Himself is unaffected by the sufferings of others, where is the motivation for someone to share another's pain? The God of classical theism makes people indifferent (1974b:8, 10, 17), and there will be no liberating Christian theology apart from a revolution in how God is understood, moving Christians from apathy to a sensitive, sympathetic, active engagement with the causes of suffering (1974b:9).

Fourth, passibilism offers benefits in the apologetic realm. A belief in a suffering God is required for a post-holocaust theodicy. God's suffering in Christ alone provides an answer to protest atheism and all "metaphysical rebellions" against God and is the key to a truly Biblical theodicy. The fact that God willingly suffered in solidarity with every human who ever suffered is the only satisfying answer to the problem of evil instantiated in such places as Auschwitz (1974:4, 10, 276-

278). Moltmann famously cites a story recorded in Elie Wiesel's *Night*, in which a young boy is hanged at the Buna concentration camp as an example for the other prisoners. Wiesel, still a teen, looked on. As the boy convulsed in death, someone behind him queried, "Where is God now?" Wiesel writes that a voice inside him replied, "Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows." It has been noted that Moltmann mistakes both the location (he recorded Auschwitz, not Buna) and meaning of the event: the apparent point of the story was to underscore the death of Wiesel's faith in God, not God Himself (Wiesel 1960:60-62; cf. Sarot 1991:137-138; Lister 2013:30, fn 2). Nonetheless, for Moltmann the incident encapsulates his central theme—that God's willingness to place Himself on the gallows is the only conceivable theodicy in a world torn by evil and suffering.

As will be seen, echoes of Moltmann's theses resound in subsequent passibilist accounts. Moltmann's legacy is vast, not only in the realm of systematic theology, where he is joined by the likes of Eberhard Jüngel (1983), Daniel Migliori (1985), Stanley Grenz (1994) and Robert Jenson (1997), but also in the subdisciplines of Biblical (e.g., Richard Baukham, Terrence Fretheim, Water Bruggemann, John Goldingay, et al.) and philosophical theology (e.g., Paul Fiddes, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Richard Swineburne, William Hasker, et al.). Further, by defining the Church's prophetic task as joining with Christ in his messianic proclamation of hope, setting prisoners free, including those bound by social and political strictures, he gave impetus to the nascent liberation theology movement (Kärkkäinen 2003:154; Nnamani 1995), including James Cone's black theology project (Cone 2008a; 2008b).

A backlash will also be observed. Just as Hume awakened Kant from his metaphysical slumbers, Moltmann had an equally provocative effect on those who identify with the Great Tradition. As will be seen, he will become the lightning rod that attracts impassibilist responses when his arguments are

subjected to focused critical scrutiny (e.g., Blocher 1990:13; Cook 1990:69-92; Wells 1990:52-68; Bray 1999; Helm 2007; Castelo 2005; 2008; 2009:69-110, 2010b; Marshall 2009:246-298; Attfield 1977; Adam 2012; Goetz 2014).

2.5.2 Jung Young Lee (1974)

The same year that *The crucified God* appeared in English, Jung Young Lee published his monograph, *God suffers for us: a systematic inquiry into a concept of divine passibility* (Lee 1974). Building a case for divine *pathos* principally on the insights of Tillich, Brunner and Barth, but also—to a lesser degree— Bonhoeffer, Kitamori, Moltmann and Whitehead, Lee put forward a constructive proposal that consists of four sections which establish his case, plus an appendix, which explains his adoption of Barth's analogy of faith as his theological method.

In section one, Lee argues that God is to be understood essentially as love (*agape*) which he—following Tillich—takes to mean the healing of estrangement (1974:3). This love is characterised by empathy, an actual participation in the sufferings of others, rather than mere sympathy, which he defines as a reactive identification with the sufferings of others (1974:10-12) and, therefore, more characteristic of *eros* than *agape*. In section two, Lee outlines three basic assumptions implicit in impassibilism (an anti-patripassian Trinitarianism, an apathetic bias against passions and an autarchic conception of divine action) and three arguments impassibilists historically have made against a passibilist God (suffering as intrinsically evil, suffering as frustrated sovereignty and suffering as as mutability). The third section seeks to show the compatibility of his passibilist account with five cardinal Christian doctrines—creation, incarnation, atonement, the Holy Spirit and the Trinity. He concludes his proposal in section four by examining its practical application to human existence. Here, he argues that

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passibilism confers on the Christian the distinct advantages of conceiving one's personal suffering within a larger framework—the fellowship of human and divine suffering—and deriving the comfort and hope such knowledge affords. It is this final section that makes a contribution to the existential literature being explored in the present study.

Lee believes that a passibilist account helps sufferers by contributing to the experience of human suffering three important things: meaning, endurance and hope. First, belief in a co-suffering God infuses meaning into human suffering, permitting sufferers to perceive their pain in positive, rather than purely negative terms. When humans imagine suffering to fit within a larger metanarrative of God's own redemptive suffering on behalf of the world, that suffering takes on a positive significance (1974:84). Pain is no longer pointless, and one's faith frees a person from suffering *alone* to be suffering *with*, so that—instead of being mere subjects of one's own suffering—humans become objects of God's vicarious suffering (1974:81).

This leads to a second benefit, perseverance. Situating one's particular instances of human pain within a divine-human fellowship of suffering gives an individual strength to endure in the midst of personal pain because, among other things, that suffering is understood to contribute to the same cause that led Christ to suffer—God's eternal plan of salvation (1974:85).

Third, belief in divine co-suffering accentuates hope in the final victory, when eternal glory will replace the sufferings of this life. Current suffering with God serves as a kind of witness to the fact that the reality of human pain will give way to the reality of future glory, death to resurrection and this fallen world, to the renewal of all things (1974:86-86). Thus, participation in the sufferings of God in the present life serves as a guarantee of human participation in God's glory in the life to come (1974:87). This transforms the event of human suffering from a

negative experience into a positive anticipation. In the process, believers grow in obedience, humility, empathy and love—essential ingredients in personal development and the repristination of the *imago Dei* (1974:89).

Whilst Lee's proposal has not enjoyed the same level of scholarly attention as Moltmann's, it is deservedly credited with making an original contribution to the logic of passibilism (e.g., Thomas 1976). Lee, together with Kitamori (1946), Andrew Sung Park (1993), Dennis Ngien (1995), Jea Eun Oh (1999), Daniel Kwok To Tang (2002) and, most recently, Paul Inhwan Kim (2011) and John Byung-Tek Song (2013), is part of a chorus of important East Asian voices—both American and East Asian born—informing the contemporary debate.

2.5.3 Terrence Fretheim (1984)

Old Testament scholar and Luther Seminary professor Terrence Fretheim authored an important work in Biblical theology entitled, *The suffering of God: an Old Testament perspective* (1984) which made a significant contribution to the colloquy's trajectory. In it, he makes the case that, by taking seriously the Old Testament language of God's *pathic* involvement in the world, particularly in His covenant relationship with Israel, passibilism ensures the historical continuity of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. He warns against an insipient "Jesusology" that pervades the thinking of many contemporary Christians: assigning desirable attributes like love, compassion and mercy to Jesus whilst relegating less attractive ones—holiness, wrath, power and justice—to the Old Testament God. Some believers, he laments, go so far as to regard Jesus as their friend and God as their enemy (Fretheim 1984:2). But God is God of both testaments, and His actions are consistent—just as Christ suffered passion in the New Testament, so God suffered grief, disappointment and rejection in the Old (1984:4,148). The doctrine of divine passibility, then, is necessary to provide a continuous and

coherent picture of the God of both the Old and New Testaments, preventing Christians from bifurcating God's revelation of Himself in Christ from the rest of His self-disclosure which, in turn, would lead to idolatrous worship and unworthy conceptions of God.

Fretheim's larger aim is to challenge the hegemony within Old Testament studies of what he calls the monarchical view of the God-world relationship. This view emphasises the discontinuity between a sovereign, immutable and radically transcendent God and the world. In its place, he advocates an "organismic" model, one that recognises the interrelationship and mutual dependence of God and His creation (1984:35). Fretheim here expresses the same sympathies that are characteristic of other process (e.g., Whitehead, Hartshorne, Edgar Brightman, Tennant, Wieman, Meland, Pinninger, Williams, et al.) and open theist accounts (e.g., Sanders, Pinnock, Boyd, Hasker, et al.).

Fretheim is clear about the implications involved in this reimagining of God—God is affected by the world, dependent on the world, bound by time, limited within history, limited in space and limited (and often frustrated) by human decisions (1984:35-37, 43, 67). Only by conceiving of God in this way, he argues, can Christians do justice to the "relationship of reciprocity" that obtains between the creature and the Creator. This phrase is borrowed from the Jewish scholar Abraham Heschel, whose groundbreaking work, *The prophets,* originally published in 1936, was formative on his theology (1984:35). Indeed, Heschel and Fretheim are both credited with providing passibilism its Old Testament foundation and are widely cited in the passibility literature, especially by those espousing openness and process accounts of God.

Existentially, passibility confers at least two important benefits on its adherents, per Fretheim. The first is devotional—more specifically doxological—in nature. As was seen earlier, Fretheim insists divine passibility is necessary to provide a

consistent idea of God in both testaments, which in turn keeps Christians from bisecting God's revelation of Himself in Christ from the rest of His self-disclosure, leading to idolatrous thoughts and worship. By taking seriously the Biblical images of the suffering God in both testaments then, the essential unity of this revelation is underscored (1984:2-4).

The second is related. For Fretheim, a passible God is always available to compassionately help in time of need. Sensitive to the impassibilist objection that a suffering God might, at times, be rendered inaccessible to us due to His own suffering—an objection that would soon be forcefully made by Richard Creel (Creel 1986)—Fretheim counters that this conclusion need not be drawn. God should never be conceived of as incapacitated by suffering, hamstrung by resentment or made calloused by His own experiences. On the contrary, God is great enough as to be able to suffer yet still be inalterably good, just and loving. These facts assure the believer that God is able to bear His own sufferings yet still be available to help others in their pain. This is true even when humans are the ones responsible for causing His suffering (1984:124, 126). Fretheim never does say precisely why this conclusion is logically necessary.

2.5.4 Warren McWilliams (1985)

In his survey of twentieth century passibilism, *The suffering of God: divine suffering in contemporary Protestant theology* (1985), Warren McWilliams of Oklahoma Baptist University provides a succinct summary of the historical debate and examines six representative passibilist proposals, those of Jürgen Moltmann, James Cone, Geddes MacGregor, Kazoh Kitamori, Daniel Day Williams and Jung Lee (McWilliams 1985; cf. McWilliams 1980).

Whilst his work is largely descriptive, he suggestively alludes to certain existential benefits to a passibilist account of God in his concluding chapter. The first is that a suffering God can more readily be conceived as compassionate than a God incapable of suffering. He points out that, in both testaments, God is depicted as a sympathetic being who takes personal concern in the afflictions of people and seeks to ameliorate them. He finds Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 1:3 to be foundational to God's nature: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" (NIV). According to McWilliams, this verse underscores two core attributes of God: compassion, taken to mean God's identity with the human situation, and comfort, God's predilection for responding sympathetically to that situation. McWilliams understands this verse to be congruent with the Old Testament witness to God's compassion, found, for example in Exodus 22:27b: "…I am compassionate" (1985:186). Thus, a doctrine of divine passibility offers psychological help by assuring humans of God's ability to identify with the pain they experience (His compassion) and God's proclivity to help them in every predicament (His comfort) (1985:186).

A second benefit is ethical. McWilliams notes that, in 2 Corinthians 1:4, Paul makes an explicit connection between God's demonstration of compassion and comfort and one's ability to show compassion and provide comfort to other human sufferers. Thus, God's compassion (His identificational entering-into human pain) serves as a positive inducement for Christians to similarly exercise compassion towards others, as they seek to imitate God's example (1985:189).

2.5.5 Richard Creel (1986)

The first major contemporary work from an impassibilist perspective did not appear on the scene until twelve years after Moltmann's *The crucified God*. Prior

to this, impassibilist responses were limited to journal articles or references within larger works (e.g., Bray 1978; Muller 1983; Weinandy 1985). With the publication of Richard Creel's 1986 monograph, *Divine impassibility: an essay in philosophical theology*, the impassibilist position was articulated in the contemporary philosophical vernacular. In his essay, the former Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Ithaca College does not specifically respond to Moltmann's proposal, but, instead, to that of an earlier passibilist, Charles Harthshorne. Creel's book would become the single most important impassibilist proposal until Weinandy's *Does God suffer?* appeared fourteen years later.

Creel wrote his work, he notes in the introduction, in response to Hartshorne's critique of Aquinas' formulation of divine impassibility. Believing the discussion lacked a "center of gravity", a solid conceptual framework for dealing with its complexities (1986:ix), Creel set out to study the issue systematically. The resulting essay has come to define some of the conceptual parameters for subsequent (im)passibilist discussions. Not surprisingly, references in the literature to Creel's book abound (Shields 1992).

At the outset, Creel notes that passibilists build their case on an alleged incompatibility between divine impassibility and divine love and, since it is clear from Scripture that God is loving, He cannot then be said to be unaffected by humanity. Creel rejects the idea that these two predicates are inherently incompatible (1986:2, 16), and his book proceeds to make a case for this claim. Distinguishing four different ways an incorporeal being like God might be said to be impassible—in His nature, will, knowledge and feeling—Creel explores, throughout the main chapters of his book, whether God should be regarded as passible or impassible in each of these four respects. He concludes that God is impassible in three of these areas—nature, will and feeling—but partly passible in knowledge, insofar as genuine creaturely freedom, whilst allowing God to know all possibilities, precludes His knowing these possibilities as actualities

(1986:204-5). The fact that contributors to the (im)passibility discussion have frequently conflated two or more of these aspects—or neglected some entirely—makes Creel's definitional clarity an important addition to the literature (1986:ix; cf. Castelo 2009:15-16; Lister 2013:148-153).

Creel's four categories provide a useful means of evaluating (im)passibilist positions. For example, Graham Cole of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School argues in "The God who wept a human tear" (2010) that God is "essentially" impassible and "affectionally" passible. Using Creel's categories, Cole is claiming God to be impassible in nature but passible in feeling (Cole 2010:11, 16, 21). Different passible/impassible combinations within the four categories yield, theoretically, sixteen possible permutations (although, in actual fact, the number is less since certain combinations are illogical: nature passibility, for example, combined with impassibility of will, knowledge and/or feeling). This fact has helped scholars understand the complexity of the debate and to avoid framing arguments in strictly binary terms.

Interestingly, Creel later revised his position on God's emotional impassibility. In Chapter 38, "Immutability and impassibility", of *A companion to philosophy of religion*, published eleven years later, Creel (1997) argues that God's impassibility in feeling, whilst preventing his being "crushed" by the sufferings humans experience, does not preclude His being "touched" by them in a way that allows Him to genuinely empathise with a sufferer (2010:326). Creel caveats his argument with the acknowledgement that attributing such emotionality to God might be improper since, in human experience, emotion is tied to physiology and God—lacking a body—might therefore not have an affective dimension to his evaluations (2010:327). One wishes Creel clarified what is meant for God to be "touched" or "crushed", as the distinction suffers from imprecision. Rather than being two different things, they seem to represent degrees of the same thing. Nonetheless, Creel's "touched"/"crushed" disjunction suggests a way to speak of

God possessing an affective life, allowing Him to be empathetic toward His creation, yet not adversely affected by it. In ways unique to their own positions, later impassibilists will make similar distinctions (Weinandy 2000:152-170; Vanhoozer 2002:93; Lister 2013:256-257, et al.).

Creel further helps define the conceptual landscape of the debate by examining how the term "impassibility" has been used throughout the long history of Christian theological discourse. He discerns eight ways the term has been variously employed:

I_1 "lacking all emotions"

I_2 "in a state of mind that is imperturbable"

I_3 "insusceptible to distraction from resolve"

I_4 "having a will determined entirely by oneself"

I_5 "cannot be affected by an outside force"

I_6 "cannot be prevented from achieving one's purpose"

I_7 "has no susceptibility to negative emotions"

I_8 "cannot be affected by an outside force or changed by oneself"

Of these, he suggests that I_5, "cannot be affected by an outside force", is the most consistently used, and, therefore, he adopts the following definition for impassibility: "imperviousness to causal influence from external factors" (1985:11). Eleven years later, after revising his position on God's impassibility of feeling, Creel still held, essentially, to the same definition: "insusceptible to causation" (1997:323). By his own definition, then, Creel, by 1997, had moved from being a strict emotional impassibilist to occupying a kind of theological middle-ground: agreeing with impassiblists that God is imperturbably happy with His own perfections, the goodness of His creation and the certainty that He controls all of human history, and with passibilists that God is "touched" by both

the joys and sufferings of His creatures, though not necessarily in the same ways humans are (1997:326).

Creel's earlier essay suggests several possible existential benefits to an impassibilist understanding of God. It is important to keep in mind that Creel is responding to a certain variant of passibiliity, that of process theology (Shields 1992; cf. Simoni-Wastila 1999). Accordingly, his criticisms do not apply equally to every passibilist proposal. It is also the case that, given the revision he later made to his position on God's emotional passibility, he might have revised some of the following arguments had they been made at a later time.

What then are the putative advantages of holding to an impassible God? The first is doxological—Creel suggests that divine impassibility is necessary for a worthy conception of God. A suffering God does not deserve human worship but human pity, since He is weak and victimised. If suffering is, as passibilists claim, inherent in love, then God, being infinite love, must suffer infinitely, stuck in an "endless vortex" of pain (1986:123-124). Such a God evokes human sympathy, not worship. One is tempted to address Him as "poor God" yet can do little to relieve His acute suffering (1986:125). It seems more appropriate to pray *for* such a God than *to* Him (1986:126). Further, as the highest object of pity, God should pity Himself above all things (1986:124). Passibilism thus leads to impoverished worship. An impassibilist account, on the other hand, retains God's independence from His creation and His essential "otherness", making Him more praiseworthy.

The second benefit is closely connected to the first: impassibility prevents humans from making emotional attributions that are inappropriate for the divine being, such as feelings of stupidity, cruelty, anxiety, despair and desperation. This, in turn, ensures that humans worship and serve God worthily for who he is rather than as an unhealthy projection of their own experiences. If, as process

thinkers claim, God shares every human's feelings, the implications are horrendous, for now God must be thought of as feeling horny, feeling dumb or taking sadistic pleasure in another's pain, since humans experience all these feelings (1986:129). Further, as a Being conditioned by temporal events yet aware of the future, what is to keep God from dreading the sufferings that are certain to befall Him as He contemplates the future (1986:135)? And, as One whose own happiness is inextricably tied to the vicissitudes of creaturely choices, what prevents God from pining away like a jilted lover over those who spurn His appeals or from making indecorous efforts to win them back (1986:142)? In this way, impassibilist language serves as an important qualifier on theological speech.

It is in this connection that Creel develops one of the more controversial features of his proposal. He suggests that it is not God's will that humans love Him but only that they choose freely, whether to love Him or not. God wills that humans have libertarian freedom. His will is, therefore, always accomplished, for whether one chooses His kingdom or not, one is exercising his or her free agency and therefore giving God pleasure (1986:125). This fact helps clarify how God's will is fulfilled despite human rebellion and the divine bliss is undisturbed despite earthly suffering. This, in turn, enables Christians to see an impassible God as fully in control rather than as relationally deficient. Not surprisingly, this aspect of Creel's thesis has not gained much scholarly traction.

A fourth existential benefit to an impassibilist account is that it gives humans a solid hope for the future, for it promises that God will not be the victim of eternal suffering nor, ultimately, will humanity. The doctrine therefore serves as an important safeguard to Christian eschatological hope. A passible God, on the other hand, can offer no such assurances, since He is enmeshed in suffering with no guaranteed future relief. The problem is accentuated for those passibilists who believe God to be timelessly eternal and immutable. On this view, God will

be eternally tormented by suffering and never perfectly happy. And, since human happiness is conditioned on His, then neither can Christians hope to one day be perfectly happy (1986:132).

A fifth advantage is psychological. A God of unperturbed bliss, not distracted by His own suffering, is in a better position to render aid to suffering humans than one who is seeking relief from His own pain. Passibilist accounts assume humans are comforted more by the thought of persons sympathetically sharing one another's pain than by their practical assistance in relieving it. Impassibility questions this claim and suggests that a God who cannot suffer but can offer concrete assistance is actually more comforting in the long run to those in pain (1986:154-155). Creel notes that, in an emergency, one cares little about whether a caregiver identifies with one's pain so long as he or she renders the assistance one requires. In fact, strong sympathetic feelings might prevent a benefactor from rendering the help needed (1986:155). The fact that God cannot suffer in no way precludes His being able to forgive sins, give renewed hope and strength or comfort humans with the most exquisite tenderness. And the expression of "blissful loving equanimity" on God's face during the course of one's trials ought not to be interpreted as divine indifference but as an assurance that all will turn out well since everything takes place within the constraints of God's wisdom, goodness and power (1986:156-157). As will be seen, other impassibilists will espouse similar benefits to those proposed by Creel.

2.5.6 Paul Fiddes (1986)

Two years after Creel published his impassibilist rebuttal to Harthshorne, Paul Fiddes, Professor of Systematic Theology at Oxford and former Principal of Regent's Park College, authored one of the most sophisticated and nuanced passibilist proposals, *The creative suffering of God*. Twelve years later, he wrote

a second book, *Participating in God: a pastoral doctrine of the Trinity* (2000), which discusses, among other things, the pastoral implications of a passibilist understanding of God. He also wrote the article, "Divine suffering", in *The Blackwell encyclopedia of modern Christian thought* (1993). Together, these works present a cogently reasoned case for divine suffering. They lay out what is, in essence, an open view of God's involvement with the world.

His first book relies extensively on philosophical arguments. Combining elements of four distinct traditions—classical theism, "death of God" theology, process philosophy and *Kreuzestheologie* ("Theology from the cross")—as well as insights from Heidegger and others, Fiddes weaves together an approach that is original and logically consistent (1986:12-15). But Fiddes' approach is not entirely philosophical. He makes a strong case for passibility based on pastoral considerations as well. Broadly, his arguments may be summarised under four general headings, each of which can be seen as a benefit of holding to the passibilist view. His theses bear a striking resemblance to Moltmann's.

Fiddes argues, first, that ascribing passibility to the divine Being provides consolation to those who suffer. This results from the knowledge that, in the midst of personal pain, God is not a passive observer but truly understands human suffering "from within" and will not abandon those in pain (1988:31). Fiddes concedes this position lacks the probative value of theological argument but suggests it might, in the long run, prove the more compelling from a psychological standpoint. However, Fiddes adds, the force of the argument depends upon two important corollaries: (1) that God is never overwhelmed by suffering but, instead, ultimately defeats it and (2) that God, whilst suffering uniquely in the Christ event, suffers universally throughout human history, and is therefore able to sympathise with all kinds of suffering (1988:32; cf. Olson 1990:115).

Divine passibility confers a second benefit on the human sufferer, according to Fiddes. In a manner reminiscent of Lee, Fiddes argues that God's own story of suffering has a definite plot-line in which the divine protagonist, prompted by love, braves great suffering at the hands of gross injustice and emerges victorious over evil, suffering and death. Thus, when humans understand their suffering within the larger context of God's, it helps infuse it with meaning. No longer is personal suffering pointless and vain. This identification of one's suffering with God's moves one from mute despair to righteous protest and then to healthy acceptance. On that path, one's suffering then becomes redemptive as one draws upon personal experiences to serve others (1988:147; 2000:158). However, in thus attributing some kind of meaning to suffering, two mistakes must be avoided.

First, one must resist the urge to look for some kind of inherent meaning in human pain, as though God sent the suffering as its "first cause" and one must now discover the reason why. Pursuing such a course of action betrays a conception of God as omni-controlling, a view Fiddes flatly rejects. There is no meaning *behind* human suffering waiting to be discovered, he insists. However, ostensibly senseless suffering can *acquire* meaning when set alongside the definitive suffering of Jesus (1988:148; cf. Wink 1992:14-15).

Second, one must not romanticise the story of the cross. Christ's cry of dereliction expressed his utter forsakenness and desolation in the face of apparently senseless suffering. The message of the cross, then, is that God is with humans even in the depths of desolation. Indeed, God's radical identification with Jesus on the cross reveals the divine willingness to face the threat of meaninglessness and negation, for Jesus' own loss of meaning on the cross entered the very Being of God. God therefore gives meaning to the cross by sharing in it (1988:150).

A third benefit to a passibilist account is the active disdain that such a position engenders for all forms of suffering caused by injustice, greed, authoritarian power struggles and other expressions of human sin (Fiddes 1988:88ff.). His point is that God—who in the person of Christ walks the road "from suffering to glory"—registers a strong protest against the suffering and death endemic to human existence. In Christ, God chooses to define Himself through weakness. Instead of avoiding suffering or inflicting it on others, God voluntarily submits to it. In doing so, God condemns it as well as the human power structures that perpetuate and exacerbate it. And because God stands against suffering in all its forms, humans are offered strong inducement to do the same.

Here Fiddes finds common ground with Moltmann and other "theologians of hope" who protest the present order based upon the promise of eschatological renewal (1988:90). In doing so, he undermines the central theme in protest atheism, that God is a cruel tyrant who subjects people to suffering for the sake of some master plan. If the divine self suffers, takes the side of victims and protests against those who inflict suffering, then God cannot be legitimately charged with cruelty or indifference (2000:161).

Conversely, Fiddes argues, belief in an impassible God predisposes a person to tolerate injustice and other forms of human suffering. By conceiving God to be apathetic in the face of horrendous evil and human suffering, humans also become prone to apathy in the midst of those intolerable realities (1988:48, 108). Only by acknowledging that, through divine suffering, God chooses to identify with the weak and disenfranchised will humans, in turn, identify with them and oppose the totalitarian power structures that keep people in poverty and employ political and military force for self-aggrandising purposes. This critique of impassibilism, of course, relies on the equation of divine *apatheia* with the modern notion of apathy, an equation impassibilists are quick to deny (e.g., Castelo 2009; Vanhoozer 2010; Lister 2013).

A fourth existential benefit of a passibilist account is the motivation it provides for personal worship. Fiddes acknowledges that the image of a suffering God cannot, perhaps, elicit the same degree of awe as the impassible, omni-controlling deity of "classical theism". But he questions whether obeisance to a despotic father figure really constitutes legitimate worship rather than an infantile repression of the Freudian sort (1988:145). Provided a case can be made that God will ultimately conquer suffering, Fiddes believes passibility poses no threat to God's worthiness of worship (1988:146). Further, he avers, the image of a God who voluntarily participates in human estrangement and submits to suffering on their behalf has enough persuasive power to inspire love, obedience and worship in human hearts (1988:146) and move them to genuinely trust God (1988:267).

If God is seen as impassible, on the other hand, it is difficult to understand how God can love humans in the sense that the term is typically used. Fiddes approvingly quotes Daniel Day Williams who—in contrast to Aquinas' conception of love as a dispassionate "intellectual appetite"—insists that there can exist no true love that does not suffer (2000:170). Love necessarily involves participating in the life of the one loved such that, what happens to the beloved, happens to the lover. A God without genuine empathic response can be said to be "with us" in suffering only insofar as God does good to us, which hardly qualifies as the kind of sympathetic solidarity that characterises real love. As an example, Fiddes observes that society tends to disparage "do-gooders" who lack real empathy for those they help. He also points out that if God's love is simply understood as "doing good", then it renders suspect the Biblical claim that God loves all His creation, since all people clearly do not share equally in the benefits of God's "good-doing" love (2000:172). He notes that contemporary black theologians use this argument to underscore their observation that entire ethic groups appear to have escaped God's favour. Finally, Fiddes argues that sympathetic suffering is a necessary form of communication between persons who truly love each other (2000:172-73).

A fifth advantage to a passibilist understanding, echoing Moltmann, is its apologetic value. Only a suffering God can be the basis of a reasonably satisfying theodicy (although Fiddes is quick to disavow the possibility of a truly satisfying theodicy). Fiddes favours the Free Will defence: in creating the universe, God's purpose was to form a race of personal beings with whom God might enjoy fellowship. Doing so required they be endowed with the freedom to choose good and evil, lest they be mere robots. This, in turn, opened the door for evil and all its consequences (2000:164). Fiddes notes that for created persons to have genuine freedom necessitated that God limit the divine freedom. This, in turn, exposed God to suffering in three ways. First, it made it probable that at least some of the divine purposes would be frustrated through contravening creaturely choices. Whilst not logically necessary, this eventuality was, avows Fiddes, virtually inevitable (2000:168). Second, it allowed for something alien and unplanned—namely, evil or "non-being"—to emerge from within God's good creation. Thus evil befell God as something strange and unsolicited. And third, it made God ultimately responsible for suffering. Even though He did not directly create it, He took a risk when He created the circumstances out of which it arose. This made Him vulnerable to regret as the one ultimately responsible for its devastating effects. But, Fiddes seems to say, by being a faithful covenant-partner who shares in the suffering that derives from the risk, God mitigates His own blameworthiness (2000:168). Thus, the attribution of passibility to God renders credible the Free Will defence—an important advantage in our post-Shoah age, when cultural sensitivities to the problem of human suffering are acute. To maintain the position that God does not suffer will deter people from being open to a relationship with God. Fiddes believes this is a new phenomenon. Previously, impassibility could be held in tension with—and softened by—talk about God's intimate and providential care. Now, however, those who are suffering want to know that God's sufferings are analogous to their own (2000:178).

2.5.7 Marcel Sarot (1992)

One of the most prolific defenders of the logic of passibilism is the Dutch Catholic theologian Marcel Sarot, who works within the "Utrecht school" of philosophical theology, advocating a "personalist" understanding of God (Wynn 1994; cf. Wolf 1964; Davies 2004:2-14). Sarot has written numerous articles on the subject of God's passibility (1990, 1991, 1995, 1996, 2002, 2012) as well as an extended monograph, *God, passibility and corporeality* (1992). His influence is widely seen in the literature.

Certain motifs run throughout his works. Citing the Johannine text that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8), Sarot believes humans are entitled to privilege love above God's other attributes such that, when there appears to be a conflict between it and another attribute, we qualify the other by appealing to the primacy of God's love (1996:234). According to Sarot, love necessarily has an emotional aspect. In fact, borrowing the Greek terms, Sarot insists that genuine *agape* includes *eros*, for it is this "value-creating" element that communicates worth and uniqueness to the one loved, assuring the beloved she is not superfluous but is needed by, and irreplaceable to, the lover. Sarot thus believes the traditional understanding of God's love as benevolence—a disposition to charitably act on behalf of the other —to be flawed and in need of revision (1996:234-235). Love must, if genuine, be capable of the kind of interpersonal relations that generate strong emotions, including acute suffering and emotional distress (1992:80;157; cf. 1991:148; 1996:234-235).

In addition to a more robust, satisfying understanding of love, there are other existential advantages to a passibilist view of God, argues Sarot. One is that it provides greater comfort to those who suffer, for a God unable to suffer is less capable of consoling humans in their pain (1996:231). He believes Bonhoeffer's dictum, "only a suffering God can help", is corroborated by human experience:

when one willingly suffers with others, one demonstrates that they matter, reinforcing their self-esteem and empowering them to dissociate themselves from their suffering and feel more fully human (1996:232; cf. Aubert 2011). Further, co-suffering can change the very character of suffering itself. By willingly sharing the pain of another, one can transform suffering from something entirely degrading and terrible into an experience that, whilst unpleasant, contains the seeds of something good: a deepening fellowship (1996:232). Thus, for religious believers, the ability to affirm God's co-suffering is a decisive advantage (1996:232-233).

A second existential benefit is the incentive a passibilist account gives to missionary activity. His reasoning is as follows: Christianity is fundamentally a missionary religion, seeking to convert non-believers to the Christian Faith because they cannot find fulfillment outside of a relationship with God. But whilst it is one thing to believe that people need God, it is another to believe that God needs people. If one conceives of God's love purely in terms of benevolence or beneficence, one cannot affirm the latter: God is fulfilled even if people do not respond to His love. However, if one believes that God's love is emotional and bilateral, then it cannot be satisfied outside of a positive human response. Thus, believing in a passible God incentivises missionary zeal, for it seeks to satisfy God's longing for human relationship by introducing others to Him (1996: 236).

Unconventionally, Sarot takes his argument one step further. Building on Aquinas' argument that passions imply embodiment, Sarot suggests that God is best thought of as possessing a body (1992:160-243). This is, of course, a departure from his Catholic tradition, and most passibilists disagree with the inference. Taliafero, for example, argues that it is conceptually possible for a non-physical being to nonetheless possess sensory experiences like pleasure or pain (1989:221). Despite Sarot's heterodox view of divine embodiment, he makes several important contributions to the passibility literature, most notably

the problems associated with developing pastorally sensitive, post-Auschwitz theodicies (1991).

2.5.8 Dennis Ngien (1995)

Dennis Ngien is a Lutheran scholar and Professor of Systematic Theology at Tyndale University and Seminary in Torono. Like many of his passibilist colleagues, Ngien grounds his proposal in Luther's theology of the cross. His scholarly passibilist works include an article on Luther's understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* (2004) and his dissertation-turned-book, *The suffering of God according to Martin Luther's theologia crucis* (1995). But it was his popular-level 1997 *Christianity today* article, "The God who suffers", that garnered attention and cemented his reputation, at a popular level, as an evangelical in line with Moltmann.

His major 1995 work, whose foreword was written by Moltmann, is self-consciously an effort to approach the (im)passibility question from the perspective of Luther's Trinitarian, soteriological and Christological insights, which are examined in three of the books five chapters. The other two chapters are devoted to a survey of (im)passibility in the early church and a consideration of the history behind—and explanation of—the theological underpinnings of Luther's *theologia crusis*. Ngien concludes that the logic of Luther's theology makes passibility "ontologically constitutive" of God (1995:1, 175). Not all scholars agree with this conclusion, even within the passibilist camp (e.g., Pool 2009:15-16), but it is consistent with a Moltmannian reading of Luther (e.g., Ngien 1995:xi-xii). Like Moltmann, Ngien sees the patristic and medieval axiom of *apatheia* as a Hellenistic import and Chalcedonian Christology as a Nestorian distortion (1995:7-17; 1997:§3).

Ngien cites several existential ramifications of his proposal. The first is devotional in nature: like Moltmann and others before him, Ngien insists that only a passible God can truly love, since true love entails vulnerability. To not suffer sympathetically with those one loves, then, is no love at all (Ngien 1997:§2). Thus, only a passible God can be a real friend (1997:§2). Impassibilism guts the Johannine dictum "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8) of rational content, for a God incapable of sharing another's pain is incapable of genuine love (1997:§2; cf. House 1980: 412). Further, only a suffering God can render comprehensible the incarnation and the cross, since it is only these *pro nobis* events that express the self-humiliation of God *in se* through His willing participation in human suffering (1995:42-86; 1997:§3). To understand God as loving, therefore, requires humans construe Him to be capable of suffering.

The second advantage is ethical: it motivates the Christian to act in morally appropriate ways. As noted above, Moltmann and Fiddes argue similarly, but Ngien's approach is somewhat different. If God is unaffected by what humans do, he argues, there is insufficient reason to take one course of action over another (1997:§2). The argument here appears to be that one's moral choices affect God's emotional happiness and that knowing this incentivises right behavior in a way that belief in an impassible God would not. As noted earlier, Creel disagrees with this line of reasoning.

Third, a belief in divine passibility helps the Church stay true to its apostolic message. Ngien argues that, because God is revealed in the suffering of Jesus, Christians should avoid preaching a triumphalist message of health, wealth and success that fails to embrace suffering as part of the normal human experience. The Christian life is to be patterned on the cross. There, God's vulnerability and voluntary suffering served as a model for loving others. As Christians live cruciform lives, making love a first priority and accepting suffering as part of what

it means to serve the poor and needy, they will eschew triumphalist tendencies and be a healing presence among those in need (1997:§4).

Fourth, belief in divine passibility can open doors for evangelism by showcasing a God who chooses to suffer on humanity's behalf. God's example of magnanimous love—shown on the cross—becomes a magnet for humans who have suffered great pain. Ngien tells a personal story in which a man, who had suffered acute loss in the former Czechoslovakia and was trapped in rage and resentment, converts after he understands that Jesus shed tears for him and suffered alongside him during his difficult life (1997:§4). A suffering God is approachable and inviting in a way that a non-suffering God is not.

2.5.9   Thomas Weinandy (2000)

After Creel's groundbreaking work, the next major impassibilist account was proposed by Thomas Weinandy, OFM Cap., an important Catholic scholar, former lecturer at Oxford and current Executive Director of the Secretariat for Doctrine and Pastoral Practices of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). His approach differs dramatically from Creel's. Whereas the latter approaches (im)passibilism from a philosophical perspective, Weinandy deals with the Biblical, historical, and pastoral issues associated with the doctrine.

Weinandy became interested in impassibility whilst researching his doctoral dissertation on divine immutability in the mid 1970s (published in book form in 1980 as *Does God change?*). By his own admission, he avoided weighing in on the subject of impassibility due mostly to the specter of Auschwitz—that is, the apparent indefensibility of God's impassibility in light of such horrendous human sorrow (1990:viii). He relented, however, the result being what has become

perhaps the single most important work on the topic from an impassibilist perspective, *Does God suffer?* Since its publication in 2000, Weinandy has contributed further to the discussion with three additional essays: "Does God suffer?" (2001), "Human suffering and the impassibility of God" (2009b) and "God and human suffering: His act of creation and His acts in history" (2009a), originally a 2007 symposium address. This corpus has significantly shaped the dialogue.

Weinandy argues in his works that there are three primary catalysts for the contemporary push to reconceptualise God as a passible being. The first is the cultural climate, in which the tragedy of Auschwitz has become the modern interpretive event that renders morally repugnant the notion of a God incapable of suffering. The second is a dual tendency in contemporary Bible scholarship to emphasise those Scriptural (principally Old Testament) accounts of God in which He is said to grieve, become angry and experience other pathic states and to understand Christ's incarnation and crucifixion as indicative of divine *pathos*. The third is a shift in modern theological reflection away from "static" and ostensibly impersonal philosophical categories to more dynamic, putatively personal ontologies (2000:1-25; 2001:35-36; 2009:3-6).

In *Does God suffer?* Weinandy addresses each of these three passibilist impulses by discussing the philosophical, theological and Biblical material. His conclusion is that, although God cannot be said to suffer within His divine self, He is, nonetheless, a God of passionate love, who compassionately acts in human history and—in Jesus Christ—suffered truly as a man (2000:25, 59, 204, 206, 211). Indeed, having taken on passible human flesh and as head of His body, Christ can still be said to suffer and grieve with His people in compassionate solidarity (2000:252-253, 265, 268). Even the Father can be said to experience "grief" and "sorrow" as part of His fully actualised love for humans (2000:228), but these should not be thought of as forms of suffering, as though

God were experiencing some loss or diminishment: He grieves only in the sense that He knows humans experience such loss and He "embraces them in love". (2000:169). Michael Dodds (2001) points out the difficulty of holding in tension both impassibility and the capacity to experience grief and sorrow and, thus, finds Weinandy's synthesis unconvincing.

For the above reasons, the God revealed in the Hebrew and Christian scriptures can fully answer to the existential needs of Christians experiencing grief and pain, avers Weinandy. In fact, he argues, it is only such an impassible God—transcendent to creaturely suffering in His perfect, fully actualised being, yet compassionately proximate to each sufferer in love—that can satisfactorily meet human needs. A passible God, on the other hand, ensconced within the cosmos and subject to its worst affects, is theologically unsustainable and religiously disastrous (2001:39). Throughout his corpus, Weinandy enumerates several existential advantages to an impassibilist construal of God.

The first, echoing Creel, is doxological: only an impassible God merits human worship. A passible God could not exist, for such a God—on the one hand ontologically distinct; on the other hopelessly entangled in the affairs of the world—is a logical absurdity. If He could exist, He would be unworthy of worship, for He would be impotent, impoverished and perpetually tyrannised by changing emotional states (2000:146; 2001: 40, 41). Such a God is far removed from the transcendent, Wholly Other of the Bible who inspires awe and holy fear (2000:53-57).

The second is devotional: impassiblity assures humans that God's love is wholly benevolent rather than self-serving. The fact that God does not suffer actually liberates God to love humanity freely, for He cannot then be thought of as acting to relieve His own suffering. His love for His creation is wholly altruistic and beneficent. On Weinandy's view, what humans long for in their suffering is not a

God who suffers with them, but a God whose love is pure, gratuitous and unconditioned—no matter the circumstances. A passible God, embarked on His own odyssey to rid Himself of pain, simply cannot answer to that need, for any action He takes to eradicate suffering unavoidably appears to have an element of self-interest (2000:160, 162-163; 2001:40). Impassibility should not be thought of as precluding passionate love in God as Moltmann and Ngien seem to suggest. To the contrary, the unconditioned fully-in-act love shared between the Trinitarian members is marvelously abundant, passionate and dynamic, and is shared freely with humans, who experience it—not as some dispassionate, affectively deficient thing—but in all its multivalent power and beauty (2000:160-168).

Third, impassiblity preserves redemptive hope by assuring us that God, as ontologically distinct from His creation, will ultimately eradicate sin and suffering once and for all. Passibility, by predicating suffering of God, undermines this hope, for a God ontologically enmeshed in a sinful world is incapable of redeeming that world. Only a God free of creaturely suffering sustains the expectation that His justice will ultimately set things right and that His goodness will vanquish all evil (2001:39; cf. 2000:158). God's compassion is best understood to be an active impulse to alleviate the cause of human suffering—namely sin—not merely a desire to commiserate with those who experience it (2001:40). Passibility inadvertently assigns such an ontological weight to evil that it becomes difficult to envision how even God can extricate Himself from a system of which He has, through suffering, become a part. On such a view, salvation from sin and suffering become a false hope, for it cannot conceivably be attained (2000:155-157; cf. 214).

Fourth, impassibility, as defined in the Chalcedonian Christological formula, assures the Christian that God can truly identify with her suffering because God suffered *as* man in Christ and not merely *in* a man. Thus, in Christ, God suffered in a genuinely human way. This can be a source of great comfort for all in

distress (2000:204; cf. 261). Ironically, those who, motivated by the plight of suffering humans, espouse a God who suffers *as God* preclude God's suffering *as man*, in a way that would assure humans He understands their condition from the inside, as it were (2000:206). Moreover because the risen Christ still suffers—in a Chalcedonian-qualified way—as head of His suffering body, the Church, humans can be certain of God's most intimate understanding of, and sharing in, their situation (2000:252, 265, 268; cf. 252 fn. 18; 254). Thus, without predicating suffering of God's inner being, impassibilists are able to nonetheless affirm that God sympathises with His suffering creatures in Christ.

A fifth and final existential advantage to Weinandy's impassibilist proposal is that it preserves the uniqueness of Christian consolation, without which our mission to the world is compromised. Passibility, by indiscriminately offering divine comfort to all people regardless of their religious sensibilities, has the effect of weakening Christian commitment to Christ's evangelistic mandate. This is the case because, if all peoples everywhere can—through direct experience—be consoled by God's sympathetic, co-suffering love, then there is arguably less incentive to answer Christ's evangelistic summons to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world (2001:41). There is an important eccesial dimension to Christian suffering that passibilist accounts overlook: Christians experience suffering in a radically different way than those who are not part of Christ's body and who, therefore, are unable to participate in the fullness of the Father's multivariegated response to evil and sin. The tendency among contemporary passsiblists to deemphasise the soteriological and Christological significance of Christ's suffering, Weinandy argues, has the effect of denigrating the "singular evangelistic import" of Christ's suffering on humanity's behalf (2000;173, 258; cf. 249, fn 8).

Weinandy's work has influenced a wide range of scholars. His existential claims complement, and largely overlap with, those of Creel, considered above. In general, the analysis he offers tends to be grounded more in the Biblical witness

and Church tradition than in philosophical discourse, as is the case with Creel. Later impassibilists will develop and add to these arguments.

2.5.10   David Bentley Hart (2002)

Orthodox theologian David Bentley Hart made his first major contribution to the impassibility literature with the publication of his lengthy 2002 *Pro Ecclesia* article, "No shadow of turning: on divine impassibility". This was followed by his 2003 book, *The beauty of the Infinite: the aesthetics of Christian truth*, in which he begins his chapter on the Trinity with a consideration of divine *apatheia*. And, in 2007, he was a presenter at a Providence College symposium examining the relationship between human suffering and divine (im)passibility. His talk, "Impassibility as transcendence: on the infinite innocence of God", was later included with the other addresses in the volume, *Divine impassibility and the mystery of human suffering* (Hart 2009a; Keating and White 2009:299-323). He has, in addition, touched on the doctrine of impassibility in other works (Hart 2005, 2009b, 2013). Several underlying themes characterise Hart's analysis.

Against contemporary passibilist articulations by the likes of Moltmann, Jüngel, Pannenberg and Jensen, Hart argues that God's transcendence implies His non-contingency: His utter freedom from being determined in any way by the created order (2003:157). To argue otherwise is to reduce God to one being among others, a quantitatively superior "thing" in the ontic order, super-eminent to be sure, but qualitatively indistinct from other "things", lacking the ontological "otherness" Hart argues is inherent in the idea of transcendence (2002:190). *Apatheia* or impassibility is, therefore, a necessary correlate of transcendence: God does not suffer precisely because He infinitely transcends the order in which suffering and non-suffering have connotative meanings. God, in fact, transcends every dialectic of being and non-being, existence and non-existence,

transcendence and immanence, responsiveness and unresponsiveness—distinctions that carry meaning only within an order whose members are subject to time and in process of becoming (2009:300-301: cf. Jüngel 2001:98-103). As such, impassibility is part of a constellation of predications—immutability, aseity, love, etc.—that must be maintained to preserve the ontological uniqueness of God. If theology fails to safeguard the divine otherness, the result is a Hegelian reductionism by which God is brought into finite reality, where potency and act are temporally distinct (2003:157).

But God knows no such distinction between potential and act. As pure actuality, God is—Hart argues—infinitely dynamic in the Trinitarian dance of self-giving and receiving. His effulgence admits of no diminution or increase. He is plentitude itself, and no *pathos* is possible for Him, since every *pathos* is a finite instance of change forced upon a passive subject. Thus, God's impassibility is not impassivity. To the contrary, it is the aboriginal and eternal love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in such sheer dynamism, energy and abundance that nothing can add to or detract from it—an infinite drama, bliss and delight impervious to change (2003:167). This has a number of important existential implications for the Christian. In examining these, the reader will note their similarity to the arguments of Creel and Weinandy, albeit with a distinct Platonic bent.

For one thing, it renders God more praiseworthy than a God who suffers. An ontically determined God, even one who chooses self-limitation out of a free exercise of His love, is merely a "finite subject writ large" embarked on a "project of self-discovery" (2002:191). He needs humans for His actualization as much as humans need Him for theirs. Such a God cannot elicit awe and worship in the way transcendent Being is capable. Further, a God subject to finite occurrences (both good and bad) is *ipso facto* shaped by them and thereby open to the charge of requiring suffering and evil for His own "becoming": God's goodness requires evil to be good (2002:191). This, obviously, is doxologically disastrous.

And what of Christian hope? If suffering is foreign to the divine experience, it seems easier to make the case that humans will one day share in that experience and that pain and suffering will be finally eradicated. If, on the other hand, God's very identity is partly established through trafficking with evil, evil is given a certain measure of independent existence. Against the tradition that interprets evil in terms of privation, a passibilist account appears to invest it with metaphysical autonomy, which makes the promise of its extinction dubious (cf. 2002:185).

Theodicy also becomes a problem, according to Hart. On his account, the presence of evil is anomalous, an alien state of affairs resulting from the misuse of creaturely freedom and without divine sanction. But by making God subject to suffering, passibilists make suffering partly constitutive of God and necessary to His being. Doing so unavoidably implicates God in its existence. What an irony it is, he notes, that—whilst attempting to exculpate God from the horrors of Auschwitz—Moltmann and others make God its metaphysical ground (2003:192).

Hart's existential arguments are rooted in metaphysical claims not widely accepted in the broader theological community. He recently described his own approach as "vaguely" Platonic (2013:9): exactly the kind of ontotheology to which Moltmann and others have so strenuously reacted. Perhaps this accounts for why his arguments have not received the degree of scholarly attention they deserve. For example, among the most recent impassibilist treatments, with whom Hart shares common cause, Daniel Castelo cites him just three times— twice in footnotes (2009:19-20, 44, 82)—and Robert Lister only four times—all in footnotes (2013:143, 145, 148, 247). To date, there have been no extended critiques of Hart's work by notable passibilists.

2.5.11 Paul Gavrilyuk (2004)

Another Orthodox scholar who has made important contributions to the literature is Paul Gavrilyuk, who holds the Aquinas Chair in Theology and Philosophy at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 2004, he published *The suffering of the impassible God: the dialectics of patristic thought,* a work based on his PhD dissertation at Southern Methodist University. Its importance to the colloquy is evidenced by its frequent citation in subsequent works. More recently, Gavrilyuk spoke at the same 2007 symposium cited above. His talk, "God's impassible suffering in the flesh: the promise of paradoxical Christology", appears in *Divine impassibility and the mystery of human suffering* (Keating and White 2009:127-149; Gavrilyuk 2009). As a patristics scholar, Gavrilyuk's primary interest is in the early historical development of the impassibility axiom during its most formative period.

In *The suffering of the impassible God,* Gavrilyuk gives detailed consideration to Harnack's Hellinisation hypothesis, the argument that the church fathers were complicit in hijacking of the simple Biblical narrative through uncritical acceptance of Greek and Hellenistic philosophical constructs. Noting that the Harnack thesis has informed contemporary theologies of assorted stripes—kenotic, philosophical, historical, Biblical, theology of the cross, process, openness, liberation, feminist—Gavrilyuk claims it is largely accountable for the disavowal of impassibility in modern theological discourse (2004:1). He suggests that the adoption of Harnack's proposal by contemporary theologians produces a passibilist agenda composed of five key arguments: (1) divine impassibility or *apatheia* is a uniform feature of Greek and Hellenistic philosophies, (2) divine impassibility was adopted uncritically from the prevailing intellectual milieu by the Church fathers, (3) divine impassibility subverts a Biblical account of God's *pathos* and actions in the world, (4) divine impassibility cannot be reconciled with the suffering God revealed in Christ's incarnation and passion and (5) divine

impassibility became so dominant in patristic theological reflection that it stifled more Biblically accurate, passibilist accounts advanced by certain of the Church fathers. His book sets out to address each of these five assertions in an effort to show that the "theory of theology's fall into Hellenistic philosophy" is historically inaccurate and theologically flawed (2004:5).

Gavrilyuk argues that Greek and Hellenistic philosophical traditions—Platonist, Peripatetic, Stoic and Epicurean—far from being univocal, made use of the concept of *apatheia* in vastly different ways, including its use as a divine predicate. Thus, it is senseless to argue, as some contemporary passibilists do, that the fathers accommodated a Greek or Hellenistic concept of God, for there was no one, single God-concept to accommodate (2009:136). Whilst the Church fathers employed the philosophical idiom of their day in their God-talk, they did not do so uncritically, but wrestled with how best to represent God based on their reading of Scripture, in language accessible to their contemporaries (cf. Culver 1996; Weinandy 2000; Castelo 2009; Lister 2013).

For the fathers, argues Gavrilyuk, the doctrine of *apatheia* was used as an apophatic qualifier necessary to maintain the distinction between the Biblical God on the one hand and both pagan gods and human beings on the other. It thus served as an apophatic qualifier on the divine emotions. It in no way made the claim that God has no emotional life or is essentially impassive and uncaring toward His creatures, as is commonly represented in contemporary passibilist accounts (e.g., Moltmann, Pinnock, Ngien, Sarot, et al.). Rather, the *apatheia* axiom was conceptually necessary to affirm, with Scripture, that God's care for humanity is free from evil or self-interest, that He is incorporeal and therefore cannot directly have those experiences connected with a body and soul and that God is not overcome by emotions. Instead, He conquered suffering and death in the incarnation (2009:15-16).

Gavrilyuk traces four dialectical movements in the early centuries of the Church's theological formation in its rejection of second century docetism, third century patripassianism, fourth century Arianism, and fifth century Nestorianism (2009:16-18). In each of these cases, the Church avoided the extremes of unqualified impassibilism on the one hand (e.g., docetism, Arianism, Nestorianism) and an unqualified passibilism on the other (e.g., patripassianism). Instead, the Church chose a *via media* that sought to honour the Biblical account of God's transcendence and active participation in the incarnation and passion of Christ (2009:139-144).

The way ahead, argues Gavrilyuk, is by means of a "paradoxical Christology", summarised by Cyril's enigmatic phrase, "the Impassible suffered". Cyril recognised that God *qua* God cannot suffer, being impassible. Yet, in the person of Jesus Christ, having "emptied Himself" and assumed a human nature, He became the subject of all the sufferings attributed to Christ in the Gospels, not a mere spectator. This allows theologians, then, to affirm both a "qualified divine passibility" and "qualified impassibility" in a carefully constrained Christological sense. In Christ, the impassible Logos suffered, not in the divine nature but in the single subject, Jesus Christ, who is both fully God and fully man. Further, neither the Father nor the Holy Spirit suffered, but only the Son. According to Gavrilyuk, this position avoids the extremes of an unqualified impassibilism and unqualified passibilism (2009:131).

Garilyuk draws from his reseach two important existential implications. First, he suggests that divine impassibility, carefully qualified so as to exclude apathy or indifference, gives God a unique capacity to show humans compassion and unselfish love. Only because God infinitely transcends human suffering can he can demonstrate active compassion and render aid. And because God does not suffer—and therefore has no need to relieve His own suffering—He can love

humans with a perfect, disinterested love (2009:140-141). Accordingly, Christians need never question whether God's motives are tainted by self-interest.

Second, impassibility assures believers that God is never Himself overcome by evil and suffering but—to the contrary—overcomes them in Christ and will one day eradicate them entirely. This gives the Christian hope in a future free of suffering. A co-suffering God cannot provide that assurance, for a "fellow-patient" is unable to offer credible aid to those who suffer. Sufferers need more than "sentimental commiseration": they need to know that suffering and pain really have been vanquished and will one day end (2009:145). Passibility, on the other hand, exacerbates the problem of evil by eternalizing it and making God its permanent victim (2009:145). It also makes a mockery of those Christian martyrs who willingly sacrificed their lives to experience something better with God in eternity (2009:146).

Gavrilyuk's main contribution to the literature is his argument, based on a careful reading of the fathers, that there were multiple voices within the Greek philosophical tradition; not a single, univocal position responsible for the alleged Hellenisation of patristic theology. His insistence that the fathers took pains to ground their understanding of impassibility in the Biblical account, rather than in a misplaced confidence in Greek metaphysical constructs, has encouraged other impassibilists to make similar claims (DeYoung 2006; Castelo 2009; Vanhoozer 2010; Lister 2013).

2.5.12 Daniel Castelo (2009)

Daniel Castelo is a Pentecostal believer and professor of theology at Seattle Pacific University. His Duke University dissertation (2005) critically egaged Moltmann's passibilist programme. His several articles (2007, 2008, 2010a,

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2010b, 2012) and full-length monograph (2009) have called into further question the historical accuracy and theological assumptions of contemporary passibilist proposals, particularly those of Moltmann. In their place, Castelo offers what he calls a "qualified impassibilist" approach, which ascribes suffering to God in a Christologically qualified sense.

Throughout his works, Castelo, like Gavrilyuk and Weinandy before him, disputes the passibilist argument that impassibility was blindly adopted by the Church fathers (2008:397-398 more). This represents a simplistic historical revisionism (2008:399; 2010:119). Instead, he insists, the fathers significantly qualified the concept through devises like paradox and apophasis to preserve God's transcendence (2008:398-400). By not giving due weight to God's transcendence, passibilists create inevitable problems for our God-talk by making the divine Being in some sense dependent on the world for His fulfillment (2008:401). To avoid this error, and to respect the Biblical witness, our theologising must balance talk of God's immanence with an equal respect for His transcendence. Impassibility is important in this respect, for it chastens our speech and provides an apophatic counterweight to theological constructivism (2008:404; 2010b:126). Castelo thus argues for a *via media*—a qualified impassibility, believing this to be most consonant with the Biblical and patristic sources and, thus, an important feature of legitimate God-talk (2007:416; 2008:14; 2010:119-120). Such a position denies that God suffers in His nature, safeguarding His transcendence, yet affirms He genuinely suffered as a man in Christ, preserving His immanence (2010b:125; cf.2009:19).

Castelo notes two important benefits to this approach on the existential level. First, he argues that impassibilism reinforces a proper fear of God. The understanding that God transcends one's suffering helps one appreciate His "otherness" and inculcates a sense of holy awe among His people (2010b:121-125). This is important, for it keeps in-check the inveterate human tendency to

domesticate God. Citing William Placher's work, he notes the proclivity, particularly among Pentecostals, to describe God's proximity in anthropologising language, making light of God's transcendent presence, which at times can be terrifying and deeply unsettling (2010b:121-122). For example, he notes how, within the context of Pentecostal worship services, a holy hush or silence sometimes follows a manifest demonstration of God's presence, such as the use of *glossalalia* or its interpretation (2010b:121). These moments underscore a sacred sense of God's transcendence, and Castelo thinks it important to preserve it, in part, through a Biblically qualified impassibilism. If, on the other hand, Christians are incautious in their use of theopathic speech, discourse can lapse into an inordinate sentimentality, reducing God to a mere Whiteheadian "great companion" or "fellow-sufferer who understands" (2007:415-6). This has a trivialsing effect on the one's conception of God.

This leads to a second benefit of impassibilist-constrained God-talk: real hope. A God who is a fellow-sufferer is, by definition, also a fellow-victim, trapped in the fallenness of His creation (2007:414). But impassibilist speech underscores the essential dissonance between God and fallen reality (2009:20). Castelo notes how, for many ancient writers, God's *apatheia* generated a positive anticipation of the afterlife. God was so transcendent to the ever-changing circumstances of suffering and death in our world, that the prospect of one day sharing that reality provided immense consolation (2009:15). Like Gavrilyuk, he notes that the witness of the early Christian martyrs confirms their hope that, by participating in Christ's sufferings, they would one day participate in His resurrection and so experience firsthand the impassible freedom from the pertubations of life in a fallen world that God Himself enjoys. The perfection and blessedness of the divine life thus gave them courage to persevere under their present trials (2009:143). A passibilist account, by contrast, has the effect of apotheosising suffering (2009:120), vitiating the Christian hope in a future free of pain. Castelo quotes a personal letter Rahner wrote to Moltmann, quoted by the latter in his

History and the triune God, in which the former contests the consoling value of a non-suffering God, noting that it does not help him to escape from his difficulties and despair "if God is in the same predicament" (2009:91).

In recent correspondence with the present author, Castelo, whilst retaining an essential commitment to Chalcedonian reasoning, has indicated a greater willingness to employ theopathic language as a legitimate dimension of the Biblical witness. Such pathic predications of God, however, are never univocal. Instead, recognising the analogical nature of all God-talk due to the divine transcendence, they are used to express both the similarities and dissimilarities between God's affectivity and our own (Castelo 2014a; 2014b).

2.5.13   Anastasia Scrutton (2005)

One of the more creative proposals in recent years comes from Anastasia Scutton (née Foyle), a faculty member in the Department of Theology at the University of Leeds. In an original and intriguing way, she combines insights from three disciplines—theology, contemporary philosophy of emotion and an ancient and medieval understanding of emotionality—to weave together a creative account of how God might relate to His creation affectively in a way that cuts across the passibilist-impassibilist divide. Scrutton's corpus on the subject includes both articles (Foye 2005; Scrutton 2005, 2009) and a book, *Thinking through feeling: God, emotion and passibility* (Scrutton 2013).

With Thomas Dixon, Scrutton suggests that to speak of "emotions" within ancient and medieval contexts is anachronistic, for the current understanding of a homogeneous category of pathic expressions called "emotions" or "feelings" is a distinctly modern one (2013:33) traceable—in the English language—to the mid sixteenth century (2005:170). She notes how Augustine and Aquinas, for

example, distinguished between passions (*passiones*) and affections (*affectiones*), both of which are lumped together into the current idea of emotions. For Augustine, *passiones* were unreasonable and idolatrous and *affectiones* were reasonable and God-centred (2005:170-174). Similarly, for Aquinas, *passiones animae* were attributable to movements of the sensory appetite (presupposing embodiment and, thus, inapplicable to God) and *affectiones* or *motus voluntates* were tied to the intellectual appetite (2013:37). For Aquinas, passiones are involuntary and affectiones are voluntary, being authorised by the will (2005:175). Aquinas, and possibly Augustine (depending on how one reads him) attributes some *affectiones* to God. Scrutton suggests the contemporary (im)passibility debate would benefit from a reappropriation of the Augustinian-Thomist distinction between passions (extreme, overpowering, involuntary) and affections (reasonable and volitional), providing common ground in attributing some degree of emotivity to God whilst denying to Him those pathic experiences that might be incompatible with deity (2005:176; 2013:4).

In a related way, Scrutton explores insights from the contemporary philosophy of emotion. Cognitivism theorises that emotions are mental events, entailing beliefs, perceptions and judgements that are intellectual in nature. Drawing on the work of Martha Nussbaum and Mark Wynn, she follows Sarot in claiming emotions to be integral to certain forms of knowing and, therefore, to theological discourse (2013:5). Thus, she argues that emotions are essential to God's wisdom and His understanding of at least certain states of affairs, for God would not be omniscient if He lacked an emotional capacity (2013:5).

Another interesting feature of Scrutton's work is her suggestion that the rise of passibilism in the twentieth century is less attributable to an increase in human suffering in the modern world, as is frequently claimed, than to a decline of certain religious practices which fulfill the human need for a transcendent fellow sufferer. Building on the work of Eamon Duffy, Scrutton argues that, in the midst

of suffering, humans have a psychological need to know that someone who transcends them—whether God or some holy person—understands their pain and sympathises with them. In ancient and medieval Christian practice, this need was met by praying to the saints and martyrs and by meditating on the sufferings of Christ (Foyle 2005:§29). The knowledge that a saint or God in human flesh suffered gave the Christian consolation. But with the decline of these practices in the post-Reformation west, some Christians began to look to God Himself as their transcendent co-suffering companion (2005:§36). Scrutton argues that this is one reason passibilism became attractive particularly among Protestants. Catholics, who have maintained devotion to the cult of saints and religious practices focusing on the sufferings of Christ (stations of the cross, devotion to the crucifix and the five wounds of Christ, etc.) have an alternative means of meeting their need for a transcendent co-sufferer, without having to predicate suffering of God (2005:§29). The existential implications are readily apparent: belief in divine impassibility need not deprive its adherents of empathy in the midst of suffering. By praying to those saints who have suffered before us and reflecting on the human sufferings of Christ, the Christian's psychological need for a transcendent fellow sufferer can be adequately met (2005:§28-9).

2.5.14 Robert Lister (2012)

Robert Lister of Talbot School of Theology, published his *God is impassible and impassioned: toward a theology of divine emotion* in 2012. It remains one of the most extensive impassibilist-leaning proposals in the contemporary literature and the most exhaustive from a conservative evangelical perspective. A revision of his doctoral dissertation from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, the book builds on previous impassibilist arguments, notably those of Gavrilyuk and Weinandy, and is self-consciously aligned with the theology of Bruce Ware, who wrote the foreword (Lister 2013:24; cf. Ware 1986).

Lister's work consists of two parts. In part one, he discusses the doctrine of impassibility within its historical setting, looking at past formulations (patristic, medieval and Reformed), modern passibilist rejections of the axiom and contemporary evangelical responses to it. Following Gavrilyuk, he argues that the Church fathers—far from uncritically adopting Greek metaphysics—articulated their commitment to impassibilism in quite varied ways and to different degrees (he suggests three categories: qualified-impassibilism, extreme-impassibilism and extreme-passibilism), usually with high regard for the Biblical witness. It is the qualified-impassibility model which he attributes to early theologians like Irenaeus, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine that he believes to best strike a balance between the Biblical notions of divine transcendence and immanence (2013:150). He organises the contemporary evangelical responses into three categories: (1) those who reject impassibility, (2) those who affirm it with (more or less significant) qualifications and (3) those who affirm it in an essentially unmodified form. He identifies with the middle group.

In part two, Lister presents his proposal, which he believes to be faithful to the patristic-medieval-Reformed tradition (2013:149-150). He discusses the need for a hermeneutic that respects both the metaphysical predications of God in Scripture (understood analogically) and the narrative flow of salvation history through creation-fall-redemption-new creation. He argues for the need to balance attributions of divine invulnerability (such as transcendence, self-sufficiency, omniscience and immutability) and divine emotion (jealously, anger, love, affliction, etc.). And he presents his model, which contends that God is atemporal, fully actualised and essentially impassible *in se* but is temporally related to humans in covenantal love (*in re*), such that He experiences passion, even grief over our sins (2013:256-257), yet is never overcome by His emotional engagement with creation (2013:242). Lister thus proposes a duality in God—He is impassible within the divine self and impassioned with respect to His creation,

particularly His covenant people (2013:251-252). This is the heart of his thesis. Lister concludes part two with a Christological reflection that affirms a Chalcedonian two-nature theology and a Reformed versus Lutheran understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum*, allowing for suffering to be genuinely predicated of Christ (within His human nature) whilst preserving the essential impassibility of His divine nature (2013:270).

At a few points within his main argument, but especially in part two, he teases out certain existential implications of his model. One implication is that impassibilism offers both confidence and comfort to sufferers that passibilism does not. Knowing that God is stable and invulnerable to "creaturely machinations" gives Christians confidence in His availability to them in their need (2013:249). On the other hand, knowing God is emotionally engaged (thus "impassioned") assures them of His presence, care and concern in their pain. These twin realities are a source of great human comfort (2013:249). Another implication, common to other impassibilist proposals, is that only a non-suffering God provides solid grounds for eschatological hope, for if God suffers now, what assurance do believers have that evil and suffering will one day be overcome? (2013:248). These considerations anticipate a third implication. Again echoing other impassibilists, Lister insists a co-suffering God complicates—rather than answers—problems of theodicy (2013:249-251; cf. 139). Conceding the initial appeal of a co-suffering God, Lister avows that any comfort derived from the notion is short-lived, for when the day of trouble comes people need a God who ultimately triumphs over sin and evil rather than being "handcuffed" by them (2013:249).

God's freedom is a central feature of Lister's proposal. He understands God's sovereignty in terms of exhaustive control (e.g., 2013:249) and emphasises the volitional element in his framing of divine emotionality, defining impassibility, not as the inability of God to be conditioned through relationship with His creation, but as invulnerability to excessive conditioning—that is, being overcome or

manipulated —by it (2013:149-150). By thus defining impassibility in quantitative rather than qualitative terms, Lister addresses the common passibilist complaint that impassibility implies non-emotionality whilst distancing himself from the Augustinian-Thomist-Reformed tradition. Because of this, Lister's solution is unacceptable to those evangelicals who, like Paul Helm, work from within that tradition (Helm 2013).

2.6   Synthesis of the review

This review of the literature allows for an assessment of the state of contemporary scholarship on the existential dimensions of divine (im)passibility. What remains is to synthesise these findings, then demonstrate the relevance of this material to the project as a whole. This section provides a synthesis of the research by examining, first, the specific types of arguments employed by passibilists and impassibilists to demonstrate the existential benefits of their proposals (Section 2.6.1) and, second, some general trends and observations with respect to the literature (Section 2.6.2). Section 2.7 explains the relevance of this research to the overarching aim of the project.

2.6.1   Typology of argumentation

As seen throughout the above review, passibilists and impassibilists resort to a number of arguments to demonstrate the existential superiority of their positions. Because these arguments have not previously been extensively inventoried, the literature lacks an agreed upon conceptual apparatus for assessing the relative strengths of these claims. It is toward addressing this lack and facilitating future discussions on the topic that the present author proposes the following typology.

The existential arguments advanced in the literature may be usefully classified under five main categories. Other typological arrangements were considered, ranging from three principal categories (God-ward, self-ward and out-ward) to six (relational, doxological, psychological, ethical, apologetic, and other [ecclesial and evangelistic]). However, the author settled on the following five, believing them to represent the best balance of comprehensiveness, on the one hand, and simplicity of presentation, on the other.

The five categories used to evaluate the existential arguments are: (1) devotional considerations—i.e., arguments related to how ones (im)passibilist assumptions enhance ones relationship with God, (2) psychological considerations—i.e., arguments respecting how ones (im)passibilist assumptions promote psychological advantages such as optimism, hope and consolation in suffering, (3) ethical considerations—i.e., arguments concerning how (im)passibilist assumptions improve the way individuals relate to the needs and sufferings of others, (4) apologetic considerations—i.e., arguments that ones (im)passibilist assumptions present a more compelling concept of God to the non-Christian world and (5) missional considerations—i.e., arguments concerning how one's (im)passibilist assumptions provide greater motivation to evangelise and engage in other aspects of Christian witness. Within these five main categories, several subcategories of arguments are employed throughout the literature.

The arguments are briefly outlined in the subsections that follow. The more important of the passibilist claims are more fully explained in Section 4.3 and critiqued in Section 5.4. The more compelling of the impassibilist claims are discussed in Section 6.2.3. For now, they are offered as a means of orienting the reader to the rhetorical scope of the existential dimensions of the debate.

2.6.1.1 Devotional considerations

Passibilists argue that their account is devotionally beneficial in several important ways. First, it gives a clearer, more compelling account of God's love, which—lacking genuine empathic ability—would be deficient (e.g., Moltmann 1974b:17; House 1980:412, 414, 415; Bauckham 1984:10, 12; McWilliams 1985:186; Wolterstorff 1987:90; Taliaferro 1989:222; Clark 1992:§3.3; §5.1; Sarot 1996:234, 235, 236; Sia 1996:§7; Ngien 1997:§2; Ware 1998:63; Carson 2000:59, 60; 2003:186, 190). Second, passibilism makes it easier to understand God as personal, for in the common human experience, normal persons share the capacity to enter into another's pain (House 1980:412, 414; Bauckham 1984:10; Eibach 1990:66-67; Clark 1992:§3.3; §5.1; Sia 1996:§7; Ware 1998:63; cf. Williams 1964:190-192; Wolf 1964). Third, passibilism better explains God's goodness. All good persons are deeply disturbed by evil; thus, if God is not similarly troubled by it, His goodness is in question (Taliaferro 1989:220; Clark 1992:§4.8; §5.1). Fourth, a passibilist understanding of God renders the *imago Dei* in humans more intelligible. Because we reflect God's image, we may analogically attribute to Him certain things—like responses to evil and suffering—that are true of humans (Clark 1992:§4.6; cf. Wolterstorff 1987:83). Fifth, a passible God allows for a deeper level of intimacy than one incapable of sharing human pain. Understanding God to suffer, Christians can—in their own suffering—imaginatively share this suffering with God, who suffers alongside them (Woltersdorff 1987:66-67; 71, 80, 81; cf. Bonhoeffer 1997:361). Sixth, passibility need not necessitate God be seen as pitiable or unworthy of worship (Fiddes 1988:146, 267; 2000:172-173; Taliaferrro 1989:222, 224). In fact, it offers a more attractive, lovable God, for a God who shares voluntarily in human suffering is worthy of greater affection and adoration than One who does not (Macquarrie 1975:114; Fiddes 1988:146, 267; 2000:172-173; cf. Kitamori 1965:44-45). Furthermore, ascribing passibility to God provides continuity with

the Old Testament witness, preventing believers from worshipping an impassible idol of human design (Fretheim 1984:2-4).

Impassibilists counter these arguments with what they consider to be the devotional advantages of their proposals. They argue, first, that ascribing impassibilism to God grants the Christian immediate and intimate access to God's plentitude and presence. Properly understood, impassibility does not imply indifference on God's part nor preclude God's intimate involvement with His people. To the contrary, the doctrine ensures that God is never diminished nor deficient and, thus, always available to His creatures (Johnson 2001:§4; Emery 2009:71-72; Helm 2005:§3, §5; 2007:102; Gavrilyuk 2009:140-141; DeYoung 2010:§6; Lister 2013:251; cf. Anselm 1976:58-59; Von Hügel 1926:191, 197-198). Related to this is a second benefit: divine impassibility provides assurance that God will never be emotionally overwhelmed and therefore unavailable to help during times of need. God is always fully in control of the divine life and can therefore be depended upon to meet our needs at all times (Creel 1986:125, 141, 154; Helm 2007:§3; Gavrilyuk 2009:141, 145, 146-147). A third benefit of an impassibilist account is that it understands God in a way more deserving of our awe, reverence and worship. The passibilist God, on the other hand, by denying His transcendent ontological "otherness", reduces God to someone humans can identify with, even pity, but hardly worship or fear (Creel 1986:123-124, 125-126, 129, 135, 142; Cook 1990:70, 77, 86; Weinandy 2000:146; 20011:39, 41; Hart 2002:190-191; Heaney 2007:237; DeYoung 2010:§6). Fourth, the doctrine of impassibility helps Christians to relate appropriately to God in prayer. When coupled with an accurate—that is, Chalcedonian—understanding of Christ's sufferings, it protects believers from merely Gnostic views of Christ on the one hand and anthropomorphic distortions of God on the other (Von Hügel 1926:222-223). Fifth, an impassibilist account assures Christians that God loves us unselfishly rather than for personal, selfish reasons. Because God does not suffer, Christians need never wonder whether, in relieving their suffering, God is

acting partly out of self-interest by relieving His own, which might be the case were He to share human suffering. Instead, impassibility means that God can freely exhibit true, disinterested and purely gratuitous compassion toward His creatures (Dodds 1991:332-333; Weinandy 2000:160; 2001:40; Hart 2002:192, 195; Gavrilyuk 2009:140-141). Sixth, impassibility assures believers that God's love for them remains constant, unchanging and invulnerable to shifts in emotional states (Johnson 2001:§1). Seventh, divine impassibility accentuates the enormity of God's empathic love in assuming for Himself a (human) nature capable of suffering, for the express purpose of experiencing human pain and taking upon himself the sins of the world (Anders 1997:§4, §7; Gondreau 2009:214, 244, 245). Eigth, an impassible account allows for an even deeper sharing of sufferings with God than if He Himself actually suffered *qua* God. By virtue of the Christian's union with Christ—i.e., Christ as head, the Church as His body—the Christian can be confident that Christ "shares" human sufferings in the deepest, most intimate way possible; not that He suffers in His divine self, but that He identifies with humans in their suffering (Dodds 1991:337, 339, 340, 341).

2.6.1.2 Psychological considerations

Another large set of concerns surrounds the effect a suffering/non-suffering God has on human sufferers. Not surprisingly, passibilists and impassibilists alike perceive psychological strengths in their positions. Passibilists argue their case in several ways. By far the most popular is the assertion that a passible God provides consolation for the sufferer. Knowing God suffers with humans makes them feel better, understood and not so alone (Moltmann 1974b:16-17; Hick 1979:80-82; Young 1979:102-103; Surin 1983:241, 246; Fretheim 1984:124, 126; Woltersdorff 1987:88; Fiddes 1988:31, 32; Taliaferro 1989:222; Sarot 1996:231, 232-233; Sia 1996:§7; Louw 2003:394, 395; Bush 2008:782, 783; O'Brien 2000:18-22; cf. Whitehead 1929:532; Taylor 1998:118-124). Some claim a

second advantage to passibilism: it helps humans adjust to the reality of suffering as a normative experience in a fallen world. If God Himself suffers—the reasoning goes—it should not be surprising that humans, too, suffer. This thwarts triumphalist tendencies from creeping into orthodox theology and promotes psychological health by encouraging Christians to embrace suffering rather than neurotically avoid or deny it (Ngien 1997:§4; Taylor 1998:118; cf. Bonhoeffer 1997:360-362). Third, belief in divine passibility can help ameliorate human suffering by situating it within the larger story of God's own struggle against suffering, sin and death. By seeing one's story within this larger narrative framework, it gives meaning and significance to one's particular pain (Lee 1974:84-85; Fiddes 1988:147, 150; 2000:158; cf. Kitamori 1965:52-53). And because the Biblical narrative ends with God triumphing over sin and death, there is a fourth benefit to a passibilist view—the promise of a future free of suffering. So, whilst believers now derive comfort from a God who shares human pain, they also enjoy a solid hope that a day is coming when neither He, nor they, will suffer again (Lee 1974:86-87; Fiddes 1988:31, 32; cf. Williams 1969:193-194). Kelly James Clark suggests a fifth psychological benefit—a passible account makes it easier for Christians to understand and experience God's empathy. Believing that God suffers obviates the need for an Anselmic rationalization of how humans experience God's compassion when in fact—according to Anselm—it is not compassion God offers in the conventional sense of the term (Clark 1992:§4.8, §5.1). Simply accepting the Biblical truth that God has compassion on humans as a "suffering-with" can have a psychologically salubrious affect.

For their part, impassibilists find passibilist claims unconvincing. They counter with a range of arguments they feel to be of superior psychological value. First, they insist that an impassibilist account offers better help to the human sufferer—that is, actual relief from their distress rather than mere sympathy (Creel 1986:154-155, 156-157; Bray 1999:§3; Helm 2005:§2; Heaney 2007:174; Adam

2012:354-374; Lister 2013:248; cf. Herdt 2010). Their point here is that people who suffer need more than mere commiseration. They need tangible help to relieve their distress, and a God unimpeded by His own pain is arguably in a better position to provide that relief. Second, impassibilists suggest that the notion of a non-suffering God offers a superior hope for the future than a God whose life is in part defined by suffering. Divine impassibility ensures that pain and suffering really will come to an end, since they are not necessary to God's Being, and, as a result, sufferers will one day no longer be subject to their ravages. Christ's work on the cross should be understood primarily in terms of God's decisive victory over the powers of evil than a statement of His sympathetic love for humanity (Muller 1983:39-40; Creel 1986:132; Goetz 1986:§5; Cook 1990:86, 88; Anders 1997:§4; Weinandy 2000:155-158, cf. 214; 2000:39; Hart 2002:191, 202-203, 205, 206; Gavrilyuk 2009:141, 145, 146-147; Marshall 2009:247, 258, 297-298; Leahy 2010:§5; Lister 2013:248). Third, an impassibilist account gives suffering Christians the consolation they need by teaching that God, in the person of Christ—per a Chalcedonian two-nature Christology—suffered as a man and can therefore fully sympathise with their plight. This obviates the need for a God who suffers *en se*. Were God to suffer in His own nature, it would be an alien suffering very unlike the kinds of sufferings humans contend with (Dodds 1991:334; DeYoung 2006:49, 50; 2010:§7; Heaney 2007:174, 175, 178). Kevin DeYoung offers a fourth psychological benefit: divine impassibility provides motivation for Christians to persevere in their suffering as they look to Jesus—who suffered as a real man, not some *tertium quid*—and who persevered through those sufferings to later obtain His reward (DeYoung 2006:50). DeYoung argues that if God had suffered *qua* God in Christ, His experience of suffering would be quite different from that of humans, and Christ's life would not be the model for imitation that it would otherwise be. A fifth benefit is argued by Scrutton: that the doctrine of impassibility, can—when coupled with the devotional practice of meditating on the sufferings of Christ and/or the saints—meet the human need for a transcendent fellow sufferer, providing

comfort for those in pain (Foyle 2005:§29-29; §33; §36). Baron von Hügel argued for a sixth benefit: that the doctrine of impassibility can make Christians long to be more "God-like" by creating a kind of "holy discontent" with the way they now experience suffering, versus the way God impassibly transcends suffering (von Hügel 1926:208-209, 213).

2.6.1.3 Ethical considerations

A third species of existential argument are those that have a bearing on ethical decisions and behaviors. Passibilists have advanced at least four arguments in the literature within this category. First, they aver, a passibilist understanding prevents Christians from becoming apathetic to the suffering in the world. Knowing God Himself suffers with humans prevents them from becoming so inured to human pain that they stop trying to do something to alleviate it (Moltmann 1974b:8, 9; Solle 1975:43, 74, 127; Bauckham 1984:12; McWilliams 1985:189; Migliori 1985:120, 121, 122-123, 126, 131; Ngien 1997:§2; Ellis 2005:172; Louw 2003:395; Long 2006:147). The second benefit is closely tied to the first: passibilism provides greater incentive to protest the causes of suffering in the world, for if God Himself suffers because of the world's pain, then Christians will work especially hard to combat the causes of oppression and suffering to provide relief for God (Sölle 1975:134; Migliori 1985:120, 121, 124, 126, 131; Woltersdorff 1987:91; Fiddes 1988:88, 90; 2000:161; Sia 1996:§5, §8; Louw 2003:395; Ellis 2005:172; Cone 2008:701, 709, 711). Third, it gives Christians more reason to share the sufferings of others. If God voluntarily shares human pain, Christians will want to follow His example and help bear the pain of others. A passibilist account of God can thereby make believers more compassionate (Fretheim 1984:124, 126; McWilliams 1985:189; Ngien 1997:§4; Long 2006:147). Fourth, belief in a suffering God can help deter Christians from sin. By understanding human sin to occasion pain in God, Christians will be less

inclined to indulge those behaviours that God finds offensive (Ngien 1997:§2; Pool 2009:196-197), making them better people and improving their character (Pool 2009:15).

Impassibilists tend not to focus on this species of argument. Hart and Creel both promote the value of a healthy *apatheia* in the Christian life as an ethical ideal. God's impassibility is a model for human behavior, and as He is able to transcend the ever-changing circumstances of life, Christians should seek to do the same. This motivates believers to conquer their passions, remove distractions and nurture a purer, unselfish regard for others within themselves, in which *agape* becomes increasingly determinative of their actions (Hart 2002:193; Creel 1986:157-158; cf. Garvey 1989).

2.6.1.4 Apologetic considerations

Each side in this colloquy believes it possesses the apologetic high ground—a not insignificant consideration for a missionary religion that places a premium on making itself intelligible to the ambient culture. In this category, passibilists muster a pair of arguments. First, they insist that a suffering God is more attractive and compelling to non-Christians than one incapable of sharing human pain (Ngien 1997:§4; Fiddes 2000:178; Pool 2009:9). Because this is the case, they believe, second, that divine passibility is the basis for a more convincing theodicy, arguing that a God who does not meticulously control everything in the universe and has voluntarily chosen to share human suffering provides a more existentially satisfying answer to the problem of God's relationship to evil and suffering (Moltmann 1974b:10; Sölle 1975:134, 149; Surin 1983:246, 247; Bauckham 1984:11-12; 1987:83-95; Fiddes 2000:164, 168; cf. Jonas 1987:3, 4, 6).

Impassibilists, understandably, disagree. They are convinced that what non-Christians most want is not sympathy but help—that is, not a fellow sufferer but a strong rescuer. For them, the fact that God in Christ crushed the powers of darkness and evil and will one day eliminate them entirely is far more compelling than any solace to be derived from a co-suffering God (Castelo 2009:142-145; Leahy 2010:§5; Lister 2013:248). On this view, impassibilism makes for a better theodicy, for it provides assurance that evil and suffering are only temporary, alien to the will of God and external to His life (Goetz 1986:§5; Simoni 1997:346; Hart 2002:192; Gavrilyuk 2009:141, 145, 146-147; cf. Wolterstorff 1987:80, 90; Miller 2009).

2.6.1.5 Missional considerations

For purposes of this project, missional considerations are those having to do with the mission of the Church. Unlike devotional and psychological considerations, this category is rarely cited in the literature, yet there are two clear examples—one for each side—that deserve a mention. The passibilist, Sarot, claims that his account provides greater incentive for missionary engagement insofar as it portrays God as grieving over the state of unredeemed humanity, a grief that can be relieved only through the active participation of Christians in leading others to faith in Christ, so that God's yearning for human love is assuaged (Sarot 1996:236). On the other hand, Weinandy, an impassibilist, argues that his view incentivises missionary zeal. He claims that, by indiscriminately offering divine comfort to all people—regardless of faith commitment—passibility has a tendency to weaken Christian commitment to Christ's evangelistic mandate, whereas impassibility preserves the uniqueness of Christian consolation as a comfort found exclusively in the person of Christ, through His Church (Weinandy 2000:173; 2001:41).

2.6.2 General trends and observations

This examination of the literature yields three notable observations, insofar as they have bearing on the project's present concerns: (1) the persistent passibilist focus on theodical considerations, (2) the increasing sensitivity among impassibilists toward existential concerns and (3) the growing tendency for impassibilists to portray God as having a full emotional life. These are discussed in the sections that follow.

2.6.2.1 Passibilist theodical rhetoric

First, from the beginning, the rhetorical strategy of contemporary passibilist accounts reflects an overarching concern for issues of theodicy—giving a reasoned and existentially viable account of God's involvement in a world scandalised by human suffering. Whilst passibilists tend to be quite candid about the difficulty of making the existence of evil and suffering intelligible on any level (e.g., Sarot 1991; Nnamani 1993:394; cf. Sölle 1975), they nonetheless understand the importance of the project if the Christian message is to be relevant to the real problems of humanity and answer the objections of protest atheists. This inclination toward apologetics results in a tendency among passibilists to approach the topic of impassibility "from below"—to begin with human existential concerns and explain God's relationship to our suffering world in ways that provide comfort and perspective to sufferers as well as legitimacy to God, who is portrayed as a fellow sufferer.

The distinctly existential cast to the discussion is discernable in Moltmann's works and maintained by those who follow him. Whilst earlier thinkers anticipated these concerns (e.g., Brasnett 1928; Robinson 1940; Kitamori 1946), they lacked the same degree of apologetic urgency observed in Moltmann, and the greatest

pre-contemporary passibilist project—that of Whitehead (1929)—had a different, distinctly metaphysical bent. With Moltmann, however, a fresh exigency is assigned to the role of theology in making the Gospel relevant to contemporary concerns, and the greatest of these concerns, in Moltmann's view, is the problem of suffering and evil (Moltmann 1974:1).

These concerns are often quite personal. As was seen, Moltmann's ideas were shaped by his personal experiences of suffering as a German POW in World War II. Other notable passibilists have commented on the ways their own experiences of suffering have informed their theological reflection. Fiddes and Wolterstorff both lost sons to untimely deaths; Ngien, his father and, soon afterward, his health; Hudson was deeply affected by the plight of seriously diseased children (Wolterstorff 1987; Hudson 1996; Ngien 1997). For them, and for others for whom existential questions loom large, the only way to exculpate the Creator in light of the ruined creation is to understand Him as sharing in its suffering. Whilst any "creator" is necessarily implicated when his design appears to fail, passibilists generally hold that God can be exonerated from charges of capriciousness or cruelty only due to His self-humiliation and willingness to enter into His creation's pain (e.g., Fiddes 2000:164-168). Such voluntary identification with the human condition proves that He is good and worthy of human trust.

Impassibilists reject these claims. In their view, attributing voluntary suffering to God only exacerbates the problem of theodicy. Rather than having to explain why God is a sadist, one must now explain why He is also a masochist (Simoni 1997:346). No one argues the point more eloquently that Hart, who insists that by attributing suffering to God, passibilists make suffering and evil necessary to God's "becoming" and, thereby, the metaphysical ground of evil's existence (Hart 2003:160; cf. Jüngel 2001:98-103).

Impassibilists also object to the general orientation of passibilist projects. Rather than beginning one's reflections on God's relationship to suffering "from below", the proper place to start is "from above", with whatever metaphysical attributions are made of God throughout the Bible. The two sides, therefore, disagree fundamentally on their approach and on the relative weight they assign to the human and metaphysical variables in the (im)passibility equation.

2.6.2.2 Impassibilist existential rhetoric

Second, the trend in recent impassibilist accounts is to be more sensitive to the existential aspects of the colloquy. Impassibilists seem to realize they can no longer limit their discussions to metaphysical considerations. Keating and White note how, by 2007, heightened sensibilities surrounding the human predicament had become so pronounced as to require that impassibilist rhetoric take them into account (Keating and White 2009:2). Eighty years prior, von Hügel could describe God's posture—even in the midst of human suffering—as "entire delectation" and an "ocean of joy" (von Hügel 1926:208, 213) and twenty years earlier Creel could write with relative dispassion about the divine ambivalence concerning humans choosing for or against His kingdom (Creel 1986:125). Now, however, the debate's centre of gravity has shifted: it is no longer possible—certainly not advisable at any rate—to speak of God's impassibility in isolation from the awful reality and considerable magnitude of human suffering. In light of his 1997 revision to his original thesis, Creel appears to have drawn this same conclusion (Creel 1997:326-327). But whatever the cause for Creel's reassessment, what is clearly discernable is the trend in recent impassibilist proposals to seek to explain how the divine being can be impassible yet still compassionate and caring toward His creation.

This is a positive development, for it forces the two sides to speak to the same sets of issues, making side-by-side conceptual comparisons easier. And it forces impassibilists to reflect more deeply and sensitively on the pastoral implications of their proposals. The result is a greater balance within the impassibilist literature and perhaps less room for legitimate umbrage on the passibilist side.

2.6.2.3   Impassibilist emotionality rhetoric

A third observation is tied closely to the second: there is a definite trend in the impassibilist literature to increasingly attribute an emotive element to God. As seen in Section 2.4.5, Creel identified four areas in which the term impassibility might be predicated of God: in His nature, will, knowledge and feeling (Creel 1986:11). Sarot argues that contemporary theologians should restrict their use of the term to God's emotions, since other linguistic resources are available to describe impassibility of nature, will and knowledge, but only one— "impassibility"—of feeling (Sarot 1992:29-30). Lister concurs with this assessment and sees the question of divine suffering as part of the larger discussion of God's feelings (Lister 2013:149 fn 4). The present author does not see it as quite that clear cut, for if we commit ourselves to divine *affective* passibility we seem *ipso facto* to be making certain ontological assumptions about God's suseptibility to determination by His creatures and, therefore, to commit ourselves at some level—by necessity—to God's *essential* passibility.

The most recent impassibilist literature has laboured to demonstrate that, whilst certain Church fathers held to unqualified notions of impassibility, the majority did not. Rather, they understood God to possess and exhibit an affective life that allows Him to express a full range of emotions, including delight, anger, jealousy and wrath (Gavrilyuk 2009; Castelo 2009; Lister 2013; Scrutton 2013; Bird 2013a:130).

Passibilists have long contended that the Tradition's teaching of impassibility precluded divine emotionality. They have bolstered their case by citing those early modern confessions that describe God as being "without passions"—the Thirty-Nine Articles (1563), Westminster Confession of Faith (1647) and the Baptist Confession of Faith (1689)—interpreting these statements to mean God has no affective capacity when, in fact, the precise meaning of this phrase is by no means certain, even among adherents of these confessions (e.g., Grudem 1995:165; cf. Duncan 1990:1-15). Accordingly, they accuse the impassibilist tradition of teaching that God is an emotional iceberg—stoic, stolid and unmoved by human pain, more akin to Aristotle's "unmoved mover" than the living God of the Bible (e.g., Moltmann 1973:267-268; Baukham 1984:10; Stott 1986:330; Pinnock 1994:102; 2001:68; Hudson 1996:§3; et al.).

The challenge for impassibilists in recent years has been to demonstrate how God can be impassible but not impassive: how He can, in other words, have an affective life without being inordinately influenced by His "emotions". The new trend in impassibilist literature, therefore, is to emphasise the rich, variegated and dynamic quality of the divine feelings whilst safeguarding divine transcendence (e.g., DeYoung 2010:§6; Giesler 2011; Gonzales 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2012d; Lister 2013:149-150). Although not all impassibilists ascribe an emotional life to God (e.g., Lee 2001:218-230) it is notable how most of the recent accounts address the question of divine emotions head on (e.g., Weinandy 2000:59; Horton 2005:47-48; Castelo 2009:39; Vanhoozer 2010:387-468; Cole 2010:11-16; Geisler 2011; Gonzales 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d; Bray 2013:150-151; Lister 2013:195-216. The approaches these authors take to reconcile God's emotionality and transcendence vary greatly, depending upon their personal proclivities and confessional traditions. Five common approaches this author has discovered in the literature are described below, although most theologians combine two or more of these elements in their proposals.

(1) Affection/passion distinction. Some theologians note the distinction made, in late patristic and medieval sources, between "passions" and "affections" as a means of affirming the emotionality/transcendence dialectic (Weinandy 2000:125-127; Emery 2009:64-68). Scrutton's work in this area was previously noted (Section 2.4.13), in which it was seen that Aquinas' *passiones/affectiones* distinction is a useful device for predicating healthy emotional responses of God whilst eschewing unbecoming passions. Other theologians who appeal to this distinction include Castelo (2009) and Vanhoozer (2010).

(2) The "touched"/"crushed" distinction. This strategy was noted in Creel's 1997 article, distinguishing between God's ability to be emotionally "touched" by human pain, which he affirms, and God's Being overwhelmed or "crushed" by human pain, which he denies (Creel 1997:326-327). Weinandy's position that God cannot suffer but can nevertheless feel "sorrow" and "grief" is a species of this argument (Weinandy 2000:152-170), a point not lost on his critics (cf. Dodds 2000:770). Bloesch avers God freely enters into the world's misery yet does not cease to be "joyous" at the prospect of overcoming this travail (Bloesch 1995:94-95). Vanhoozer uses a similar approach when he claims that God can "feel the force" of human suffering yet never be overwhelmed (Vanhoozer 2002:93; cf. Doerge 2008). Horton argues similarly that—whilst God "is affected" by his interactions with humanity—His being, will and actions are never determined by what happens in His "covenantal" dealings with humans but only by His eternal counsel (Horton 2011a:242-253: cf. Horton 2005:43, 45, 48; Horton 2011b:80). It should be noted that Horton also argues, following Calvin, that, properly speaking, impassibility should be predicated only of the divine essence—which, he claims, cannot be affected from outside influence—not to the divine

persons—whom, he believes, "open themselves up" to human tragedy (2011a:249-250). Gerald Bray takes this same line (Bray 1993:99).

As noted above, the challenge with this type of language is to demonstrate how these pairs of descriptors ("touched"/"crushed", etc.) are different in kind, not merely in degree. Or, if one concedes they are different only in degree, how the distinction has the intended effect of precluding the possibility of God's Being overwhelmed by pain. Arguably, once one opens the door to God feeling negative emotions like sorrow or grief it is logically difficult to then close the door to the possibility of more sorrow and grief, and more, and more, until a threshold is crossed and God must be said to suffer. One way around this dilemma, perhaps, is to combine the above approach with the volitional control argument, described next. This synthesis is discernable in Horton, whose definition for impassibility states that God cannot be "overwhelmed" by suffering (Horton 2005: 194-195). Vanhoozer (2010:404) and Lister (2013:256-257) use similar strategies.

(3) Volitional control. Some theologians—notably Packer, Carson, Lister and Bird—maintain that God has a full emotional life which permits Him to share in the human condition, even to the point of suffering (Packer 1986, 1998; Carson 2000:60; Bird 2013a:131; Lister 2013:256). Although this technically qualifies them as passibilists, all four wish to retain continuity with the impassibilist tradition. To do so requires they add a volitional component to the definition of impassibility—that is, that God cannot suffer *unless He chooses to allow it* (e.g., Packer 1986:§3, §5; 1998: 277; Carson 2000:60; Bird 2013a:131; Lister 2013:256; cf. Attfield 1977:48; Bloesch 1995:95; Jackson 2008). For theologians who identify so closely with the Reformed tradition, this seems a curious approach, since the tradition has historically supported the classic theistic understanding of

impassibility. It is reminiscent of Barth's emphasis on the absolute sovereign freedom of God, who chooses to suffer with His creation out of love (Barth 2010:370-371). And it has occasioned the criticism that it is, in essence, merely another form of passibilism. The celebrated "post-conservative" evangelical Roger Olson, for example, describes Packer's position as being essentially irreconcilable with classical Calvinism and bearing a striking resemblance to open theism (Olson 2011; cf. Bird 2012:131).

(4) Ontological/Economic distinction. Lister makes the case that God is, within the divine nature, invulnerable to involuntary suffering (Lister's preferred term for impassibility) yet is fully impassioned (interacting with creation from a "posture of plentitude") in the economy of His covenant dealings with humanity (Lister 2013:215-216, 224, 242). He believes this view to be the most faithful exposition of the impassibilist tradition, which he traces through patristic, medieval and Reformed instantiations (2013:150, 251). Ironically, however, the way he arrives at his position, following the lead of Bruce Ware, John Frame and William Lane Craig, is by attributing a form of temporality to God's economic activities, which he calls God's *in re* omnitemporality, and which is a denial of the classic theistic understanding of God's eternality as essential atemporality (2013:226-231; cf. Craig 1998, 2001; Ganssle 2001; Helm 2001, 2002; Padgett 2001; Wolterstorff 2001). On Lister's view, God is emotionally affected through His relationships with creatures, who may be said to occasion His changing pathic states (2013:226). At the same time, Lister maintains that God is invulnerable *in se* to any suffering that was not predetermined by His eternal council. Thus, God is *essentially* immutable and *relationally* mutable (e.g., Cole 2010). Whilst God demonstrates the whole panoply of divine emotions within the economy, including grief, all these feelings were freely chosen by Him according to his exhaustive divine foreknowledge

and sovereignty, so He is never the victim of suffering, never taken by surprise, never overwhelmed and never guilty of exercising His emotions in an irrational or disproportionate way (2013:229, 249-255). Lister never explains how the sort of relational pain He attributes to God—foreknown, voluntarily received and tightly controlled—can legitimately be termed "grief" insofar as it bears little resemblance to what passes for "grief" among human subjects. Vanhoozer—who depicts emotions as concerned-based covenantal theodramatic construals—and Horton—who employs the essence-energies dichotomy—also appeal to the logic of the ontology/economy distinction in their proposals (Vanhoozer 2010:212-416; Horton 2011a:244, 248).

(5) Active/passive distinction. In the position described above, Lister explicitly disavows the ancient Aristotelian-Thomist concept of God's *actus purus* (Lister 2013:157). Yet the belief that God is fully in act is a common approach for many scholars working within the Orthodox, Thomist and Reformed traditions, who believe it to be the best way to ascribe both impassibility and impassionedness to God. The doctrine of *actus purus* teaches that the infinitely perfect God has no self-constituting unrealised potential in Him but is a fully actualised triune being (Helm 1990:124-125; Weinandy 2000:120-127; Hart 2003:167; Emery 2009:71-72). The key implication of the doctrine, for purposes of this discussion, is that God is never passive but always active—never determined by His interactions with things outside Himself, but entirely complete in the fullness of His being and His self-giving love. Thus, God is utterly and supremely passionate in Himself (Helm prefers "impassioned"; Helm 2007:102) and cannot experience temporal "passions", since He cannot be more passionate than He already is (Weinandy 1985:78-79; 2000:79, 124, 127, 161; Hart 2003:167; 2009:301; Davies 2006:68-74; Emery 2009:59-61; Long 2009:51-52; Bray 2012:152-153). Helm recommends that, because

the divine affective life is so different from that of humans, a new term be coined to denominate it. He suggests "themotions" but, after twenty years of scholarly neglect, the suggestion has clearly not been well received (Helm 1990:140).

Each of the above proposals shares a common commitment to speak of God as possessing a full, rich emotional life whilst preserving a sense of God's transcendence. They do so, variously, by asserting that God's "emotions", unlike those of humans, never overwhelm Him, are never sinful and are always well-proportioned and under the control of His will. It remains to be seen whether future passibilist proposals will critically engage these attempts to reconcile God's affective life with His transcendence. Perhaps the straw man of divine impassivity will finally be laid to rest.

2.7   Relevance to the topic of research

As stated in Sections 1.2 and 2.1, the primary question guiding this project is, What are the key pastoral implications, as understood from a conservative evangelical perspective, of contemporary passibilist accounts of God's relationship to suffering? Answering this question first required a review of the state of the scholarship in the contemporary existential (im)passibility literature. This was accomplished with an analysis of major contributors in Section 2.4 and a synthesis of the literature in Section 2.5.

It now must be demonstrated how this review contributes to the specific aims of the project. Doing so requires a brief consideration of how conservative evangelicals have variously responded, on both scholarly and popular levels, to passibilist claims. This is undertaken in the subsections that follow. In Section 2.7.1, four common conservative evangelical responses in the academy are

considered, whilst Section 2.7.2 examines common popular level conservative evangelical responses. These analyses are developed in Chapter 4 but are introduced here to acquaint the reader with these concerns and demonstrate the relevance of the literature review to the pastoral dimensions of the project.

2.7.1 Scholarly conservative evangelical responses

Thus far, the (im)passibility literature has been considered as a multiplex phenomenon whose contributors represent a rich variety of theological traditions—Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, liberal Protestant and conservative Protestant. Inasmuch as this project is focused on the conservative evangelical community (a subset of conservative Protestants), it is required to now briefly note the ways self-identifying members of this community have responded to the (im)passibity colloquy at the scholarly level. A detailed examination of these responses is provided in Chapter 4.

First, a preliminary remark is in order. The colloquy is frequently cast in strict passibilist/impassibilist binary terms as a subset of larger discussions involving more ambitious traditionalist/constructivist (e.g., Castelo 2010a:366-367), traditionalist/revisionist (e.g., Jenson 2009:117) or traditionalist/Meliorist (e.g., McDermott 2013:363) agendas. Whilst these distinctions are helpful in discussing certain aspects of (im)passibility, they are inadequate as general categories, tending toward semantic imprecision and conceptual disjunction. Castelo argues, for example, against simple passibilist/impassibilist dichotomies, describing his own position as a mediating one (Castelo 2009:14, 19; cf. 2010a:368-369) and noting the existence of multiple divine possibilities and impassibilities (Castelo 2010a:366). It is wise to guard against the temptation to characterise the array of theoretical options strictly in passibilist/impassibilist terms. The complexities of

the issues require an accommodation of their nuances if those exploring them are to fairly represent the range of positions available on the subject.

Lister identifies three ways evangelicals have responded to the doctrine of impassibility—affirmation, modification and rejection (Lister 2013:158). The current project employs four, three of which (i.e., the first, second and fourth) roughly correspond to Lister's classifications. These four responses may be usefully imagined as points on a continuum, running left to right, with "hard impassibilism" on the far left, "hard passibilism" on the far right and "soft impassibilist" and "soft passibilist" positions occupying the space in between. Brief descriptions of these four positions follow. They are examined more closely in Chapter 4.

2.7.1.1 Hard impassibilism

Some conservative evangelical scholars maintain that God, for ontological reasons, cannot suffer within the divine being. These scholars generally align themselves with the classic-theistic tradition running through Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin. They emphasise God's transcendence as precluding a relationship with the world that would expose the divine Being to suffering. Instead, His relatedness to the world is characterised by such fullness, benevolence and self-giving generosity that He is not affected by His creation in any kind of passive sense. Rather, He is fully-in-act, never reactive, working within the created order out of the divine initiative and sheer plentitude of His triune being. As such, He cannot be affected negatively by what transpires in our space-time world. Whilst immune to suffering within the divine self, God may truly be said to experience suffering Christologically by means of Chalcedonian logic—that is, Christ, the second member of the Godhead, genuinely suffered in the medium of His

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humanity (but not His deity), and so in this qualified sense, suffering was experienced by God *as a man*.

2.7.1.2 Soft impassibilism

Other conservative evangelical scholars, whilst holding to the same Chalcedonian understanding of Christ's suffering and critical of certain features of passibilist accounts, believe that God's relatedness to the world nonetheless exposes the divine being itself to suffering. Because of this, God is affected by the sin and sufferings of His people. However, because of the infinite fullness of His being, He is not overcome by this exposure to suffering—He does not cross the threshold beyond which He would be said to suffer. God is thus touched by human affliction but never overwhelmed by it. Further, because God decreed (so Calvinists) or has knowledge of (so Arminians) all that transpires in human history, He is never surprised by suffering, nor made its victim. And because nothing can happen to God that He does not in some sense ordain, His volition limits His exposure to suffering—God cannot suffer unless choosing to do so.

2.7.1.3 Soft passibilism

Still other conservative evangelical theologians go further. Wishing to attribute some degree of suffering to God *qua God*—as opposed to a Chalcedonian qualified suffering-as-man—these scholars speak of Him as voluntarily suffering with, for and because of His people. They qualify the divine suffering by appealing to God's voluntary involvement in it and by His invulnerability to determination by it in His nature. In this vein, some speak in terms of God's essential impassibility and affective passibility. Scholars in this category are typically critical of both impassibilist and hard passibilist accounts. They therefore

wish to balance the transcendent attributes of God found in the Bible with those depictions of Yahweh's *pathos* and Christ's sufferings. They believe that some illicit Hellinisation took place to the Gospel during the patristic period, but typically not to the degree thought by scholars in the hard passibilist camp, considered next. Not surprisingly, distinguishing this category from that of soft impassibilism is the most challenging part of this taxonomy, because the line separating the two categories is subtle. This is explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.

2.7.1.4   Hard passibilism

There are other conservative evangelical scholars who reject the *apatheia* axiom outright as an antiquated doctrine imported into Christian theology by the church fathers. They thus endorse Harnack's hypothesis and accuse impassibilists of worshipping a God who is impassive and uninvolved with His creation. They are critical of the classical-theistic tradition and believe Chalcedonian Christology to obscure the degree to which God entered into human suffering. In their view, by confining Christ's suffering to His humanity, the fathers indulged Nestorian impulses in a misguided effort to safeguard the divine transcendence. In doing so, they bequeathed to the Church a distorted account of God's empathic solidarity with suffering humanity. These scholars tend to also challenge other components of the classical-theistic tradition, such as divine immutability, simplicity, eternality and perfection.

2.7.2   Popular conservative evangelical responses

The scholarly factionalism among conservative evangelical theologians is troubling in its own right. But it is problematic in a second respect—namely, that it has contributed to the theological confusion among rank-and-file evangelical

Christians, many of whom have been influenced by the shift toward passibilist sensibilities. Another contributing factor is the role played by popular evangelical pastors, teachers and authors who promote passibilist views. It has become a commonplace to hear sermons and read literature, for example, describing God as "heartbroken" over human sin, One who "weeps" over His creation in grief like a "jilted lover" pining for His beloved and who "needs" humanity to "fulfill a longing in His heart" (Ferrante 2006; Tada 1997:241-244; Yancey 1998:153; Comerford 1999). This phenomenon is examined in greater detail in Chapter 4, but for now a single example will suffice.

William Young gained a worldwide audience with the 2007 publication of his popular novel *The shack*, in which the protagonist, Mack, experiences significant healing from certain life traumas, most notably the murder of his daughter and his prolonged estrangement from his father. What brings about his healing is a lively series of interactions with the three members of the Trinity—the Father (Elousia or Papa, normally appearing as a congenial black woman), the Son (Yeshua) and the Holy Spirit (appearing as a waif-like Asian woman named Sarayu). In two especially powerful encounters with Papa, special attention is given to the suffering the Father has Himself endured due to His risky decision to create free moral agents capable of sin and His paternal identification with Jesus' death on the cross. In one instance, Papa sheds tears; in both, He reveals deep scars on His wrists, having suffered vicariously with His Son on the cross (Young 2007:94; cf. 225). This attribution of suffering to the Father is, of course, a form of patripassianism—or to use Moltmann's term, "compassionism"—and, without any qualifications placed on it, it has enormous negative ontological implications. These, in turn, have a number of devotional, psychological, ethical and other existential implications for those who accept this view.

2.7.3 Pastoral concerns within conservative evangelicalism

The examples cited above highlight two prominent sets of pastoral concerns that are the focus of this project.

The first set relates to the way certain conservative evangelical scholars, preachers and influential authors have adopted passibilist models for explaining the divine life. If not carefully qualified, predicating suffering of God can lead to a dramatic attenuation of such divine attributes as the divine sovereignty, aseity, blessedness, immutability and transcendence. This violates certain conservative evangelical convictions, explored in the next chapter, regarding the ontologically distinct nature of the Creator with respect to His creation. It also results in a number of problems at the existential level. Finally, the adoption of passibilist accounts betrays an ahistorical bias—a willingness to abandon the consensual, historical teaching of the Church in favour of a novel view perceived to be more amenable to contemporary sensibilities. For all of these reasons, the tendency among conservative evangelical scholars to adopt unqualified passibilist models of divine action is serious and deeply troubling.

The second set of concerns involves the confusion that exists among rank-and-file conservative evangelical believers. Some, following passibilist assumptions and ignorant of impassibilism's long historical pedigree and the Biblical arguments in support of it, take for granted the assumption that God must suffer if He is to lovingly relate to humans in any kind of intelligible way. Others have been raised in traditions in which such classical theistic notions as God's transcendence and sovereignty were taught without a commensurate emphasis on God's compassion and understanding, leaving them with serious doubts about whether God really cares about their difficulties and struggles. Still others simply do not know what to think: exposed to a bewildering array of seemingly irreconcilable options—each proffered by trusted religious authorities—they are

left to makes sense of these alternative explanations of the God-world relationship, all the while asking, "Where is God when I hurt?"

For pastors called to shepherd God's flock, this represents an untenable state of affairs. The ubiquity of human suffering makes this a matter of supreme importance, for this is an issue church leaders confront weekly, if not daily. If Christian pastors cannot offer their parishioners the instruction, encouragement and consolation they need in their pain, they are failing in their calling. Now more than ever, what is needed is clarity about God's relationship to human suffering so pastors and other ecclesial authorities can confidently assert what Scripture teaches—that God is incomparably proximate to those who hurt (e.g., Ps 34:18), understanding their needs, sensitive to their afflictions, rich in compassion and love and mighty to save (2 Co 1:3-4; 1 Pe 5:7; Zep 3:17). And in Christ, God has a unique, firsthand acquaintance with suffering, so that Christians can be assured that they have a high priest capable of sympathising with temptation and human pain (He 2:17-18; 4:15-16). These twin concerns, then, motivate the present project.

2.7.4   Gaps in the current research

The author discerned four principal gaps in the current research. The first is the lack of evaluative criteria for assessing existential truth claims. Despite forty years of collective reflection on the existential implications of divine (im)passibility, there has been no single attempt to develop an organisational schema or theoretical framework for the purpose of analysing the kinds of devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional arguments employed by (im)passibilist scholars. Yet such an apparatus is invaluable if scholars are to do a rigorous job of critically assessing the existential claims made by both sides of the colloquy.

The second is the absence of a systematic critique of the more important passibilist existential arguments. Whilst many impassibilists have criticised certain passibilist existential claims (e.g., Creel, Weinandy, Hart, Castelo, et al.), none has attempted to do so in a thorough, systematic way. Creel's is perhaps the most extensive, yet it suffers from (1) being dated, having been written in 1986, (2) lacking interaction with Moltmann and the post-1973 literature, (3) lacking significant Biblical argumentation and (4) being revised after the author's subsequent change of heart (cf., Creel 1997), thus undermining some of its conclusions. The result is a body of literature in which is found an *ad hoc* assortment of arguments, leaving a number of important existential questions unanswered.

The third is the paucity of projects set within the context of conservative evangelicalism. Lister's work comes the closest. He self-identifies as a confessing evangelical and explicitly endorses certain key evangelical presuppositions (Lister 2013:19-20). But the work itself is intended to add a voice to the larger (im)passibility discussion, does not specifically address some uniquely conservative evangelical concerns and departs from certain key classical theistic commitments. Castelo has helpfully offered some reflections for an impassibilist-informed Pentecostal praxis (Castelo 2010b; 2010c; 2012; cf. Gabriel 2011), and DeYoung has offered some help along these lines from a Reformed perspective (DeYoung 2006; 2010). Vanhoozer, Bray, Helm and Long all write from within the broader conservative evangelical subtradition, but their proposals are not directed specifically toward those within the subtradition, nor do they give detailed attention to the praxeological dimensions of (im)passibilist beliefs. This observation leads to the next point.

The fourth gap is the limited degree to which pastoral considerations are taken into account. Weinandy (2000), Heaney (2007) and Castelo (2009) have offered

helpful insights into the pastoral ramifications of certain impassibilist arguments, and others have invoked the benefits of passibilist presuppositions in the realm of pastoral care (e.g., Hunter 1979; Dearing 1985; Henning 1986; Cavanagh 1992; Sarot 1995; Louw 2000, 2003; Ellis 2005; cf. Pargament and Hahn 1986; Hill and Hall 2002). But a more robust and systematic account is needed to detail how the Christian God can be eminently transcendent yet incomparably present—that is, how He can genuinely relate to humans in their suffering without it having deleterious effects on the divine being and compromising His ability to fully save.

2.7.5 Contribution of the current project

Like every dissertation, this one is designed to add to the fund of current knowledge about a particular subject (cf. Vyhmeister 2001:185), in this case, divine (im)passibility. The primary purpose of this study is to explore the pastoral implications of the debate by assessing passibilist existential claims, examining how these claims have impacted conservative evangelical scholars, key influencers and lay persons and making specific recommendations for addressing the problems resulting from an accommodation of certain passibilist assumptions. The project contributes to the existing literature in the following four ways.

First, the project sets forth a typology of the existential arguments used by passibilists and impassibilists over the last forty years. This organisational schema arranges the assorted claims into five principal categories—devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional—for future scholarly refection and interaction.

Second, the project explores the more compelling passibilist arguments that collectively assert a suffering God confers greater existential benefits on believers than One incapable of suffering. These claims are contrasted with counterclaims by impassibilist scholars, and both are subjected to Biblical and theological scrutiny. This has not been attempted in a comprehensive or systematic way; a lacuna the current project helps address.

Third, the study proposes a set of suggestions for addressing the problems related to the adoption of certain passibilist assumptions. Located within a conservative evangelical framework, these recommendations should prove to be of practical value to scholars and non-scholars alike who identify with this subtradition, assisting the Church to move beyond the status quo to a preferred future.

Fourth, in keeping with its practical theological focus, the project proposes a view of God that has important existential implications for Christians. This God is quintessentially relational and loving; One who understands the human predicament, having assumed human flesh in Christ and suffered vicariously in life and death; and One who is compassionately present to humans in their pain, offering sympathy and help, often in the form of relief. The intent is to provide a solid Biblical account that offers confidence and consolation to Christians struggling with their faith in the midst of their suffering.

2.8   Relevance of this chapter to the overall research agenda

This literature review is an essential element of the project's overall argument, significantly determining its direction and content. The review assists in the development of Chapter 3, the aim of which is to explain the current situation by means of a contextual analysis of conservative evangelicalism, noting its history,

relationship to the larger Christian community and two of its core theological commitments that have direct bearing on discussions of (im)passibility. The review provides the necessary theological backdrop against which the relevance of these core commitments can be measured.

The review is also necessary to Chapter 4, which provides a historical analysis of key passibilist teachings, documents the four ways conservative evangelical scholars have responded to these teachings and describes the impact of the colloquy on rank-and-file conservative evangelical believers. Without the review of the contemporary scholarship, these tasks would be impossible, inasmuch as they presuppose an intimate acquaintance with both passibilist and impassibilist arguments found in the literature.

Chapter 5 is also informed by this literature review. Following an exegesis of certain key Biblical texts, the chapter examines passibilist arguments by means of these texts in tandem with the chief conservative evangelical theological convictions described in Chapter 3. A thorough knowledge of the passibilist literature is essential to an informed and fair critique of the apparent weaknesses of its claims.

Finally, Chapter 6 requires an extensive engagement with the literature offered in this review. This chapter prescribes specific ways to address the pastoral concerns raised in previous chapters—the uncritical adoption of passibilist assumptions and the abandonment of certain core conservative evangelical commitments among scholars and non-scholars who identify with this subtradition. Knowing what those assumptions are and offering alternative approaches requires a familiarity with the way the issues have been framed in the literature.

2.9 Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter, as stated in Section 2.1, was to review the most recent, credible and relevant scholarship on the topic of divine (im)passibility for the purpose of assessing the pastoral implications, from a conservative evangelical perspective, of passibilist accounts of God's relationship to human suffering, to identify the gaps in the current literature and to demonstrate how this project adds to the broader discussion by making specific unique contributions.

A brief introduction to the large body of (im)passibilist literature was provided in Section 2.4, noting the ancient nature of the debate, extending back to the early patristic period and playing a major role in defining orthodoxy especially during the Arian, Nestorian and monophysite controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries, leading to the Chalcedonian Confession of 451. The current project was contextualised within this body of work and delimited in scope as pertaining to the post-1973 literature with an existential focus.

Section 2.5 presented the results of the review. The study discovered a large number of articles, books, essays, blogs, sermons, book reviews, theses, dissertations and other material that dealt with the existential aspects of the subject. These were reviewed in chronological order to preserve the linear and dialogical development of certain dominant themes. To avoid needless repetition, fourteen representative authors were selected who were judged by this author to have made the most important contributions to the colloquy. The works of these scholars were examined with particular attention paid to their existential claims. Six of these scholars may broadly be identified as "impassibilist" and eight as "passibilist". After identifying the scholar's general approach to the subject and, in some cases, larger theological ambitions, each review then detailed the author's specific existential claims.

Section 2.6 provided a synthesis of the review. First, the assorted existential arguments were organised into five principal categories—devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional. Individual arguments were summarised within this typological framework. Three general trends in the literature were noted—the dominance of theodical concerns within passibilist works, the increased sensitivity among impassibilist scholars to existential considerations and the recent efforts by impassibilists to clarify their understanding that God has a rich, full affective life.

Section 2.7 considered the relevance of this literature review to the current project by examining the four basic ways conservative evangelical scholars have responded to the debate—strong and weak impassibilist and strong and weak passibilist positions. How passibilist assumptions have become dominant among conservative evangelical pastors, authors and other opinion shapers was then considered, as well as how these various scholars, writers and eccesial practitioners have informed the thinking of rank-and-file believers. Two sets of pastoral concerns were then noted—the first having to do with the way many conservative evangelical scholars have responded to passibilist rhetoric, the second, with the confusion in the pews and the subsequent need for solid teaching so the average believer can be confident of God's presence, compassion and help in his or her suffering. Finally, four gaps in the literature were considered. It was proposed that the current project helps address these gaps in the following ways: (1) by developing a conceptual framework for discussing existential concerns, (2) by critically evaluating the most compelling passibilist existential arguments, (3) by closely examining the effect passibilist assumptions have had on conservative evangelical scholars and non-scholars and (4) by offering an account of God and God's involvement in the world that is Biblically defensible and existentially viable.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS – AN EVALUATION OF CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICALISM

3.1 Chapter introduction

The Loyola Institute of Ministries (LIM) model prescribes three structural features, the first of which (situational analysis), interpreting the world as it exists, is the subject of three chapters: Chapter 2 (analysis of the literature), Chapter 3 (contextual analysis) and Chapter 4 (historial analysis). Having examined the literature in the previous chapter, the project now turns to explore its ecclesial setting—"conservative evangelicalism".

Section 1.2 describes the primary research question motivating this project as, What are the key pastoral implications, as understood from a conservative evangelical perspective, of contemporary passibilist accounts of God's relationship to suffering? Answering this question is the aim of this dissertation. The aim of this chapter is to answer the second of the five secondary research questions, What are the key theological tenets of conservative evangelicalism that inform theological discussions of (im)passibility? Answering this question requires an explanation of how the term "conservative evangelicalism" is being used in this project (Section 3.2), a brief overview of the history of the movement—noting its major figures, influences, beliefs and relations with the broader Christian community (Section 3.3)—and an examination of two prominent conservative evangelical dogmatic commitments that are particularly

germane to the subject of (im)passibility, God's transcendence and God's relatedness to His creation (Section 3.4). The chapter concludes with an explanation of how its contents relate to the overarching research agenda (Section 3.5) and a chapter summary (Section 3.6).

3.2 Definition of "conservative evangelicalism"

Section 1.6.3 defined a "conservative evangelical" as "a Christian who identifies with certain core convictions and devotional practices inherited from the Protestant Reformers and their heirs". The same section noted that the modifier "conservative" implies a mistrust of certain claims of higher criticism and a reticence to substantively alter the received tradition. This section will expand on this definition, which, in turn, will delineate the ecclesial parameters of the current project more precisely. First, the term "evangelical" is defined (Section 3.2.1) after which the modifier "conservative" is explained (Section 3.2.2).

3.2.1 Evangelical

The literature frequently notes the difficulty of defining "evangelical" with exactitude (Gerstner 1975:22; McGrath 1995:53; Stone 1997:2; Olson 1998:40; Bloesch 2005:39; Sweeny 2005:20-23; Greggs 2010:5; cf. Noll 2010:20; Hansen 2011:9-10; cf. Kantzer 1977:139; Woodberry and Smith 1998:26-29). DG Hart urges the term be abandoned altogether due, in part, to its lack of dogmatic specificity (Hart 2005:11, 16; cf. Wells 1993:8; Stone 1997:2-3). However, others have pointed out that many theological terms (e.g., orthodox, catholic, fundamentalist, Reformed, ecumenical, etc.) admit of similar ambiguity (Bloesch 2005:40), that the term is worth retaining unless it can be shown to obstruct

discourse (Larsen 2005:121) and that further definition, not outright rejection, is what is needed (Bloesch 2005:39).

Etymologically, the term "evangelical" derives from the Greek cognates *euangelion* and *euangellismos,* meaning "good news" and normally translated "gospel" in English Bible versions (e.g., Lk 2:10; Ro 1:16; Ga 1:8; et al.). Evangelicalism is, therefore, fundamentally a religion grounded in the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ and committed to spreading this good news to others. By these standards, all branches of the Christian family tree—Orthodox, Catholic, Oriental Orthodox, Church of the East, Anglican, Protestant—technically qualify as evangelical. Indeed, Bloesch detects distinct evangelical notes in Orthodox theologian Bradley Nassif and Catholics Hans Urs von Balthasar, Ida Freiderike Görres, Lous Bouyer, Hans Küng, and John M Todd (Bloesch 2008:18). Historically, however, the term has had a more limited range of applications.

Since the sixteenth century, "evangelical" has been used to describe those associated with the various protests against the late-medieval Catholic Church—protests designated, collectively, as the Protestant Reformation (Noll 2010:21). "Evangelical" is still used to describe the heirs of the Reformation, especially in Europe, where the term is essentially synonymous with the word "Protestant" (e.g., the *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland*). Later, "evangelical" was applied to those who identified with the eighteenth century revival movements of John Wesley, George Whitefield and others. Still later, in the mid-twentieth century, the term was self-consciously employed by certain predominantly American scholars, pastors and other religious leaders who wished, whilst not abandoning their core dogmatic commitments, to distance themselves from the more pejorative appellation, "fundamentalist". Toward the end of that same century, the term became associated with a particular political ideology espousing conservative social and moral agendas. "Evangelical" is still used in this sense today,

especially by American popular media (Stone 1997:8-21; Hansen 2011:12-16; Mohler 2011:68-73). These historical considerations are examined in greater detail in Section 3.3.

This brief overview demonstrates the semantic elasticity of the term "evangelical". Despite its diverse uses, however, there are certain distinguishing characteristics that have remained constant among self-identifying evangelicals, and these are the hallmarks of what might be properly designated "evangelical" religion. These include a strong emphasis on the Bible, the importance of personal faith in Christ, the centrality of Christ's atoning work and the obligation to share the good news of God's saving activity with others. These emphases have remained central to scholarly efforts to define evangelicalism.

Timothy Larsen describes an evangelical as, (1) an orthodox Protestant who (2) identifies with the worldwide movements spawned by eighteenth century revivalism, (3) ascribes unique epistemological and ethical status to the Bible, (4) emphasises Christ's work on the cross as the sole means of reconciliation with God and (5) stresses the work of the Holy Spirit as the means of sanctification, fellowship with God and service to the world in fulfilling Christ's Great Commission (Larsen 2014:1). According to its author, this so-called "Larsen Pentagon" was designed to complement, not supplant, the "Bebbington Quadrilateral", a list of four evangelical essentials proposed by David Bebbington in 1989: (1) conversionism, (2) activism, (3) Biblicism and (4) crucicentrism (Larsen 2014:1; Bebbington 1989). Beggington's model has become the scholarly "gold standard" for defining "evangelicalism" in the literature (e.g., Olson 1995:§1; Sweeny 2005:18; Hankins 2008:1; Noll 2010:21; Larsen 2014:1, et al.). This being the case, a brief explanation of its four constituents is in order.

3.2.1.1 Conversionism

Conversionism emphasises the evangelical conviction that at the heart of true religion is a personal encounter with God involving a turning away from sin and self-centreed living and turning toward God in faith through Jesus Christ. In reaction to late-medieval sacramentalism, seventeenth century confessionalism and all forms of nominalism, evangelicalism has consistently maintained the need for this personal, volitional nature of true saving faith. The "born again" movement of late-twentieth century popular religion is but the latest instantiation of this conversionist impulse.

3.2.1.2 Activism

Activism is Bebbington's way of capturing the important evangelical impulse to live out one's faith in intensely practical ways—engaging in charitable endeavors, seeking social reform and, above all, taking seriously Jesus' mandate to make disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19-20). Historically, such activism has been a feature of evangelical faith and been responsible for the establishment of a wide array of institutions: hospitals, sanitariums, orphanages, soup kitchens, rescue missions, food and clothing distribution centres, suffrage and abolitionist movements, missionary societies and, more recently, efforts to protect the unborn and victims of slave and sex-slave trafficking (cf. Davis 1986; Moore 2013).

3.2.1.3 Biblicism

Whilst respecting the proper place of reason, experience and Church tradition in determining dogma and praxis, evangelicals have assigned special value to the

testimony of sacred Scripture. This core conviction has motivated and shaped evangelical rhetoric throughout the centuries: from the sixteenth century rallying cry of "*Sola scriptura*", to the early-twentieth century "modernist" controversies, to the more recent postmodern debates. Evangelicals believe the Bible to be God's definitive source of written revelation and, thus, authoritative for Christian faith and practice. Whilst debates have fractured evangelical discourse since the late-twentieth century between "infallible" and "inerrantist" camps, virtually all self-identifying evangelicals ascribe unique epistemological status to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures (Olson 2004:212-215; Gregg 2010:4).

3.2.1.4 Cruicentrism

Cruicentrism is Bebbington's preferred term for designating the staurocentric or cross-centred soteriology of evangelical reflection. Fittingly, the cross is the *crux* of the Faith—Jesus' death satisfied the demands of divine justice and reconciled sinful humanity to a holy God. Accordingly, a substitutionary view of the atonement has been a recurrent theme in evangelical theology. This fact has, in recent years, engendered debate among evangelicals, with some groups calling for a greater emphasis on other atonement models (e.g., *Christus Victor*, recapitulation and relational schemes) to balance out what they consider to be an excessively juridical paradigm derived from Western forensic notions based on Roman law. Most evangelical discussions along these lines urge, not an abandonment of penal considerations, but a complementing of those considerations by recourse to other atonement theories. Except in extreme cases, the vicarious element of Christ's expiatory work, in continuity with the Old Testament sacrificial cultus, is still retained.

3.2.1.5 Bebbington's model

Most, but not all, self-described evangelicals identify with Bebbington's four criteria. Evangelicalism is not a denomination or a homogeneous movement. Rather, it spans multiple denominations and traditions and, whilst a majority of evangelicals find their identity in the doctrinal motifs described above and the religious practices deriving from them—practices like daily Bible reading, unscripted prayer and personal evangelism—not all do so. Noll cites George Rawlyk's interesting 1996 research: using Beggington's four evangelical markers, some 74% of self-professing American evangelicals polled claimed to hold to all four convictions, and 13% of these were Catholics (these numbers for Canadian evangelicals were 51% and 25%, respectively; Noll 2010:22, 31 n.5). These data appear to support George Marsden's observation, also cited by Noll, that evangelicalism represents a series of overlapping constituencies, some more self-conscious than others (Noll 2010:22).

These facts notwithstanding, Bebbington's model, whilst modified or complemented by the work of others (e.g., McGrath 1995; Olson 1998:40; Sweeny 2005:23-25; Bloesch 2008:16-17; Larsen 2014:1-12; Domeris 2014:153-158), has enjoyed widespread acceptance in the scholarly world and stood the test of time. It appears far more frequently in the literature than, for instance, Webber's fourteen-part taxonomy (Webber 1978:32). Accordingly, this project accepts its fourfold model as a serviceable means of defining the basic contours of evangelicalism.

3.2.2 Conservative

The foregoing suggests that evangelicalism, like virtually every religious tradition, is a diverse phenomenon, representing a coalition of individuals, families and

other groupings holding to a common set of beliefs and practices. How strenuously they hold to those beliefs and practices—and how they interpret them—varies considerably (cf. McDermott 2011:46). Rather than conceiving evangelicalism as a homogeneous, undifferentiated tradition then, it is common to depict it metaphorically as a "mosaic", "kaleidoscope", "rainbow", "family" or "coalition" that admits of diversity, even dynamism (e.g., Smith 1986:128; Stone 1997:6; Sweeny 2005:19-23; Greggs 2010:5).

Perhaps the most frequent way to represent the doctrinal polarities within evangelicalism, is by means of a continuum with traditionalists at one extreme and non-traditionalists at the other. The *Oxford dictionary of the Christian church* denominates these two poles as "conservative" and "liberal" (Cross and Livingstone 2005:§3). Other pairs of terms are employed in the literature, including: old model/new model (e.g., Brow 1990:12), conservative/progressive (Stone 1997:169), traditionalist/reformist (Pinnock 1998:43; Olson 1998:41; Moore 2004:423), resistant/accommodative (Oden 1998:45), conservative/post-conservative (Pinnock 2006; cf. Vanhoozer 2005:xiii), traditionalist/revisionist (Jenson 2009:117), traditionalist/constructivist (Castelo 2010a:366-367), conservative/opening (Greggs 2010:2, 5) and traditionalist/meliorist (McDermott 2013:363). The terms are not, strictly speaking, coterminous, and each pairing captures a different aspect of a complex array of differences between the competing camps. But what the pairings collectively underscore is the considerable dissimilarity between the two poles in both their general aims and their dogmatic results. A brief exploration of these dissimilarities will give greater clarity into how the term "conservative" is employed in the present work.

3.2.2.1 Theological ambitions

The theological aims of conservative and revisionist camps are significantly different. As their name implies, conservatives wish to conserve or preserve the basic theological grammar of the Great Tradition, the orthodox consensus as taught by the fathers, medieval scholastics and the Reformers (McDermott 2011:47; 2014:16). Conservatives identify with those core beliefs that have historically distinguished Christian orthodoxy as a whole and evangelicalism in particular. A theme verse for conservatives might be the last part of Jude 3: "…contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints". They fully embrace the Reformed value of *sola scriptura*, but believe that the same Holy Spirit who authored the Bible has worked within the Church to direct her interpretation of Scripture. In McDermott's words, the Tradition is granted "veto" power over novel interpretive schemes at variance with how the Scriptures have historically been understood by the majority of the Church (McDermott 2011:46, 48; cf. Oden 1998:45-46). Conservatives, therefore, demonstrate a great respect for the historic formulations of theological reflection—especially as embodied in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan, Apostles' and Athanasian Creeds and the Chalcedonian Definition—and are critical of revision-minded theologians who fail to accord the Tradition the hermeneutical priority they believe it is due. Timothy George, for example, observes that theologians are not "freelance scholars" but guardians of a sacred trust that must be passed on intact to succeeding generations (George 1998:49). Here, perhaps, the formula proposed by the Anglican Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626) is as good a summary as any: one canon, two testaments, three creeds, four ecumenical councils and five centuries of formative, consensual Christianity. Whilst varying greatly in the particulars of their dogmatic programmes, representatives of conservative evangelical approaches include Carl Henry, Kenneth Kantzer, Norm Geisler, Gerald Bray, JI Packer, Paul Helm, Richard Muller, Wayne Grudem and DA Carson. Despite identifying his approach as post-conservative (Vanhoozer 2005:xiii) and being

claimed by Roger Olson as a representative of that camp (Olson 2007:15, 17, 28), Kevin Vanhoozer gives consistent evidence of belonging in the conservative camp.

Revisionists are primarily concerned, not to preserve the Tradition, but to shape it creatively in an effort to conceive and articulate the Faith in fresh, accessible ways so as to render it intelligible to new generations. Accordingly, they believe it their duty to reinterpret the Tradition in light of present realities. By doing so, they improve the Tradition (thus McDermott's "meliorist" label; McDermott 2011:46) and reform it (cf. Olson 1995:§1-7; Pinnock 2006:383-388; Greggs 2010:8, 9). Whilst tradition deserves the theologian's respect, the creeds, like all theological articulations, represent man-made second-order theological reflection (Olson 1995:§2; cf. Pinnock 2006:384; McDermott 2011:46). A revisionist theme verse might be Matthew 13:52b: "… every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Pinnock 2006:388). Revisionists frequently accuse conservatives of a rigid obscurantism and slavish adherence to the Great Tradition (Pinnock 2006:383; Olson 1995:§1; 2007:17-27). This critique extends to conservative evangelical methodological approaches—where charges of foundationalism, common sense realism and naïve Biblicism are common—doctrinal formulations, in which many dogmatic elements of so-called "classical theism" are challenged and ethical construals, in which ethical strictures are reinterpreted in light of contemporary moral tastes (Olson 1995:§3; 2007:22-28). In this last category, homosexuality has most recently become the *cause célèbre*, with some revisionists accusing conservatives of misconstruing Biblical strictures on pederasty as divine sanctions on legitimate monogamous homosexual relationships (e.g., McLaren and Campolo 2006:198-215). Acknowledging wide-ranging opinion among revisionists in each of these categories, some of the better known representatives of revisionist brands of evangelicalism include Stanley Grenz, Clark Pinnock, Roger Olson, Nancey Murphy, John Sanders, Joel

Green, Steve Chalke, Mark Baker, Robin Parry, Greg Boyd and, on the popular level, Brian McLaren and Tony Campolo.

3.2.2.2 Dogmatic formulations

These divergent aims, naturally enough, lead to very different results in conservative and revisionist theological formulations in a number of key areas. Two of these are of particular relevance to discussions of (im)passibility—the authority of Scripture and the nature of God. Regarding the former, the *Oxford dictionary of the Christian church* cites the disagreement over the inspiration and authority of Scripture as the main impetus for the conservative-liberal split in England in the early twentieth century (Cross and Livingstone 2007:§3; Holmes 2014). Olson notes that these same issues have historically divided American evangelicals as well (Olson 2004:212-215). Other scholars suggest that the conservative-revisionist divide over how to approach Scripture represents perhaps the greatest challenge to sustaining the evangelical coalition as presently configured (McDermott 2011:45-50; cf. Merrick and Garrett 2013:9). The conservative-revisionist divide over Scriptural authority is examined more closely in Section 3.3.2.1.

The second dogmatic issue concerns the nature of God. Generally speaking, conservative evangelicals espouse a view of God consistent with the classic theistic tradition, representing the majority view of God throughout the patristic, medieval and Reformation periods and reflected, for example, in the creeds and the works of Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas and Calvin. Believing this view to best express the teaching of Scripture, conservatives are reticent to countenance novel reinterpretations of God's essence and actions. Revisionists, on the other hand, believe the Great Tradition to be theologically suspect, tainted by alien thought forms inimical to the Biblical portrayal of God and His involvement

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throughout salvation history—thought forms deriving from Greek metaphysics, Roman jurisprudence and medieval feudal notions. In light of these corrupting influences, the role of theology is to rehabilitate our understanding of God, ridding it—as much as one's historical-situatedness allows—of those contaminants distorting one's reading of the Scriptural text. The evangelical factionalism occasioned by the open theism debates in 2000-2001 both highlights and exacerbates the tensions long associated with these differing ways of conceptualising divine being and action. Section 3.4 further explores conservative evangelical construals of God in contrast with revisionist models.

As will be seen, these twin doctrinal loci—the doctrine of Scripture and the doctrine of God—have long been, and continue to be, major battlefronts along the conservative-revisionist divide. It is little surprise, then, that two of the most controversial and divisive intra-evangelical polemical works during the past forty-years bear the titles, *The battle for the Bible* (Lindsell 1976) and *The battle for God* (Geisler and House 2001). What these titles lack in imaginative scope they certainly make up for in dramatic flair and, perhaps, prognostic suggestiveness.

3.2.2.3 Definitional summary

This project follows the scholarly convention of recognising two poles to the evangelical theological axis, denominated "conservative" and "revisionist". These labels seem to describe the aims of these two groups better than some of the other pairs of terms—namely, conservatives seek to conserve the Tradition as an essentially faithful embodiment of Biblical truth, whilst revisionists aim to revise the Tradition in light of contemporary needs, thought forms and language. Yet, it is not as though the two camps are entirely dismissive of each other's concerns: most members of either camp recognise that good theologians are responsible for simultaneously preserving and reinterpreting past formulations of Biblical truth

(cf. Pinnock 2006:387-388). The difference, rather, is the relative weight each camp assigns to these very different tasks (cf. Olson 2007:209-214).

For the purposes of this project, then, the modifier "conservative" refers to those evangelicals who place a high value on preserving traditional, consensual formulations of the Faith, hold to the inspiration, inerrancy and authority of Scripture and understand God in ways consistent with the classic theistic heritage. This dissertation is written from within the context of conservative evangelicalism and is intended principally for conservative evangelicals. It will interact with non-conservative evangelicals and other traditions, but it is self-consciously a project located within this subtradition.

3.3   Historical and contemporary assessment

To gain a better appreciation for the ecclesial setting for the project, a brief history of the development of conservative evangelicalism is offered in Section 3.3.1, and the contemporary landscape is surveyed in Section 3.3.2. The historical factors that have shaped evangelicalism are diverse and complex. The following is not intended to provide a complete accounting of these factors but, instead, offer a cursory overview of some of the more salient formative influences in the making of the movement.

3.3.1   Historical origins and development

As a subset of evangelicalism, conservative evangelicalism shares a substantial history with this broader movement. Noll notes four phases in the development of evangelicalism: (1) an original pan-European phase, (2) a British-dominated phase, (3) an American-dominated phase and (4) an international phase (Noll

2010:23). Others employ a century-by-century approach (Gerstner 1975; Hankins 2008; George 2014; Holmes 2014). This project follows to the latter. The following sections trace the development of evangelicalism and its conservative sub-stream from the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation (Section 3.3.1.1), through seventeenth century Pietism and Puritanism (Section 3.3.1.2), eighteenth century revivalism (Section 3.3.1.3), nineteenth century developments (Section 3.3.1.4), early twentieth century fundamentalism (Section 3.3.1.5), to mid-twentieth century neo-evangelicalism (Section 3.3.1.6). These are the historical antecedents to today's conservative evangelicalism.

3.3.1.1 Sixteenth century Reformation

Bloesch points out affinities between the contemporary evangelical ethos and orthodox efforts within the early Church to differentiate the Gospel from the works-righteousness messages of first century Judaisers and fifth century Pelagians (Bloesch 2008:17). McGrath cites research indicating that an approach to Scripture reading and personal salvation arose in the later Italian Renaissance period within certain Benedictine monasteries and among Italian aristocrats that was distinctly evangelical in tone (McGrath 1995:19-20). However, most scholars understand the formal starting point of evangelicalism to be the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation, when various reform movements sought to distinguish themselves from Tridentine Catholicism on the one hand and humanism on the other (e.g., Bloesch 2008:17). The French term *évangélique* and German *evangelisch* appear frequently in polemical works in the 1520s. In the 1530s, the term "Protestant"—a reference to the fourteen German cities and six princes who protested the rescinding of religious freedoms at the second Diet of Speyer (1529)—became the preferred term (McGrath 1995:21).

Kantzer identifies two principal features of the message of Luther and the other Reformers—the Biblical gospel (i.e., justification by the free, sovereign grace of God through faith in Christ)—and the authority of Scripture (Kantzer 1977:128). The so-called *solas* of the Reformation—*sola gratia, sola fides, sola scriptura*—reflect these concerns and became rallying cries of the nascent evangelical movement (cf. Hankins 2008:3). From the earliest days of the Reformation then, evangelicals distinguished themselves from other Christian traditions by insisting on the undisputed norming authority of Scripture as opposed to dual-source theories that gave equal weight to ecclesiastical tradition, and on the free grace of the sovereign God who leads sinners to repentance and grants salvation on the basis of faith. These would remain hallmarks of evangelical religion throughout the Reformation period and well into the seventeenth century. Gerstner agrees with Schaff on a third distinguishing feature—the universal priesthood of believers as opposed to late-medieval notions of clericalism (Gerstner 1975:23). It can be argued that these emphases, inherited from the Reformation era, continue to be central foci of a distinctly evangelical approach to theology and practice.

3.3.1.2 Seventeenth century Pietism and Puritanism

Noll agrees with Ward that the seventeenth century was formative for pan-European evangelicalism (Noll 2010:23-24). Particularly within the Hapsburg Empire, evangelical expressions of faith flourished, resulting in scattered revivals and offering to the populace "true Christianity" in contradistinction to the staid, confessional orthodoxies of state-imposed religion. The pioneers of this movement—Johann Arndt (1555-1621), Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705) and August Hermann Francke (1663-1723)—emphasised a personal relationship with God and an active, lived faith of vibrant obedience to the commands of Christ as opposed to mere notional commitments and formulaic religious approaches.

Pietism, as it came to be called, often emphasised mission work and active social engagement, as well.

Perhaps the best-known embodiment of these Pietistic impulses was the man dubbed by George Forell the "noble Jesus-freak", Count Ludwig Nicholas von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), whose Moravian community at Hernnhut was renowned for its piety, prayer, exuberant worship and devotion to missionary work (Noll 2010:24). Of its many lasting legacies, the greatest may be the influence it would exert on a struggling Anglican vicar by the name of John Wesley, whose work would eventually impact millions.

The Pietist emphases on personal faith, obedience, social service and world missions have remained core principles in evangelical expressions of faith. Before his 2010 death, Bloesch noted that a Pietist strand still remained in his own church, the United Church of Christ, formed from the 1957 merger of the Evangelical and Reformed Church and Congregational Christian Churches, although theological liberalism had a deleterious effect on its expression (Bloesch 2008:18).

A movement related to Pietism, Puritanism, took root in Elizabethan England at the end of the sixteenth century and embodied many of the core convictions of its European counterpart—the primacy of Scripture, personal faith in Jesus Christ and holiness of life lived out in practical ways. Strongly Calvinistic, the Puritans sought to complete the English Reformation begun when Henry VIII broke from the Church of Rome in 1534, purifying Anglicanism from its vestigial Catholic corruptions. When Elizabeth's successors, James I (reigned 1603-1625) and Charles I (1625-1641), opposed Puritan ambitions, many thousands of them migrated abroad, most notably to the American wilderness, where they sought to establish a "Godly Commonwealth" in "New England". Later joined by Scotch-

Irish Presbyterians, they would exert a determinative influence on the shaping of colonial American social, religious and intellectual life.

Meanwhile in England, Puritanism would, with the deposing of Charles I (1649), enjoy a brief respite under the short-lived Commonwealth. It was during this period that the Westminster Standards were adopted (1643-1649), giving Puritanism a its confessional, catechetical and ecclesiastical bearings. It was also during this time and in the years following the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II (1660-1688), that some of the most notable Puritan works were produced by the likes of Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), John Owen (1616-1683), William Guthrie (1620-1665), Thomas Manton (1620-1677), Thomas Watson (1620-1686), Steven Charnock (1629-1680) and Joseph Alleine (1634-1668).

The Puritan ethos would continue to be a force within conservative evangelicalism well into the late twentieth century through the sermons and printed works of the pastor, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, theologian JI Packer and author and publisher Ian Murray, co-founder of the Banner of Truth Trust in 1957, which reprints Puritan classics for popular consumption.

3.3.1.3 Eighteenth century revivalism

If the Reformation signaled the formal origins of evangelicalism, it was the great evangelical revivals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that cemented its reputation for evangelistic activism. Some scholars point to this as the time when the term "evangelical" took on a specific religious identity (e.g., Bloesch 2008:18; cf. Sweeny 2005:27).

There were important precursors to the outbreak of the Great Awakening in the American colonies in the 1740s. As a new pastor, Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) witnessed a series of revivals in his own parish in Northampton, Massachusetts, and among a number of churches along the Connecticut River Valley, narrating these events in his *A faithful narrative of the surprising work of God* in 1737. Among the Reformed Dutch of New Jersey, the preaching of Theodore Frelinghuysen (1691-c.1747) created an evangelical stir. Over the border in Pennsylvania, the Scotch-Irish Presbyterian pastor William Tennant (1673-1746) built a humble seminary in Neshaminy, Bucks County, derisively called the "Log College" by its detractors, for the training of his sons and other young men in Bible, theology and pastoral ministry. The school was in existence for less than twenty years, yet its graduates exerted an inordinate influence on the spread and tenor of the Great Awakening. It is often considered, though not without debate, the precursor to the College of New Jersey, later Princeton University (e.g., Alexander 1968:68-75). Archibald Alexander's *The log college*, provides brief biographical sketches of ten of the more illustrious of its twenty or so graduates, including Samuel (1712-1751) and John Blair (1720-1771), Gilbert (1703-1764) and William Tennant (1705-1777) and Samuel Finley (1715-1766). Under their evangelistic and church-planting ministries, evangelical religion spread throughout the middle colonies and down into Virginia, formerly an Anglican stronghold (Alexander 1968; cf. Noll 2002:26, 127).

The face of the Great Awakening was undoubtedly the gifted orator, Oxford-trained George Whitefield (1714-1770), under whose preaching ministry thousands were converted. During his thirty-three year career, he is reputed to have preached some 15,000 times on both sides of the Atlantic. He made seven trips to the colonies, ministering across the eastern seaboard, as far south as Savannah, Georgia, where he established an orphanage, and as far north as New England. Known for his dramatic flair, his preaching was characterised by a conservative Calvinism wed to a warm, rich experiential faith, emphasising the

necessity of personal regeneration. Whitefield's influence was multiplied by his partnering with American revivalists who shared his evangelical views, regardless of denominational affiliation. This ecumenical collaboration between Anglicans, Presbyterians, Baptists and Reformed would become a hallmark of later intra-evangelical cooperation. As a result of these combined ministries, a vibrant evangelical faith—conservatively orthodox in doctrine and exuberantly evangelical in expression—took root throughout the colonies, providing the foundation for later religious developments in America.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) was the theologian of the Great Awakening. Graduating from Yale at sixteen, the precocious Edwards was novel in his thinking, yet conservatively Calvinist in his theology. The pastor, scholar and missionary was a curious blend of rational erudition and evangelical zeal. His scholarly works are still held in high regard for their originality of thought, but his most lasting contributions have had to do with his connection to the evangelical revivals he defended, critiqued and helped guide.

As important as Edwards and Whitefield were, however, it was John Wesley (1703-1791) who provided the organisational backbone of the Awakening. His famous quip, "the world is my parish", captures both the scope of his personal vision and the evangelical impulse animating all of the leaders of the Awakening—an impulse that was faithful to prior, and predictive of future, evangelical expressions. A friend of Whitefield's at Oxford, the two would maintain their friendship over the years, despite their well-publicised doctrinal disagreements. In contrast to Whitefield and Edwards, as well as most of the other leaders of the Awakening on both sides of the Atlantic, Wesley was Arminian in his theology. So much so that his name would later be applied to one strand of Arminianism—one that reflected his highly original thinking, particularly on the doctrine of Christian perfectionism. This Wesleyanism would later became a major force in shaping certain Anglo-American Protestant movements including

Oberlin theology, the Holiness movement, the Keswick movement and Pentecostalism.

Wesley's literary output was prodigious on both scholarly and popular levels. Combined with his untiring preaching, he reached thousands both in the United Kingdom and in the American colonies. His legacy extended far beyond his lifetime. Wesley was more than a revivalist and scholar—he was a strategist and systemitiser, organising his converts into local "societies" or fellowships, complete with leaders, teaching material and devotional practices or "methods". Following his death in 1791, his "methodist" innovations would continue, both within the Anglican Communion (Wesley remained a lifelong Anglican) and within the Methodist movement that grew out of it. These local societies provided the organisational scaffolding allowing for the perpetuity of evangelical convictions and practices well into the nineteenth century.

3.3.1.4 Nineteenth century developments

By the end of the eighteenth century, there was widespread concern over the declension of spiritual life in the newly minted American republic. The nation was in need of a fresh movement of God's Spirit, and it was not long in coming. In 1801, the Cane Ridge Ridge revival, sponsored by a consortium of Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist pastors, signaled a fresh infusion of evangelical fervor into the religious life of the Cumberland River Valley, spreading to other areas of Kentucky and Tennessee. Meanwhile, both upstate New York and New England would experience the first stirrings of revival. Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), Nathaniel Taylor (1786-1858), Lyman Beecher (1775-1863) and Asahel Nettleton (1783-1844) all played important roles in the renewal efforts in New England, self-consciously following in the evangelical footsteps of Jonathan Edwards. The key figure in the New York revivals was the lawyer-turned-evangelist Charles

Finney (1792-1875), whose "new measures"—mass advertising, protracted revival meetings, lay leadership, use of the "anxious bench" for would-be converts—provoked considerable backlash from the more conservative New England Calvinists. Finney's measures would win the day, however, and become a feature of American evangelical mass evangelism through Finney's successors: DL Moody (1837-1899), Billy Sunday (1862-1935) and Billy Graham (b.1918). The so-called Second Great Awakening would continue into the 1840s.

Other notable revivals occurred later in the nineteenth century, cementing the role of conversionism as a key component of evangelical praxis. These revivals include the 1857-1858 Noonday Prayer Revival in New York City, led by Jeremiah Lanphier (1808-1898), renewal movements within Robert E Lee's Army of Northern Virginia during the American Civil War (1861-1865), the evangelistic ministry of DL Moody and the religious awakenings associated with the diverse elements of what became known as the Holiness movement.

It was during this century that the activist impulse of evangelical religion gained particular prominence. The various nineteenth century revival movements eventuated in diverse expressions of social concern, including the establishment hospitals, sanitariums, orphanages, "rescue missions" and schools. Evangelical Christians pioneered efforts in prison reform, the regulation of child labour and care for the poor. Following his revivalist career, Finney became famous for his advocacy of education for women and African Americans and for his unstinting abolitionist efforts. The Women's Christian Temperance Union was organised in 1873, not only to ameliorate the problems associated with alcohol consumption, but to do missionary work, promote fair labour practices and advocate for women's suffrage.

Meanwhile, in England, where the term "evangelical" was used increasingly to designate nonconformists and to differentiate low-church Anglicans from Anglo-

Catholics within the Church of England, evangelical activism made important contributions toward improving the social order. William Wilberforce (1759-1833), for example, provided leadership in education reform, missions, the prevention of animal cruelty and, most notably, the abolition of the slave trade, culminating in the Slave Trade Act of 1807. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), established in 1844, promoted a "muscular Christianity", providing low cost housing, athletic opportunities and evangelical faith to young men traveling to the industrial centres of Victorian England. And in 1865, the Methodist pastor William Booth and his wife, Catherine, founded the Salvation Army to care or the needs of London's infamous East End—an organisation now known internationally for its marriage of Christian commitment to active social concern. On both sides of the Atlantic then, evangelical Christianity became known for its proactive and vital social engagement.

3.3.1.5 Early twentieth century fundamentalism

The turn of the twentieth century witnessed a decline of evangelical fortunes within the public sphere. The proliferation of historical-critical studies in Germany during the nineteenth century, in which the Bible was treated essentially like any other book, resulted in a liberalising trend, even within the evangelical fold. And the controversies surrounding the publication of Darwin's *On the origin of species* in 1859 fueled further speculation that perhaps the Bible was not a reliable guide in matters outside its strictly religious purview. These were two of the more important contributing factors to a general decline in conservative Protestant influence from the 1890s through the 1930s (cf. Marsden 1987:4; Sweeny 2005:157-158; George 2014:279-280: cf. Woodberry and Smith 1998:27-29).

In an effort to stem this tide, a large number of mainline Protestant seminary professors, pastors and other leaders felt the need to rearticulate the Christian

message to a new generation of modern hearers, retaining its core tenants—the Fatherhood of God and brotherhood of all peoples, the moral example of Jesus, the obligation to love others tangibly through social service, etc.—whilst expunging such pre-modern notions as miracles, Christ's virginal conception and resurrection and other putative anachronistic accretions to the simple Gospel message. Hence, the liberal wing, under the leadership of men like Washington Gladden (1836-1918), Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) and Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1968) preached a message of social activism and theological revisionism.

Not surprisingly, more conservative Christian leaders reacted with alarm. Their liberal colleagues were, in their efforts to accommodate the Christian message to modern sensibilities, gutting it of its distinctively Christian features. Famously, Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962), critical of some brands of conservative Protestantism as well, articulated what many in the conservative fold felt when he accused liberals of teaching "a God without wrath [who] brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgement through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross" (Sweeny 2005:161).

Conservatives began to counteract the "moderising" trend among their liberal brethren by re-emphasising certain fundamental features of traditional Christian dogma. Several such "fundamentalist" statements of faith arose during this time. Perhaps the earliest was the fourteen-point Niagara Creed (1878), drawn up by participants in the Niagara Bible Conferences (1883-1897). The best known was "The Five Point Deliverance" of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (1910). This document identified what would become popularly known as the "five fundamentals": (1) the inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible by the Holy Spirit, (2) the virginal conception of Christ, (3) the belief that Christ's death procured atonement for sin, (4) the bodily resurrection of Christ and (5) the historical reality of Christ's miracles. But the magnum opus of this nascent

fundamentalism was a six-year, collaborative venture of several scholars including BB Warfield (1851-1921), AT Pierson (1837-1911) and James Orr (1844-1913). Entitled *The fundamentals: a testimony to the truth* and edited by AC Dixon (1854-1925) and, later, Reuben Archer Torrey (1856-1928), this set of 90 essays in 12 volumes was published by the Bible Institute of Los Angeles (now Biola University) between 1910 and 1915. It sought to defend traditional Protestant orthodox beliefs against Darwinism, liberalism, higher criticism, Catholicism, Mormonism and other heterodox teachings.

Marsden notes that, during these early years, being a fundamentalist did not mean one was dispensational or separatist, although many fundamentalists were, in fact, both. Nor did it suggest obscurantism or anti-intellectualism. These connotations would not widely attach themselves to the fundamentalist label until later, in the post-WWII years. Rather, being a fundamentalist principally implied three things: (1) a conservative theological posture, (2) an acceptance of the fundamental doctrines of evangelical Faith and (3) an aversion to, and willingness to fight against, modernism (Marsden 1987:10).

Battle lines were drawn, and the rhetorical posturing soon erupted into full-scale war, as "modernists" and "fundamentalists" wrestled for control of their denominations and seminaries. During the 1920s and 30s, the Northern Baptist Convention experienced splits that resulted in what is today the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches and the Conservative Baptist Association of America. Similarly, northern Presbyterians experienced acrimonious fracturing (Sweeny 2005:166-168). The election of J Ross Stevenson (1866-1939) in 1914 to the presidency of Princeton Theological Seminary signaled a shift from the Old Princeton conservatism to a decidedly progressive agenda. In 1923, one of its professors, J Gresham Machen, protested the shift in his *Christianity and liberalism.* When Machen and other Princeton conservatives were later marginalised by the school, they founded

Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia in 1929. Machen's ministerial credentials were soon revoked by the northern Presbyterians, whereupon he and others founded what today is called the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1936. Thus, the years leading up to World War II were characterised by intense theological and organisational infighting within the Protestant camp between modernists seeking to adapt the Tradition to changing sensibilities and fundamentalists seeking to conserve the Tradition from cultural co-option. The majority of evangelicals identified with fundamentalist aims (Sweeny 2005:168-169; Harris 2008:19-34).

Meanwhile, similar modernist-fundamentalist battles were being waged in England, where an influential liberal evangelical party repeatedly clashed with conservative evangelicals in the years leading up to World War II. The British battle-lines were not strictly binary affairs: Stephen Holmes identifies no fewer than eight sub-streams of evangelicalism in the years leading up to the war, including liberal, conservative, neo-orthodox, holiness and revivalist varieties (Holmes 2014:248-251). Still, these battles featured the same sets of theological concerns fracturing American evangelicalism, particularly those surrounding the nature of God, theological method and the nature of Scriptural authority (cf. Harris 2008:58-93).

3.3.1.6 Mid-twentieth century neo-evangelicalism

Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, the fundamentalist movement began to diversify, principally over the issue of cultural engagement (Stone 1997:8-9; cf. Carpenter 1984:257-288). One element, fearing the contagion of secular society, effectively withdrew from the public arena and sought to isolate itself from its corrupting influences. This element grew increasingly separatistic and socially marginalised. Meanwhile, a second element wanted to reassert the social

conscience of nineteenth century evangelicalism—lost during the 1920s modernist controversies—and once again become a positive force for cultural change (Stone 1997:10). In stark contrast to the pessimism of the fundamentalist right, this group was sanguine about the prospects for genuine evangelical gains in Depression-era America. By cooperating across denominational lines, orthodox Protestants could, they believed, wed a revitalised social activism to intellectual respectability on the one hand, and to old-time revivalist religion on the other, creating a fusion that preserved the best elements of Biblical Christianity (Stone 1997:8-10).

The war years, and the decade following, witnessed a consolidation of these two camps, creating distinct fundamentalist and evangelical identities. This was a critical period in the emergence of a distinctly American evangelicalism. The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was founded in 1942 and Youth for Christ (YFC) in 1945. Two years later, Carl FH Henry (1913-2003) published his seminal *The uneasy conscience of American fundamentalism,* an apologetic for conservative Protestants to re-engage in those cultural domains abandoned during the modernist controversies of the 1920s*.*

Throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, a number of theologically conservative scholars further distanced themselves from the more anti-intellectual and obscurantist elements within the fundamentalist wing. Harold Ockenga (1905-1985) popularised the term "new evangelicalism" in 1957 to distinguish this movement. Also dubbed "modern evangelicalism" or "neo-evangelicalism", the movement was led by scholars like Ockenga, Henry, Edward Carnell (1919-1967), Kenneth Kantzer (1917-2002), Charles Woodbridge (1902-1980) and Harold Lindsell (1913-1998). Many of these scholars found a home at Fuller Theological Seminary, founded in 1947 by radio evangelist Charles Fuller—an institution that became the intellectual epicentre for the movement. And Henry, Kantzer and Lindsell each became general editors of *Christianity Today*

magazine, the flagship publication for this new brand of evangelicalism, founded in 1956 as a conservative alternative to the progressive *Christian Century*. Fuller Seminary and *Christianity Today* both proved immensely formative in shaping an evangelical ethos that, whilst retaining a generally conservative theological agenda, was decidedly more inclusive and less strident than its fundamentalist counterpart (cf. George 2014:282-283).

Two other events were catalytic in giving shape to the evangelicalism that emerged in the post-war years. The first was the founding of the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) in 1949 on the basis of a single doctrinal proposition, Biblical inerrancy (revised in 1990 to include Trinitarianism). The bare doctrinal statement of the ETS is indicative of the neo-evangelical concern to allow for considerable diversified expression within a basically conservative theological framework. The second catalytic event took place in the same year, when Billy Graham's Los Angeles crusade—famously "puffed" by newspaper publisher WR Hearst—catapulted the young evangelist to national prominence. Graham would become the face of the new evangelicalism, as his name became most closely associated with its late twentieth century revivalist, activist and cooperationist features (cf. Sweeny 2005:176-178).

Today, evangelicalism is increasingly an international movement, abetted largely by a mushrooming Pentecostal and charismatic presence in the two-thirds world. According to the *World Christian encyclopedia,* from 1900 to 2000, the percentage of evangelicals (verses the general population) remained steady in Europe (8.1%) and grew slightly in North America (from 31.6% to 40%), whilst in Africa (2.1% to 25.5%), Asia (.001% to 4.6%) and Latin America (2.1% to 35.6%) the growth rates were impressive. Over 90 percent of the world's evangelicals lived in Europe and North America at the start of the twentieth century; today there are more evangelical believers in Africa than in North America and Europe combined. The same can be said for both Asia and Latin America (Barrett,

Kurian, and Johnson 2001:1.13-14; cf. Jenkins 2002:2-6). Overwhelmingly, evangelical demographics reflect a non-Western bent. These newer, non-Western evangelicals tend to be conservative in theology, overtly supernatural in praxis (visions, dreams, exorcisms, healings and miracles are commonplace), and sometimes syncretistic in conflating orthodox doctrine with indigenous folk religion and/or Word of Faith teachings (Jenkins 2002:7-8; Noll 2010:19-20; 2013:20-27; cf. McDermott 2013:373). Jenkins concludes that—for the foreseeable future—the dominant form of world Christianity will be doctrinally orthodox, conservative and supernatural (Jenkins 2002:8, 79-139).

Since the late twentieth century, Western evangelicals have attempted to recognise and better accommodate the international dimensions of the movement through shared leadership, more inclusive language and heightened sensitivity to post-colonial developments in the two-thirds world. These efforts have yielded fruit in formalising alliances and formulating strategic and doctrinal statements reflecting a genuinely international flavor. Evangelicals have held several successful international gatherings since the late twentieth century. Two of the more important were the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelisation in Lausanne, Switzerland, in which 150 nations participated, and the Amsterdam 2000 event, in which 10,000 evangelists, missiologists, theologians and church leaders gathered from over 200 countries (Lausanne Covenant 1974).

3.3.2 Contemporary landscape

The contemporary landscape of the evangelical movement—including its conservative subtradition—admits of undeniable strengths and obvious challenges. This mixed state of affairs has led to substantial—and substantially diverse—scholarly reflection. Some observers emphasise the tenuous state of

the evangelical coalition and the definitional quandaries and doctrinal ambiguities facing it (Stone 1997; Hart 2004). Others point out the pervasive intellectual and praxeological challenges within the movement threatening its viability (Wells 1993; Noll 1994). Still others warn of the substantial theological fault-lines that appear to be widening: McDermott predicts the dissolution of the coalition along traditionalist-meliorist lines within twenty years (McDermott 2011:49; cf. McDermott 2013:376; Olson 1998:40-41). Other scholars are more sanguine in their assessments (Nicole 1996; Bloesch 2008; Johnson 2011), highlighting the vitality of the movement. Section 3.3.2.3 will examine some of the movement's more conspicuous strengths. First, however, it is important to take note of two very real tensions within evangelicalism, both of which have application—the first indirectly; the second directly—to the subject of divine (im)passibility.

3.3.2.1 The "battle for the Bible"

As noted in Section 3.2.2.2, the first of two dogmatic loci problematised in contemporary evangelical theological reflection concerns the precise nature and meaning of the Scriptural authority. Lindsell ignited a firestorm in 1976 when his *Battle for the Bible* argued against any mitigating versions of Biblical inerrancy. Contending that "limited inerrantist" views lead unavoidably to doctrinal compromise, Lindsell took issue with Fuller Theological Seminary's decision to remove an inerrantist commitment from the seminary's statement of faith. The resulting controversy split the evangelical movement into "inerrantist" and "non-inerrantist" camps. The tensions have not lessened with time: nearly forty-years later, discussion of the key ideas continues (e.g., Bird 2013b; Enns 2013; Franke 2013; Mohler 2013; Vanhoozer 2013; Carson, Frame and Witherington 2014; Frame 2014; Witherington 2014; Yarbrough 2014). McDermott notes the disagreement over how to view Scripture is currently one of two flash-points in

intra-evangelical dialogue today, the other being differences in theological method (McDermott 2013:373-375).

Discussions of inerrancy tend to pivot on a range of important issues, including the precise meaning of the Scriptural claims, the definitions for key terms like "inspiration", "infallibility" and "inerrancy" and the propriety of making claims of propositional truths within post-foundationalist, postmodern discourse (Olson 2004:212-215; Merrick and Garrett 2013). The intent of this section is to briefly touch on a few of the more important of these considerations as contributory to the contemporary evangelical scene, leaving more exhaustive treatments to others (e.g., Warfield 1948; Lindsell 1976; Rogers and McKim 1979; Geisler 1980; Vanhoozer 2005; Merrick and Garrett 2013; Trier 2014).

Historically, conservative evangelicals have followed the orthodox consensus in affirming the Bible to be God's inspired self-revelation (e.g., Lausanne Covenant 1974). Several Biblical texts are cited to support this view (e.g., Mt 5:17-19; Jn 10:34-35; 2 Pe 1:20-21), the most important being the well-known assertion in 2 Timothy 3:16 that, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness". Here, the phrase "breathed out by God" (*theopneustos*) is understood to confer unique authority on the Biblical canon by virtue of its divine origin.

In all contemporary evangelical formulations, this "inspiration" of Scripture is articulated so as not to negate the human element in the writing of the texts. Reputable conservative evangelical scholars do not teach that the Bible was dictated by God, as was taught by Philo and is believed by Muslim scholars to be true of the Quran. Rather, each God-inspired text is understood to be God's word expressed in the culturally conditioned and historically situated language of its human authors, reflecting the *Sitz im Leben* and unique, idiosyncratic features of individual temperaments. This theory of inspiration generally goes by the name of

plenary verbal inspiration and is the most commonly held model among conservatives and the one articulated in its most important contemporary formulation, the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (Chicago Statement 1978; cf. Warfield 1948; Geisler 1980; Allison 2011:98; McDermott 2011:46-47).

All evangelicals agree the Bible is authoritative. As previously noted, Bebbington includes a robust Biblicism as a feature of his famous quadrilateral, and Larsen notes the uniform consensus among evangelicals that Scripture is inspired, authoritative, unique, sufficient and trustworthy in matters of faith and practice (Larsen 2014:8). The question has to do with the scope and extent of Scripture's trustworthiness in other matters. Are the texts equally trustworthy, for example, in their historical and scientific statements? Conservative evangelicals tend to answer this in the affirmative. Paul Feinberg, for example, speaks for many when he avers the original autographs, when properly interpreted as to what they affirm, to be inerrant in all areas including doctrine, ethics and the physical, life and social sciences (Feinberg 1980: 294). Article 11 of the 1978 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy states that inerrancy means Scripture is free from falsehood or mistake and, hence, trustworthy and true in *all* it asserts (Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy 1978:8).

Non-conservative evangelicals demur. They are reticent to endorse an unqualified inerrancy, wishing to limit claims of error-less-ness to teachings regarding the essential truths of the Christian faith and their practical outworking in Christian lives. These scholars tend to emphasise the human dimension in writing, editing and transmitting the Biblical texts, underscoring these processes as collaborative divine-human ventures. It is thus common for non-conservative scholars to describe the Bible as containing—rather than "being"—the word of God and to deride conservatives for what they take to be an Enlightenment-inspired fixation on propositions inherent in the plenary verbal model. Olson is

typical in characterising the conservative evangelical approach as a misplaced modernist obsession with propositional truths embodied in doctrinal statements. He juxtaposes the inerrantist view with a post-conservative view that, he contends, respects the Biblical text as narrative and the Christian life as a narrative-shaped experience (Olson 1995:§2).

For their part, conservative scholars are wary of any account of Scripture that that seems to attenuate the objective dimensions of Biblical inspiration and authority. Henry warns against the danger of changing the emphasis from "objective truth" to "subjective trust" (Henry and Kantzer 1996:34). Those who allege the plenary verbal inspiration model to be the product of Enlightenment rationalism Henry sees as disingenuous, employing an evasive tactic that signals a departure from objective Biblical revelation and a "shift in epistemic controls" to individual interpreters (Henry 1996:34). Kantzer notes the word inerrancy derives from two Latin terms meaning "not wandering", which he takes to mean that when the Bible teaches something, it is telling the truth and "nothing false" (Henry and Kantzer 1996:34).

Conservatives understand the doctrine of inerrancy to be logically related to the doctrine of inspiration, reasoning that, if God has "breathed" Scripture (2 Tm 3:16) and God is Truth (Jn 14:6) and therefore incapable of either intentional prevarication (Nm 23:19; Ti 1:2) or unintentional distortion (Ps 147:5; cf. Ro 11:33-34) then the Bible is best described as "inerrant" (cf. Domeris and Smith:112-113). Whilst some evangelicals prefer the term "infallible", the Bible wars of the late 1970s tended to use the "inerrant" label to define the conceptual territory occupied by conservatives in contrast to the "infallible" ground held by their moderate counterparts. On strictly etymological grounds, the two terms are largely coextensive. Their differences are, instead, historically determined (cf. Olson 2004:212).

There is little debate that the plenary verbal inspiration model has a venerable history within the Church and, prior to that, within Jewish tradition (Morrison 1999:165; Mohler 2013:39-42), a point conceded even by those who do not agree with the model (e.g., Hanson and Hanson 1989:51-52; cf. Olson 2004:212). For this reason, it has long been central to a conservative evangelical approach to Scripture and theological reflection. At its founding in 1949, the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) made an inerrantist account its sole dogmatic criterion for membership: "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs" (this was modified in 1990 to include belief in the Trinity). Over the past 65 years, the ETS has retained its stance on plenary verbal inspiration and inerrancy, despite the rise of more "dynamic" models of inspiration (cf. McDermott 2011:47).

One's view of Scripture has an important, if indirect, bearing on one's position in the (im)passibility debate. The relative weight one assigns to the conceptual authority of the Old and New Testaments is determinative of how one understands the Biblical portrayals of God. Speaking generally, high views of Scripture assume the coherence of the Biblical record and, therefore, believe it is possible to reconcile the disparate divine ontological and pathic attributions found in the Biblical witness. So, for example, passages describing divine "regret" (Ge 6:6; 1 Sm 15:10-11; Ez 22:29-31), surprise (Is 5:3-7; Je 3:6-7; 3:19-20) and future uncertainty (Ex 4:9; Nm 14:11; Je 38:17-18, 20; Ho 8:5) can be harmonised with those that portray God as incapable of regret (Nm 23:29; 1 Sm 15:29) and perfect in foreknowledge (Is 46:10; Je 1:15; Ac 2:23; Ep 1:4-5; 1 Pe 1:21) and wisdom (Ps 147:5; Ro 11:33). This requires a nuanced recognition of the various genres comprising the Old and New Testaments, the rhetorical aims of the various authors and the literary tropes employed by them. But by carefully distinguishing between explicit propositional predications and metaphorical depictions, it is possible to integrate the Biblical material into a single, variegated theology of God reflecting the "whole counsel of God" (cf. Ac 20:27).

On the other hand, lower views of Scripture, influenced by historical-critical assumptions, will either downplay the relevance of Scripture in informing theological reflection (e.g., Hartshorne, Pittenger), understand the Biblical witness to be hopelessly conflicted, containing multiple theologies, and thus be incapable of harmonisation (e.g., Pinnock 2006:384), or assert the Biblical texts reflect limited human conceptualisations (i.e., Ancient Near East cosmological presuppositions, Hebraic mytho-poetic conventions and, later, Hellenistic ontological categories) to such a degree as to render them theologically suspect and in need of substantial qualification. An example of the latter is Sanders' insistence that classical transcendence passages refer to only moral, not ontological, divine-human differences (Sanders 1998:21-22).

3.2.2.2 The "battle for God"

A second dogmatic locus problematised in contemporary evangelical theological reflection, noted in Section 3.2.2.2, concerns the nature of God and of God's way of relating to the world. In 2001, Geisler and House published *The battle for God*, evoking parallels with Lindsell's earlier polemic on the Bible. The authors wrote the monograph to warn against the dangers of what they call "neotheism", more commonly known as open theism, which challenges certain longstanding givens within the classical account of God. They believe open theism to threaten the very survival of evangelicalism (Geisler and House 2001:7, 9; cf. Carson 2010). They are not alone. A large number of evangelical theologians have similarly critiqued open theism as unorthodox and sub-evangelical (cf. Caneday 1999; Frame 2001b; MacArthur 2001; Nixon 2001; Picirilli 2001; Schlissel 2001; Sproul 2001; Wilson 2001c; Carson 2002; Craig 2002; Gutenson 2002; Huffman and Johnson 2002; Spiegel 2002; Wellum 2002; Ware 2004; Kreider 2006; Moore 2014, et al.). Edited works like *Bound only once: the failure of open theism*

(Wilson 2001), *God under fire* (Huffman and Johnson 2002) *and The sovereignty of God debate* (Long and Kalantzis 2009) have drawn together the writings of many predominantly evangelical scholars who argue the classical theistic tradition possesses adequate resources to address the kinds of Biblical, theodical and personal concerns open theists are eager to address.

The current conflict between classical and open accounts of God is not, of course, unique in evangelical discourse. There are numerous antecedents to the contemporary debate involving battles against significant revisionist accounts, including early modern Unitarian views (Socinus) and late modern classic liberal models (e.g., Schleiermacher, Harnack, Bultmann, Hick, Spong), process theism (Whitehead, Hartshorne, Pittenger, Cobb, Williams) and assorted pantheistic or panentheistic accounts (Krause, Tillich, Moltmann). However, open theism is unique insofar as it is largely a conservative evangelical phenomenon.

Perhaps the best-known face of open theism was, prior to his death in 2010, Clark Pinnock. Understanding his theological quest is helpful to understanding open theism. Throughout the last thirty years of his life, Pinnock argued passionately and persistently for an overhaul of the classical theistic model. His *Confessions of a post-conservative evangelical theologian* chronicled his defection from the conservative ranks, which he described as a liberating exodus from the narrow confines of fundamentalism. Conservative evangelicals, he insisted, are obsessed with getting their doctrines just right and determining who is "in" and who is "out". Lacking self-awareness, they are suspicious of theological innovation and oblivious to how strongly the Enlightenment milieu has shaped their ideas. To Pinnock, it was obvious the Bible did not present a "single theology" but multiple ones in witness to God's work in salvation history, making it necessary for theologians to continually revise their work (Pinnock 2006:382-383). Pinnock's own pilgrimage took him from conservative Reformed

evangelicalism, to Arminianism, to Charismatic evangelicalsim, to, finally, a post-conservative openness view of God (e.g., Pinnock 2006).

Pinnock says he arrived at his open theist account of God as early as 1971 (Pinnock 2005). Seven years later, at the thirtieth annual meeting of the ETS, Pinnock presented a paper entitled *The need for a Scriptural, and therefore a neo-classical theism.* This short essay outlined his agenda to revise classical theistic categories of divine immutability, timelessness and impassibility (Pinnock 1979:38-41). Such a revision was necessary, he argued, to counter a Hellenised version of God preserved in the classical account and present a genuinely Biblical vision of God as a personal, passionate deity dynamically related to the world (Pinnock 1978:41). He later fleshed out his open theistic model in *The openness of God* (1994), a collection of essays by five evangelical openness advocates, and in his 2001 monograph, *Most moved mover.* In these works, Pinnock urged a rejection of such classical theistic doctrines as God's atemporality, immutability, impassibility, foreknowledge and omniscience. Other evangelicals made similar arguments, including John Sanders, David Basinger, William Hasker, Richard Rice and Greg Boyd.

The openness of God hit an evangelical nerve. Voted one of the 1995 *Christianity Today* books of the year, it appeared to signal an evangelical openness to "openness" and to validate Robert Brow's observations, published in the same magazine five years earlier that a "megashift" was occurring within evangelical theology. In this article, Brow decried the inadequacy of "old-model" (classical theistic) thinking, and argued for the need of a "new model" to give an accurate account of the Bible's God, one that emphasises relational versus judicial atonement models as well as significant reinterpretations of key terms such as hell, faith, judge, kingship, divine wrath and sin (Brow 1990:12-14).

Battle lines were drawn within the evangelical camp. An anonymous 2000 *Christianity Today* editorial, "God vs. God", summarised the controversy as two conflicting, mutually exclusive accounts of the divine being—the traditional, "classical" view and the revised, "openness" account. The author urged both sides to do their homework. He criticised the revisionists for their inadequate treatment of those Scripture passages seeming to teach divine foreknowledge and immutability. And he criticised the traditionalists for their inadequate handing of the anthropomorphic images found in the Biblical texts and for being overly dependent on philosophical categories originating in classical Greece, employed by medieval scholastics and transmitted to the Old Princeton—thence to Berkhof and his disciples—via the works of Francis Turretin (God vs. God 2000:34-35).

The "battle for God" grew so intense that it caused serious divisions at Bethel College and Seminary and the Baptist General Conference (BGC), to which both institutions belong. John Piper notes that, at their annual conference in 2000, the BGC delegates approved two motions that sent a mixed message: they approved a resolution denouncing open theism yet also one affirming the retention of open theist Greg Boyd as a faculty member at Bethel (Piper 2000). In the same year, The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) amended their confessional statement, *contra* open theism, to affirm God's exhaustive divine foreknowledge (Do good fences make good Baptists? 2000). The battle then shifted to the ETS. At its 53rd annual meeting in mid-November 2001, the membership approved a resolution rejecting open theism as unBiblical, with approximately 70 percent of members approving the measure, 18 percent opposing it and 11 percent abstaining (Gorski 2001:10). However, as in the case of the BGC, a later (2003) motion to expel two openness proponents—Clark Pinnock and John Sanders—failed to win the necessary two-thirds majority votes. Sanders was nearly expelled (62.7% voted to expel and 37.3% against) and Pinnock was easily retained (33% voted for expulsion vs. 67% against) after agreeing to revise a footnote in his *Most moved mover* (Banks 2003). Technically, Pinnock and Sanders were not threatened with

expulsion for an aberrant view of God, but for alleged denials of the ETS's doctrinal statement affirming inerrancy. Sanders later lost his faculty position at Huntington College because of his close identification with open theism (Guthrie 2004).

The actions of the BGC and ETS are symptomatic of the confusion within the larger conservative evangelical community occasioned by open theistic teachings. And they appear to underscore a tension within the movement—that is, a willingness to condemn as heterodox those models that ignore or substantially revise the inherited or classical Tradition yet, at the same time, to take pains to resist overly restrictive boundaried approaches to evangelical branding. In fact, the whole question of the propriety and limits of evangelical boundaries—a perennial quandary for evangelicals (Stone 1997; Olson 1999)— became a major point of contention in the ETS battle (e.g., Boyd 2002a; Grenz 2002; Horton 2002; Pinnock 2002; Ware 2002; Olson 2004), in which Hiebert's application of centred and bounded mathematical set theory to missiological and ecclesial settings (Hiebert 1994) became a touchstone.

3.3.2.3 Signs of vitality

The tensions within the evangelical community over the authority of Scripture and the nature of God are serious and disruptive. Nevertheless, they do not tell the whole story. Despite the very real challenges facing it, evangelicalism shows signs of significant vitality. Bloesch and Pinnock both note the deep thirst for an authentic, Spiritually vibrant relationship with God within contemporary evangelicalism (Pinnock 2002:213; Bloesch 2008:16). And McDermott, writing in 2011, remarks that during the previous two decades, evangelical theology has become one of the "liveliest" and most "creative" of Protestant theologies (McDermott 2011:45). Other scholars similarly paint somewhat rosy pictures of

future evangelical prospects (e.g., Nichole 1996; Brierley 2004; Johnson 2011:12-14)

In a 1996 retrospective, Roger Nicole catalogued some of the enormous gains the evangelical movement made in the United States throughout the half-century between 1945-1995. He observed how the number of evangelical seminaries accredited with the American Association of Theological Schools grew from just a few in 1945 to fifty-five in 1995, how the number of evangelical institutions with significant libraries (100,000 or more volumes) grew from zero to twenty-five in those years and how scholarly evangelical journals grew in this same period from a mere handful to thirty or more. He further noted the dramatic rise in the number of graduates of evangelical seminaries, the number of professors with terminal degrees at those institutions and the explosion in serious evangelical scholarship, including Bible translations, multi-volume Bible encyclopedias, commentaries, introductions, and monographs on systematic theology, Church history, Biblical archeology, linguistics and hermeneutics. Finally, he cited evangelical gains over the previous fifty years in foreign missions, evangelism (e.g., witness Billy Graham, Campus Crusade and other para-church organisations) and social consciousness (e.g., World Vision, World Relief, Samaritan's Purse, etc.) (Nicole 1996:31-34).

More recently, sociologist Byron Johnson argued that the conservative evangelical movement is stronger than ever. One hundred million Americans affiliate with an evangelical Protestant congregation, amounting to about one-third of the American population. The Baylor Religion Survey, upon which Johnson draws, challenges some recent research exaggerating the loss of faith and influence in America since the 2008 election, such as a survey by the Pew Forum showing 44 percent of Americans to have switched their religious or denominational affiliation (Johnson 2011:12). According to Johnson, the popular media have interpreted this as an indication that the American population is

leaving the faith of their youth—a sign of religion in decline. In fact, closer examination reveals the opposite: the majority of these did not leave their faith (only 4 percent of Americans identify as atheist and only 10.8 percent as religiously unaffiliated) but simply moved from one church to another, in most cases from mainline Protestant to more conservative, vibrant evangelical churches. Johnson notes that, between 1960 and 2000, evangelical denominations grew 156 percent, whilst mainline Protestant churches declined by 49 percent. Thus, the bulk of the 44 percent cited above moved from spiritually moribund congregations to ones they perceived to have a richer, more active religious life (Johnson 2011:13).

Further, Johnson's research shows that media reports about younger evangelicals becoming social liberals is a distortion. Whilst younger evangelicals are more likely than older ones to express concern for environmental issues (by 9 to 14 percentage points), younger evangelicals actually tend to be more conservative than their older counterparts regarding popular social issues including stem cell research (61 opposed versus 51 percent in favor) and aborting fetuses conceived by rape (61 percent said this is always wrong or almost always wrong versus 50 percent of older evangelicals). Meanwhile, younger and older evangelicals responded similarly on questions regarding marijuana use (72 versus 73 percent opposed), homosexual marriage (85 versus 83 percent opposed) and government sponsored healthcare (63 versus 61 percent opposed). Further, 70 percent of young evangelicals self-identify as conservatives and 55 percent are affiliated with the Republican Party (Johnson 2011:14). Of course, conservatism on social issues does not correlate exactly with conservatism in theology, but there is an overlap, and the data indicate a robust base among younger evangelicals.

Taken together, these findings paint a fairly optimistic portrait of the movement and bode well for its future. As in the past, the movement will likely morph and

reconfigure itself as new issues arise, forging new internal alliances and abandoning or revising old ones. The dynamic quality of this incessant reconfiguring may, perhaps, be viewed as a sign of vitality rather than a weakness—a regular renewing impulse that prevents stagnation and sterile nominalism, continuously breathing new life into the movement.

3.3.3   Conservative evangelicalism within the broader Christian community

How does the subtradition known as conservative evangelicalism fit within the larger body of Christ? Answering this question requires a consideration of both the family resemblances and distinctive features of conservative evangelicalism vis-à-vis other Christian traditions.

3.3.3.1   Family resemblances

Conservative evangelicalism shares much in common with other Christian subtraditions. These include a commitment to historically determined orthodox first-order doctrines such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, salvation through faith in the atoning work of Christ, the return of the Lord and judgement of all humanity. These core dogmatic commitments represent the *sine qua non* of Christian belief, without which the Gospel becomes indistinguishable from other religious traditions. All orthodox branches of the Christian family tree—that is, Catholic, Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Church of the East, Anglican, and all varieties of Protestant—hold these in common, whilst disagreeing on a number of second- and third-order doctrines. This dogmatic core, then, is the foundation for genuine ecumenical cooperation (cf. Sawyer 2006:143-171; Mohler 2011:77-80; Jenkins 2008:ix-xi).

Yet the similarities between conservative evangelicalism and other Christian subtraditions are not merely confessional or propositional; instead, they include practices and attitudinal postures as well. Genuine Christian faith involves one's entire self—cognition, imagination, volition, affections and a whole range of habituated behaviours expressive of one's devotional life and missional commitments (cf. Willard 1998:25-28, 299-301; 2002:22-25, 95-251; Wilson 2001a:18; McGrath 2003:29-37; Wilken 2003:25-26, 87-88; Davis 2010). Stackhouse correctlty notes that orthodoxy (right belief), orthopraxy (right practice) and orthopathy (right feelings or affections) are necessarily concomitant (Stackhouse 2011:124; cf. Castelo 2008; Wilson 2001a:18). As such, one would expect conservative evangelicalism to bear resemblances to other Christian substreams in areas like the prioritisation and practice of prayer, Scripture meditation, spiritual reading, worship, fellowship, evangelism, care for the poor and foreign missions—and indeed it does. The style of practice varies considerably due to cultural, ethnic, historical, theological and geographical differences, but these devotional, liturgical and missional practices are found in each ecclesial tradition, along with commonly held heart attitudes like reverence for God, humility, love, righteousness and justice.

Thus, conservative evangelicalism fits within the larger Christian family in several important ways. Moreover, conservative evangelicalism shares something important in common with certain members of this family. Its conservative posture toward tradition means it has affinities with other Christian substreams that value continuity with the Great Tradition—whether patristic (e.g., Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Church of the East), patristic and medieval (Orthodox and Catholic), or patristic, medieval, and Reformational (e.g., Lutheran, Anglican-Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Reformed). Conversely, McDermott points out striking similarities in methodology between revisionists and liberal non-evangelicals, including progressive Catholics and mainline Protestants, whose

theological innovations seem to warrant the label George Lindbeck termed "experiential expressivism" (McDermott 2011:45).

3.3.3.2 Distinctive features

Section 3.2 delineated some of the characteristics that have been identified with evangelicalism, including its more conservative elements, since the Reformation: Scripture as the ultimate norming authority, the need for personal conversion and faith, salvation through faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice and a commitment to mission, charity and other practical expressions of faith. Whilst some scholars have amended or revised the Bebbington model, these core features are generally retained in some form (e.g., McGrath 1995:55-57; Mohler 2011:73-74; Stackhouse 2011:122-124; Larsen 2014:1).

These distinctive beliefs and practices have not always been well received by other Christian subtraditions. Section 3.3 outlined how conservative evangelicals have been marginalised throughout much of their history by the ambient ecclesial establishment, whether the Church of Rome in the sixteenth century, the Anglican communion in the seventeenth, the old side Presbyterians in the eighteenth or liberal academics in the early twentieth. Some of this censure is attributable to the inflexibility of the regnant religious establishments and is more an indictment of their refusal to countenance fresh, new expressions of faith than a legitimate criticism of conservative evangelicalism.

On the other hand, however, some of the censure is well deserved. Ecclesial traditions, like animal species, are subject to idiosyncratic pathologies, and conservative evangelicalism is no exception. Throughout its history, the movement has been justly criticised for a number of inveterate tendencies such as a lack of intellectual heft, doctrinal indistinctness (or, alternatively, doctrinal

rigidity), mawkish sentimentality, personality cults, triumphalism and an inexcusable flippancy that trivialises transcendence and eviscerates mystery in the interest of relevance (cf. Schaeffer 1984; Noll 1994; Hart 2004; Webber 2006; Davis 2010; Dickerson 2013; Brenneman 2014; Larson 2014:11). This latter tendency is seen, for example, in the predilection of some conservative evangelicals to reduce holy baptism and the Eucharist to rationalist abstractions or mere existential "moments", robbing them of their sacramental quality as signs and symbols (Webber 2006:175, 236-237).

The tendency is also quintessentially seen in conservative evangelicalism's predilection for the absurd. With its "Bible"-based weight loss programs, income-generating schemes, parenting models and dating guides, conservative evangelicalism can be embarrassingly reductionist and crassly consumerist. Its worship music is often maudlin and derivative, rarely—as with other evangelical art forms—rising to the level of aesthetic excellence. Instead, Bible bookstores purvey unsubstantial literature and unremarkable music amid ubiquitous "Jesus junk" and other kitsch. All of this betrays a cultural shallowness and intellectual impoverishment that constitutes, in Noll's words, a "scandal". Noll notes, for example, how the first war in Iraq, instead of engendering intelligent dialogue on the intractable issues hindering Arab-Israeli relations, produced a spate of popular eschatologically themed books portending Armageddon (Noll 1994:13-14).

In short, conservative evangelicalism has, positively and negatively, distinguished itself as an important member of the Christian family, with both continuities and discontinuities with other Christian subtraditions. For all of its problems, it has continued to thrive and become, in the opinion of some scholars, the most vibrant expression of Christianity within the United States as well as throughout much of the world (Nicole 1996:31-34; Jenkins 2002; Johnson 2011:12; McDermott 2011:45; Noll 2013:20-37).

3.3.4   Relevance to this research

Because projects undertaken in the sub-discipline of practical theology have a transformational aim, they are located within discrete sociological settings. For this project, that setting is conservative evangelicalism, as described above. Having situated the project ecclesiologically, it now remains to locate it doctrinally. Toward that end, the following sections will briefly examine two of the more important dogmatic commitments of this tradition that have special relevance to the topic of (im)passibility.

3.4   An examination of two essential theological commitments

Whilst conservative evangelicalism is distinguished by an adherence to a wide range of doctrines preserved within the Great Tradition including prolegomenological, soteriological, anthropological and eschatological formulations, it is the dogmatic subdiscipline of theology proper that has particular relevance to discussions related to the doctrine of divine (im)pasibility. Specifically, there are two topics that require further examination: the transcendence of God and the relationality of God. Both are discussed below.

Before considering these, however, a word about the Great Tradition is in order. Some scholars have expressed doubts about whether "classical theism" is anything other than a scholarly construct applied retroactively to a diverse theological tradition that defies precise definition (e.g., Kärkkäinen 2004:53, 120; Castelo 2012:170-172). Castelo goes so far as to call it a "vacuous concept" (Castelo 2012:172). At the same time, these scholars admit that a historically determined, shared conceptual grammar has been in use, at least in the west, from the time of the Church fathers, running through the medieval scholastics

and the Reformers and their heirs down to the present (cf. Kärkkäinen 2004:60-122; Castelo 2012:171).

Many scholars, however, find the terms "classical theism" or the "Great Tradition" to be helpful linguistic tools to denote a tradition of God-talk that, if not quite monolithic, is demonstrably uniform in what it affirms (e.g., Bray 1993:40-52; Oden 1998:45-46; 2006:ix-xiv; Geisler and House 2001:289-311; Johnson and Huffman 2002:27-36). This common theistic heritage attributes to the God of the Bible predicates like aseity, simplicity, pure actuality, immutability, impassibility, timelessness, necessity, omnipotence, omnipresence, omniscience and omnisapience (cf. Johnson and Huffman 2002:32-36; Kärkkäinen 2004:4-59; Oden 2006:53-130; McDermott 2013:366-369). Believing the terms "Great Tradition" and "classical theism" to be serviceable shorthand designations for this venerable tradition, the present author employs them to refer to this established tradition and, particularly, to the historically determined nexus of divine predicates espoused by it.

3.4.1   The transcendence of God

The first cardinal conservative evangelical doctrine with considerable bearing on the (im)passibility colloquy concerns the nature of divine transcendence. In contrast to theological approaches that begin with personal experience or, more broadly, the human condition (e.g., Schleiermacher, Moltmann, Boyd as well as black, feminist and classical liberal approaches), conservative evangelical theologians tend to privilege God's transcendence as their theological point of origin (e.g., Wells 1994:296-301; Grudem 2000:160-162; Bray 2011:180-182; McDermott 2011:45; Lister 2013:219-223). A brief word on the concept of transcendence is in order.

How might God be described as transcendently related to the world? Gunton suggests that behind the very different ways theologians and philosophers conceive divine transcendence lie very different metaphors (Gunton 1980:502). A major problem in the classical model, so basic to the western intellectual tradition, is that it relies on spatial categories, leading to a tendency to think of transcendence in quantifiable terms—that is, that God is *more than* created beings. Following Barth, Gunton sees Aquinas' Five Ways as encouraging this error, portraying God as unmoved, uncaused and necessary as opposed to (and more than) the moved, caused and contingent existence of His creatures. But because God, in Thomist thought, operates outside the web of creaturely causality—beyond and above it—a hierarchical or spatial dimension is introduced, and God's transcendence serves the same basic purpose as the forms serve in Plato's cosmology (Gunton 1980:503-504): a superintendence of the visible realm. Gunton compares this model of transcendence to that of Spinoza, whose radical doctrine of divine immanence redefines transcendence purely in terms of the whole transcending its parts; to the deists, for whom transcendence is merely a kind of temporal priority (Gunton 1980:507-508); and to Hartshorne, for whom transcendence is essentially the apotheosising of time and becoming (Gunton 1980:510). Gunton also criticises Kierkegaard's conception of transcendence—an "infinite qualitative difference" between God and man—as a formula that relies excessively on negative approaches (i.e., God being defined strictly in terms of what creatures are not). He notes the influence of Kierkegaard's view on the early Barth, who insisted God not be identified with anything humans name, experience or worship as God (Gunton 1980:511). Gunton critiseses all of these models as inadequate.

Instead, Gunton suggests the logic of the later Barth, for whom transcendence is primarily conceived in terms of God's perfect freedom, rather than some fundamental "outsideness". Although God is utterly distinct from and superior to all that is not Himself, He can choose, in His freedom to love, to relate Himself

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(or else not) to what is not God. His freedom evidences a dynamic quality—that is, the transcendent God becomes immanent in Jesus Christ, so that what is wholly God becomes wholly man, becoming what He is not. This act-in-being then allows God to be present to the creature. Thus, God's transcendence is not His freedom *from* time and space so much as it is His freedom *for* the created realm (Gunton 1980:513-514, 516).

Similarly, Robert King advocates a Barthian approach by contrasting three models of divine transcendence. He examines the causal model of classical theism, associated principally with Aquinas, which emphasises logical priority (God as "First Cause") with respect to the divine purpose and efficacy, and renders God essentially ineffable (King 1966:201-202). Against the classical conception, King juxtaposes the intrapersonal, subjective model of Schleiermacher, which, still within a causal framework, emphasises "immediate self-consciousness" as the means of apprehending transcendence, rather than cosmological arguments, as is the case in classical metaphysics (King 1966:203). King then advances what he calls the "intention-action" approach of Barth, in which God's transcendence is mediated through His being-in-act, objectively (in the person of Christ) and interpersonally (between God and other persons). This alone, he suggests, preserves the Biblical balance of God's otherness and unique immanence (King 1966:205-209). Both Gunton and King, then, envision transcendence principally in terms of God's sovereign freedom to love and save.

William Placher understands transcendence primarily as mystery. He believes the classical tradition has been blamed by contemporary theologians for developments that actually did not appear until the seventeenth century and that medieval and early modern representatives like Aquinas, Luther and Calvin conceived of God's transcendence as fundamentally mysterious and, therefore, unknowable. Placher argues that their theologies humbly accommodated this

mystery, evincing a chastened understanding of the limits of human knowledge, particularly with respect to the divine being, and that they employed analogical language to speak about God (Placher 1996:1-3).

Placher contends that this changed dramatically in the seventeenth century, when pre-modern epistemological modesty gave way to an intellectual hubris respecting the ability of humans to examine and draw rational deductions about their objects of study, whether natural or divine. By surveying representatives of the Catholic (Cardinal Carjetan and Francisco Suárez), Lutheran (Johannes Quenstedt) and Reformed (Francis Turretin) traditions, he detects a "shift to univocity" in their discourse, signaling a growing confidence in the human ability to comprehend, categorise and systematise knowledge of the universe, including God and His ways of relating to the world. God is no longer unique in an ontological sense, but one of many objects in the world that can be taxonomised and quantified. He is the greatest object, to be sure, but is not accorded the ontological distinction proper to the divine Being. The result has been an attenuation of mystery and a domestication of transcendence. What is needed, Placher insists, is a retrieval of certain features of the classical tradition, especially its rhetorical modesty, founded on the inadequacy of human categories to explain God (Placher 1996:6; Tanner 2004:165). This view of transcendence insists that categories like closeness, distance, relatedness and aloofness inevitably break down when predicated of God, for He "transcends" them all (Placher 1996:9; cf. Power 1975; Bielby 1998; Young 1999; Nelson 2005; Tanner 2005; Congdon 2010).

Like Placher, conservative evangelical scholars want to retain crucial elements of the classical tradition, including the idea that, in transcending human categories of thought and experience, God cannot be described adequately with reference to space-time categories. Erickson, for example, follows Heinecken in attributing to God a dimensional "beyondness" that makes it impossible to comprehend

God's experienced reality based simply on humanity's (perceived) four-dimensional world (Erickson 1998:342; cf. Heinecken 1956:90-93). God's transdimensional "properties" ensure that He is never circumscribed by those elements of created reality—space, time, energy and matter—that impose limits on creaturely freedoms. On this view, as part of God's qualitative distinctiveness, God can exist proximately in relationship to His creation but, by virtue of His extra-dimensional nature, transcend all of its categories. Thus, God's transcendence does not exist in tension with His immanence, but, rather, is the ground of it. God is able to be "closer than a brother" (Pr 18:24) precisely because He is not limited by spatiotemporal factors that impede creaturely experiences of intimacy (cf. Placher 1996:111-112; Tanner 2005). CS Lewis' observation is apt: affirming that God is beyond or outside the space-time continuum is analogous to affirming that Shakespeare is outside his plays, insofar as the characters and scenes do not exhaust his being (Lewis 1970:184).

For conservative evangelicals, God's transcendence does not imply distance, aloofness or intransigent otherness. Divine transcendence demarks the Being of God as radically different from creaturely nature and, in so doing, serves as an apophatic qualifier on theological discourse, ensuring an appropriate reticence to speak of God's Being too confidently. For conservative scholars, discussions of divine transcendence routinely feature considerations of God's unique ontological status, the Creator-creature divide and the consequent need for analogical language in theological discourse. These have been hinted at in this section but will be examined in greater detail below.

3.4.1.1 God's ontological uniqueness

As has been suggested, conservative evangelicals have traditionally affirmed the uniqueness of God's Being and mode of existence. God is different in kind—and

not merely degree—from everything else. Therefore, the proper starting point for discussions of God's transcendence vis-à-vis the created realm is ontology (cf. Erickson 1998:289-345; 2013:233-253; Grudem 2000:156-225; Oden 2006:49-82; Horton 2011:223-272; Bray 1993:53-110; 2012:135-164; Bird 2013a:126-139; Lister 2013:191-192).

It is a prolegomenological given among conservative evangelical scholars that humans cannot know God apart from self-initiated divine self-disclosure (e.g., Horton 2011:51, 113-186; Lister 2013:184-185). Timothy George observes that theology has no access to any "independent knowledge" but works exclusively on the basis of what it has been told. He agrees with Luther's assessment that the theologian's most important organs are his ears (George 1998:49). The fact that God has provided such revelation in His word—the Bible—privileges Scripture over experience, tradition or other sources of knowledge within conservative theological discourse.

Pace modern theologians who eschew discussions of "being" or "ontotheology", conservative evangelicals do not hesitate to modestly and humbly construct, based on the Biblical material, a theology of God's nature (e.g., Vanhoozer 2010:99; Horton 2011:186-218). As a faithful narrative of God's actions in redemptive history, the Hebrew and Christian scriptures contain numerous references to who God is and what He is like. His being or nature is revealed through His powerful acts, His assorted names (some self-originating, others given to Him) and the discrete ontological attributes predicated of Him such as "good", "holy", "wise", "Spirit", etc. (e.g., Erickson 1998:221-285; Grudem 2000:47-135; Bird 2013a:193-205). Collectively, these comprise the basic building materials to tentatively construct, with appropriate fear and trembling, a composite representation of the Biblical God—not in a naïvely Biblicist way that assumes a one-to-one correspondence between Biblical representations and theological conceptualisations—but in a way that gives due weight to the full

complement of interpretive variables, including language and cultural differences, diverse literary genres and historical considerations. This constructive project is not envisioned to be final, but tentative, not comprehensive, but suggestive of ways to speak of God truthfully, with suitable regard for the Biblical witness and Church tradition (cf. Oden 2006:42-44).

Conservative scholars point out that the Biblical authors recognise God's unique ontological status (Erickson 1998:290-292; Geisler and House 2001:192-218; Oden 2006:54-56; Horton 2011:42-43; Lister 2013:219-226). As Scripture attests, He is not One among many but a *sui generis* (De 4:35, 39; 33:26; Ps 89:6-8; Is 40:18, 25, et al.). Whilst a variety of tropes are used to describe His interactions with humanity throughout salvation-history—many of them anthropomorphic (e.g., father, shepherd, friend, etc.)—God is essentially incomparable to anything in the created order: "To whom will you liken me and make me equal, and compare me, that we may be alike?" (Is 46:5; cf. Is 42:8; 43:11; 46:9, Je 10:6-7; 1 Tm 6:15-16). Hence, God is not merely quantitatively superior to, but qualitatively distinct from, all that is not God (Oden 2006:54-56; Horton 2011:42; Erickson 1998:341). Borrowing Heidegger's language, Hart helpfully differentiates conceptualisations of the divine that are essentially "ontic"—that is, grounded in the realm of contingency—and "ontological"—that is, belonging to an order that transcends all creaturely categories (Hart 2002:190; 2003:193-194; 2009:299-300; 2013:30-31).

Conservatives recognise that the vast God-human ontological interval problematises the theological enterprise, for God is, in some sense, incomprehensible (Is 40:13-14, 28; 55:8-9; Ep 2:7; 3:19) and inaccessible (Ex 33:20; 1 Tm 6:16; cf. Ex 3:5; Jo 5:15; He 12:28). This makes it virtually impossible to understand God with any kind of certainty. However, the fact that God chooses to make Himself known gives believers confidence that—whilst humans will never *com*prehend God—they can *ap*prehend those things He has

graciously disclosed to them (Oden 2006:44). To know Him requires that one be willing to respond in faith and obedience to His overtures, to love Him preeminently and to live circumspectly in submission to His revealed norms.

Conservative scholars point out that, in view of the above considerations, all God-talk should be humble, cautious and respectful of God's wondrous, captivating and terrifying "otherness" (e.g., Oden 2006:1-2; Horton 2011:50). Respecting the God-human ontological differential will preserve much of the mystery in theological reflection whilst embracing the limits of human understanding. Taking cues from Anselm's description of God as *id quo maius cogitari nequit* ("greater than which none can be conceived"), conservatives tend to use both apophatic and cataphatic approaches with calculated caution (Anselm [2013]; Bray 2013:73-77), seeking to adhere to historically defined parameters and guided by a solemn fear of the Lord (Oden 2006:ix-xiv; Castelo 2008; Horton 2011:50, 53).

Sometimes conservatives call into question elements of the Great Tradition. Especially since the late twentieth century, conservatives have recommended revising, variously, God's simplicity (e.g., Johnson and Huffman 2002:37), eternality (Craig 2001; Lister 2013:229-231), immutability (Ware 1986:431-446; Lister 2013:253) and impassibility (Erickson 1998:753; 2013:672; Grudem 2000:165-166). Whether such revisions are necessary, advisable and logically coherent is another matter. This is addressed in Chapters 5 and 6. In the meantime, what is important to note is that conservative evangelical scholars, whilst willing to refine the Great Tradition, are reticent to overhaul that tradition outright.

3.4.1.2 The creator-creature distinction

God's unique mode of being is, in part, a logical deduction from the Biblical teaching that God created all things (e.g., Ge 1; Jn 1:3-4). The early church understood the Bible to teach that God created the cosmos *ex nihilo* over and against Greek notions of eternal, preexisting material used by a demiurge to fashion the universe. This was a major departure from regnant Hellenic/Hellenistic conceptualisations (one not always appreciated by those who accuse the fathers of succumbing to Greek philosophical categories) and affirms that God has existence antecedent to, and independent of, all that is not God (cf. Gunton 2000:262-264; Bray 2012:226; Kelly 2007:83:87). Further, as Creator, God maintains all things "in being" as a function of His provident care. In contrast to later deist conceptions of the divine, the early church understood God to be immanent within, as well as transcendent to, the cosmos, as the ground of its continued existence (Grudem 1995:315-351; cf. Ps 104:27-30; Ps 145:9, 15; Mt 10:29; Ac 17:25, 28; Cl 1:17; He 1:3).

Following Augustine, conservative evangelical scholars believe God's independent existence or aseity implies His complete freedom from space-time limitations. Even those conservatives who wish to reformulate God's relationship to time in some way (e.g., Feinberg 2001:375-436; Craig 2001; Ware 2004:133-139; Frame 2002:543-59; Lister 2013:226-231) acknowledge God's freedom from space and time constraints (e.g., Erickson 1988:299-301; 2013:243-245; Lister 2013:229). In support of this view, conservatives often cite those Biblical passages suggestive of God's extra-spatial and extra-temporal capacities (e.g., Ge 1; Is 40:12, 22, 26; 44:24; Je 23:23-24; et al.).

Not only does the Creator transcend spatiotemporal limits, but He is also understood by conservative evangelicals to possess special prerogatives vis-à-vis His handiwork. Appeal is made to passages like Isaiah 29:16, Jeremiah 18:1-

11 and Romans 9:19-24, which portray God as a potter and appear *prima facie* to confer on the Creator the right to dispose of His creation however He chooses (Kreider 2006). Thus, by virtue of bringing all things into existence and maintaining them in being, God has both the power and the right to determine their fate: "He does according to His will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand or say to Him, 'What have you done?'" (Dn 4:35b; cf. Dn 2:20-23; 4:2-3; Ps115:3). This includes the right to extend mercy and show compassion to whomever He chooses (Ex 33:19).

3.4.1.3 The use of analogical language

Because God's Being and existence are fundamentally distinct from those of humans, theologians must exercise extreme care when speaking about Him. Famously, Barth observed the conundrum faced by ministers—that, as created beings, we cannot speak of God, but as ministers, we must, for we are commanded to do so (Barth 1975:186). Human finitude, therefore, urges a certain rhetorical restraint incumbent on those who would speak of the Infinite. But this is not the only reason for caution. Humans are, according to the Biblical account, also spoiled, fallen in sin, darkened in understanding, perverse in motive and therefore liable to error and intentional distortion (e.g., Ge 3:1-19; Ro 1:18-32; 1 Co 6:6-16; Ep 2:1-3). Human finitude and fallenness, therefore, require that we view the theological task as inherently problematic and exercise appropriate care whilst undertaking it (Horton 2011:42; Lister 2013:185-187, 219-221). Doing so will yield theological models that are modest, qualified, often tentative and provisional, producing theologians who—aware of the self-subverting character of all God-talk—are humble and sometimes mistrustful of their own claims.

Castelo advises a holy, reverent fear as a governing disposition guiding theological discourse. He suggests that only a proper reverence will ensure theologians use caution in reifying their "patterns of God-talk" (Castelo 2008:157; cf. Oden 2006:43). That this very sort of respectful fear is a precondition of wise discourse and action is a commonplace in the Old Testament wisdom literature and prophetic corpus (Jb 28:28; Pr 1:7; 9:10; 15:33; Is 57:15; 66:2; Je 5:22-24; 9:23; Ma 1:14) as well as a leitmotif in the New Testament ethical instruction (e.g., Mt 10:28; He 12:28-29; 1 Pe 1:17; Rv 15:4).

So, how does one speak of a God who defies description? By means of carefully-qualified language that, whilst predicating certain things of God, leaves room for mystery. Aquinas helpfully distinguished univocal speech, which emphasises human similarity to God, from equivocal speech, which emphasises alterity and dissimilarity. Between these extremes, he identified a third option, analogy, which expresses points of contact whilst preserving proper contrast (Aquinas [2013]:1.13.5). By using language analogically, humans can make predecations of God by comparing Him to things we experience, whilst at the same time respecting the fact that His being and experience are radically different from our own. In a somewhat similar way, Calvin recognised the shortcomings of language to express the truth about God. God routinely describes Himself in Scripture in terms of how humans perceive Him rather than the way He actually is. In this way, God is "lisping" in His self-disclosure as a means of accommodating Himself to limited creaturely capacities (Calvin 1960:121).

Conservative evangelical scholars make use of these distinctions to regulate their God-talk (e.g., Erickson 1998:205; 2013:147-149; Oden 2006:42-43; Murphy 2006:161-175; Horton 2011:54-56; Bray 2012:76-77). To avoid direct association with the projects of Aquinas or Calvin, the language of "metaphor"—rather than that of "analogy" or "accommodation"—is sometimes preferred. These terms are not coextensive, but the strategy in using them is essentially the

same: to make meaningful connections across the divine-human ontological divide whilst respecting the fact that God remains uniquely God. Soskice has provided an able defence of the value of metaphor as a conceptual resource. Whether in science or religion, metaphor employs images to depict reality and plays a legitimate role in a critical realist approach (Soskice 1992:148-149; cf. Muis 2010). And whilst metaphor is incapable of describing God comprehensively, it can denominate truths about Him, as well as be genuinely referential or "reality depicting". In this latter respect, it can prove to be a helpful resource for metaphysical reflection (Soskice 1992:141; Schlimm 2007).

The Biblical authors frequently employ metaphors in which God as subject (the metaphorical tenor) is compared to something obviously dissimilar to God (the metaphorical vehicle) such as, "Yahweh is my Rock" (Ps 18:2) and "Your Maker is your husband" (Is 54:5). It is the nature of metaphor to embody paradox, for the tenor and vehicle are dissimilar in crucial ways, yet, at the same time, similar, such that the semantic content of the metaphor conveys real meaning. Whilst reading metaphor, then, it is essential that one remember that the metaphor claims "A is B" and "A is not B" simultaneously. Maintaining both aspects is critical, as an overemphasis on the "is" dimension can result in anthropomorphic projection. Conversely, an overemphasis on the "is not" dimension can result in equivocation, robbing the metaphor of all meaningful content (McGrath 2003:255-257; Paul 2006:508; Schlimm 2007:678).

This point is central to the (im)passibility colloquy. Impassibilists often accuse passibilists of anthropomorphism by reading the pathic references in Scripture in a woodenly literal (rather than a literally true yet metaphorical) way. Hence, the "is not" facet of the metaphors is sacrificed to the "is", resulting in univocal predication. Soskice, for instance, avers it is a theological naïve realism that attempts to describe God by using the same terms humans use of "observables"—that is, God is "angry", God is the "king of heaven", God

"hardens" hearts, etc. (Soskice 1992:119). Similarly, Lister cautions against describing anthropocentrically what God's affective life must be like, a tendency all too common among contemporary passibilists (Lister 2013:221). In such cases, the "is not" of alterity is collapsed into the "is" of ipseity.

On the other hand, passibilists are prone to charge impassibilists with dismissing the Bible's pathic accounts as mere divine accommodations, as if they have nothing important to communicate about God (e.g., Jones 2001:32-40; cf. Soskice 1992:119). Fretheim worries that such a move eviscerates the power of metaphorical language as content-rich discourse (Fretheim 1984:1-2, 5-10).

3.4.2 The relationality of God

God's transcendence of creaturely categories, if not properly balanced with the Biblical counterweight of divine relatedness, leaves us with Aristotle's "unmoved mover" or the early Barth's "wholly other"—a being so utterly distant and removed as to render Him relationally inaccessible. How to reconcile such a God with the Lord of salvation history is not immediately apparent. Indeed, a common criticism among passibilists is that, with their talk of transcendence, accommodated language and apophatic restraint, impassibilists betray Aristotelian or early Barthian sensibilities. Clearly, a truly Biblical theology of God will include articulations of divine transcendence and relationality in proportionate measure. There are three subthemes that are especially germane to conservative evangelical expositions of divine relationality: its Trinitarian grounding, its dialogical nature and its covenantal context.

3.4.2.1   The Trinity: God as a relational being

Conservative evangelicals follow the Tradition in affirming that the Christian God is not an undifferentiated and solitary monad, but a community of "persons" sharing the same substance and being, subsisting as Father, Son and Holy Spirit; coequal, co-creative, co-eternal and consubstantial per the Nicene-Constantinopolitan formulation. This has been the ecumenical consensus since the fourth century and remains the defining characteristic of a genuinely orthodox theology (Kärkkäinen 2007:xvii). It unites all branches of the Christian family tree—including the non-Chalcedonian Miaphysite and Nestorian subtraditions—which, despite their Nicene pedigree, are usually overlooked in contemporary western theological and ecclesiastical discussions.

Just how one should understand the Trinity is a topic of centuries-long debate. Each major period in Church history—patristic, medieval, and modern—has featured animated discussions concerning the finer points of Trinitarian theology, from the fourth century battles with Arian subordinationism and dialogue over terminology (*homoousion, homooiousion, hypostasis*, *prosopon, substantia, essentia, personae, trinitas*); to late patristic refinements in response to modalistic monarchian, tritheistic and patripassian claims; to medieval discussions of double-procession and the *filioque* and "persons" versus "subsistent relations"; to contemporary explorations of radically nonsubstantialist relational ontologies, Rahner's immanent-economic equation, Zizioulas' "being-as-communion" dictum, Volf's polycentric community of symmetrical reciprocity model and the ongoing intra-evangelical subordination dispute. It is too early to predict the trajectory of these discussions and what, finally, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries will bequeath to future generations by way of Trinitarian reflection. What is indisputable, however, is that this period has experienced a renaissance in interest and explosion in scholarly output in this

crucially important and long-neglected doctrine (Metzger 2006; Kärkkäinen 2007:xvi-xvii; Sexton 2011).

The ongoing debates notwithstanding, there is widespread agreement that divine-human and human-human relationships derive from the aboriginal, archetypal Trinitarian relations. Relationships exist because God is relationship— that is, a community of subsisting "persons" sharing a common essence, each possessing uniquely individuated "properties" defining them as "persons", yet united in their perichoretic participation in the other, partaking of a shared substance of incommunicable attributes. In the Godhead then, is seen identity and difference, ipseity and alterity, sameness and distinction—all in perfect proportion (Otto 2001). And it is this intra-Trinitarian life of shared delight, light and love that is regarded, by conservative evangelicals, to be both source and model for all other relationships (e.g., Grudem 2000:199-200; Horton 2011:329-330; Lister 2013: 223; cf. Kärkkäinen 2007:387-388). It was out of the sheer plenitude of the intra-Trinitarian love that the Godhead created humanity, and it is to that locus of music, laughter, abundance and joy that the Triune God extends an invitation and summons to experience life (e.g., Jn 14:1-3, 19-20; 17:1-3, 20-22, 24). Therefore, a distinctly Christian approach to God's relationality begins with a consideration of the plurality-within-unity Being of God and remains inalterably guided and nurtured by Trinitarian sensibilities.

3.4.2.2 Divine-human dialogical interaction

Conservative evangelicals emphasise the distinctly dialogical character of divine-human interactions. Without attenuating God's extra-spatial and extra-temporal attributes, they insist the divine persons are able to genuinely relate in time and space to human creatures. This makes for divine-human encounters that are dialogical, mutual and reciprocal.

The divine-human personal relationship has been at the heart of the evangelical project since the Reformation. Luther's discovery of the gracious *pro nobis* God who, in Jesus, gave Himself without reserve for humanity, and who can be known only *in concreto* through faith forged in the depth of experience (George 1988:59-60), and Calvin's stress on the "witness of the Spirit" (Calvin 1960:78-81) are early expressions of an authentically evangelical concern for this personal dimension in the Gospel. In different ways, Pietists and Puritans embodied this same value, and it came to its greatest expression, perhaps, in the revivalism of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It continues to find expression in the contemporary evangelical preoccupation with evangelism (introducing individuals to life with God) and discipleship (forming them in their relationships with God and others). Bebbington's "conversionist" theme is shorthand for this key evangelical feature. Simply put: divine-human dialogical interaction is basic to the entire evangelical project, inherent in its ethos and inseparable from its message.

The God-human dialogical relationship is grounded in God's creation of humanity as *imago Dei*, in the "image of God" (Ge 1:26-27). This is a much-discussed theme in Biblical anthropological studies, and there is disagreement as to what, precisely, God's image entails (Hoekema 1994; Anderson 2000:69-87). What is rarely disputed, however, is the fact that, whatever else is entailed (i.e., reason, personality, dominion, creativity, etc.), the image of God borne by humanity implies a certain relational capacity based on identity, whereby humans and God can communicate with one another in mutually intelligible ways (Lister 2013:185-186, 219; Anderson 2000:73-84; Hoekema 1994:66-101). Humanity's Fall into sin distorted but did not erase God's image in humans.

One of the most helpful conceptual resources is this arena is the seminal work of the Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, whose *Ich und du* ("I and thou") did much to catalyse reflection on what it means for humans to live in personal relationship

(Buber 1970). Buber believed there to be two types of relations in the world, denominated by two word pairs: I-it and I-thou. I-it relations are subject-object relations, established between persons and passive objects, such as books or cars. They are impersonal and based on specific-content knowledge, which is indirect and mediated through the object. In contrast, I-thou or subject-subject relations are personal, established between two subjects, both of whom are active and retain their subjectivity. These relationships are characterised by mutuality and reciprocity. Knowledge in these relationships is direct, immediate and lacks specific content, consisting of personal encounters. In these relations, both subjects know and are known by the other. For Buber, God, the Absolute Thou, whilst wholly other is also "wholly present" and is known only through direct, personal encounter (Buber 1970:53, 58-59, 67, 95, 127). Buber's ideas would spawn its own movement—dialogical personalism—and inform the dialectical school of Protestant theology, especially the work of Emil Brunner (McGrath 2003:270-273).

Buber's influence is widely seen in conservative evangelical scholarship as well, where his I-thou/I-it dichotomy is found to be a serviceable means of delineating the distinctly personal character of God's relatedness to humanity (e.g., Erickson 1998:145, 217, 221, 525; 2013:163; Oden 2006:338; Vanhoozer 2010:69, 443; cf. Castelo 2009:34). However, virtually all conservative evangelicals would agree with Vanhoozer that the divine-human I-thou relationship is not a strict parity, but an asymmetrical arrangement between covenant lord and covenant servant (Vanhoozer 2010:442; cf. Castelo 2009:36-38; Bray 2012:515).

3.4.2.3   God and humanity in covenant relationship

There is general consensus among conservative evangelical scholars that the way God has chosen to act in dialogue with humanity is by means of covenant

relationship (Archer 1982:276-278; Oden 2006:232, 244-245, 302-304; Castelo 2009:32-38; Vanhoozer 2010:68, 442-444; Horton 2011:44, 151-184; Bird 2013a:496-511; Bray 2012:511-558; Lister 2013:181-182). Vanhoozer, following Cole, defines a covenant as a relationship founded on a promise (Vanhoozer 2010:442). Archer emphasises the mutual obligation implied in covenant relations (Archer 1982:276).

How scholars classify the Biblical covenants reflects their subtraditions and larger theological aims. Reformed theologians typically reflect the Covenantal, or Federal view, that there are three overarching covenants: (1) the Covenant of Redemption, by which the Trinitarian members covenanted, in the councils of eternity, to redeem the elect, (2) the Covenant of Creation (or Works), between the triune God and Adam, as the head of the human race and (3) the Covenant of Grace, between God and the elect after the Fall, with Christ, the second Adam, serving as mediator and federal head (e.g., Grudem 2000:515-522; Horton 2011:44-45). Bray suggests a model emphasising the prophetic nature of the Abrahamic covenant, the priestly nature of the Mosaic covenant and the kingly nature of the Davidic (Bray 2012:533-550). Despite differences in emphasis, conservative evangelicals—whether Reformed (e.g., Grudem, Horton, Bird) or non-Reformed (e.g., Oden, Castelo)—agree that the concept of covenant is central to God's relationship with the world (Vanhoozer 2010:443). Additionally, there is considerable agreement on the fact that God's decision to enter into covenants with humans is purely voluntary and uncoerced (e.g., Lister 2013:181-182) and that God, as the initiator of these covenants, chooses His covenant partners (e.g., Bray 2012:523).

There is a connection between the concept of divine-human covenant and (im)passibility. As noted in Chapter 2, Vanhoozer locates the Bible's representations of divine *pathos* within covenant boundaries. Denominating them "covenantal concern-based theodramatic construals", he makes the point that

virtually all of God's pathic displays are found within covenant settings, citing Genesis 6:6 as the exception (Vanhoozer 2010:413, 443). There are actually other *pathos*-rich passages involving nations with which Yahweh did not have an explicit covenant relationship, such as Moab (Is 15:5; 16:9-11; Je 48:30-32, 35-6). However, if one takes the view that all human-divine relationship is covenantal, by virtue of the original mandate (Ge 1:28-30), the Noahic covenant (Ge 8:18-22), and/or an aboriginal covenant of grace, then Vanhoozer's omission of these texts is not critical and his central thesis remains valid.

3.5   Chapter summary and its relevance to the overall research agenda

Section 1.2 describes the primary research question motivating this project as, What are the key pastoral implications, as understood from a conservative evangelical perspective, of contemporary passibilist accounts of God's relationship to suffering? Answering this question is the purpose of this dissertation. The aim of this chapter is to address the second of the five secondary research questions, What are the key theological tenets of conservative evangelicalism that inform theological discussions of (im)passibility? To do so requires a careful examination of how the term "conservative evangelicalism" is used for purposes of this project; how the movement was shaped historically; what the contemporary conservative evangelical landscape looks like; how the movement fits within the broader Christian community and what core theological commitments held by conservative evangelicals ought to inform their assessment of passibilist proposals. Exploring these issues was the aim of this chapter.

Section 3.2 defined how the term "conservative evangelicalism" is used in the current project. First, the term "evangelicalism" was briefly examined etymologically and historically, then with reference to Bebbington's standard four-

feature model, citing conversionism, activism, Biblicism and crucicentrism as important distinguishing marks of the movement. Second, "conservative" was defined through use of the scholarly convention of recognising "conservative" and "revisionist" poles of the evangelical continuum and examining the disparate theological ambitions (preserving the Tradition versus reinterpreting the Tradition along contemporary lines) and dogmatic formulations (concerning Scripture and the doctrine of God) of these two camps. It was shown that the two groups take different approaches to doing theology, resulting in significant differences in their views of both the Bible and God. This section then described conservative evangelicals as those who place a high value on preserving traditional, consensual formulations of the Faith, hold to the inspiration, inerrancy and authority of Scripture and understand God in ways consistent with the classic theistic heritage.

Section 3.3 examined the historical development of evangelicalism and its conservative substream as well as its contemporary setting. The evangelical movement was traced from its point of origin in the sixteenth century Reformation, through seventeenth century Pietism and Puritanism, eighteenth century revivalism, various nineteenth century developments and into the twentieth century, noting both its early fundamentalist roots and mid-century emergence as a distinct "neo-evangelical" movement. The section then turned to explore conservative evangelicalism's contemporary setting, examining two of its challenges—the "battle for the Bible" and the "battle for God"—and its signs of vitality. The section concluded with a consideration of how conservative evangelicalism is located within the broader Christian community, noting both family resemblances and distinctive features, as well as the relevance of these considerations to the larger research aims.

Section 3.4 analysed two nonnegotiable dogmatic commitments held by conservative evangelicals that have a direct bearing on discussions of

(im)passibility. The first is the transcendence of God. This is often discussed in the literature with reference to three subthemes: God's ontological "otherness", the creator-creature distinction and the subsequent need for using analogical language in theological discourse. Each of these subthemes was examined from a conservative theological perspective. The second core doctrinal commitment is the relationality of God. Again, three subthemes were examined that feature prominently in the literature: the understanding of God as a relational, triune being; the dialogical nature of divine-human interactions; and the covenantal context for divine-human intercourse. These twin dogmatic loci—God's transcendence and God's relationality—are central to any discussion of divine (im)passibility, and thus figure prominently in upcoming chapters.

Finally, Section 3.5 demonstrated the relevance of this chapter to the overall research agenda. It was shown that a thorough understanding of conservative evangelicalism is essential to establishing the ecclesial context of the project and central to the respective aims of each subsequent chapter. It is particularly important for critically evaluating the primary research goal of addressing the pastoral implications of passibilist proposals for the conservative evangelical subtradition.

Because practical theology is undertaken within a distinct sociological or ecclesial context, defining this context is critically important to the present project. This chapter has provided a contextual analysis of conservative evangelicalism by defining its boundaries and noting its history, contemporary setting, relationship to the larger Christian community and two of its core theological commitments that have direct bearing on discussions of (im)passibility. This context is essential for locating the arguments presented in each succeeding chapter.

Ecclesial setting is vital to Chapter 4, which provides a historical analysis of key passibilist teachings, describes the four ways conservative evangelical scholars have responded to these teachings and documents the influence of the colloquy on rank-and-file conservative evangelical believers. Defining precisely what conservative evangelicalism is, then—historically, dogmatically and ecumenically—is foundational to analysising the historical and contemporary settings.

Chapter 5 is also informed by this contextual analysis. Following an exegesis of certain key Biblical texts, the chapter examines passibilist arguments by means of these texts in conjunction with the key conservative evangelical theological convictions described in Chapter 3. Knowledge of conservative evangelicalism is foundational to an accurate and ingenuous assessment of how passibilist arguments have impacted it.

Finally, Chapter 6 requires a thorough acquaintance with the project's ecclesial context, insofar as it prescribes specific ways to address the pastoral concerns raised in previous chapters within this setting—that is, the uncritical adoption of passibilist assumptions and the abandonment of certain core conservative evangelical commitments among scholars and non-scholars who identify with this tradition. To know what those assumptions are—and to offer alternative approaches—requires a familiarity with the history, contemporary setting, and dogmatic orientation of conservative evangelicalism.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL ANALYSIS – A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORK FOR PASSIBILIST TEACHING

4.1 Chapter introduction

The three-fold structure of the LIM research model—analysis of the present situation, depiction of a preferred scenario and recommendation of practical remedial steps—requires a thorough investigation of the current state of affairs with a view to solving a practical ministry-related problem. Per the LIM approach, this investigation of the problem consists of three elements: (1) a situational analysis, examining the state of the literature, (2) a contextual analysis, exploring the problem's ecclesial setting and (3) a historical analysis, delineating how the problem developed over time (Smith 2008:205-212).

The problem under consideration in the current project is the profusion of passibilist proposals since the last quarter of the twentieth century and the subsequent existential confusion these teachings have created on both scholarly and non-scholarly levels within the conservative evangelical subtradition. The present chapter is essential to addressing the main research question concerning the pastoral implications of passibilist construals for conservative evangelicals by specifically answering the third subsidiary research question stated in Section 1.2: What is the historical framework and contemporary setting of passibilist teachings?

The first two of these analyses—situational and contextual—were provided in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively. Chapter 2 reviewed the literature on the subject, noting the preponderance of passibilist proposals, especially since the publication on Moltmann's 1974 landmark work. Chapter 3 examined the conservative evangelical substream of the Christian tradition, including its history, theological features, challenges, prospects and leading figures and events. This is the ecclesial setting for the project. As noted in Chapter 1, this subtradition has been acutely impacted by the passibilist surge of the late twentieth century, problematising the nature of the God-world relationship for scholars and non-scholars alike.

The present chapter explores the history of these developments. It investigates, first, the chronological sequence of the major passibilist proposals and impassibilist counterproposals since 1974 (Section 4.2). This section, read in conjunction with the diachronically presented material in Section 2.5, is intended to help the reader understand the historical "flow" of the (im)passibility colloquy. Section 4.3 then summarises the most frequently cited existentially oriented passibilist arguments under five headings: devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional. This section builds on the typology of argumentation presented in Section 2.6.1, developing the more important of those arguments. Finally, the present chapter examines the impact passibilist teachings have exerted on the conservative evangelical community on both scholarly and popular levels (Section 4.4). This section develops the material surveyed in the synthesis portion of the literature review, specifically Sections 2.7.1 and 2.7.2.

4.2   A brief history of contemporary passibilist reflection

In keeping with the delimitation stated in Section 1.5.2, this overview concerns itself principally with developments within passibilist theology from 1974 onward.

For the sake of historical context, it will survey the key twentieth century proposals that helped influence contemporary espousals of the doctrine (Section 4.2.1). Additional information on this pre-contemporary passibilist literature is found in Section 2.4.

4.2.1 Survey of pre-contemporary passibilist reflection

As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, a number of important works preceded Moltmann's landmark predication of suffering to God. In the early twentieth century, a number of writers representing an assortment of traditions attributed suffering to God, contrary to the long-held *apatheia* axiom. In 1911, the Spanish writer Miguel Unamuno (1864-1936) published his *Del sentimiento tragico de la vida en los hombres y en los pueblos,* in which he argues that *congoja* (pain, sorrow, affliction) is the fundamental feature of existence for both humans and God. Infinite tragedy, not invulnerability, characterises God's life (Unamuno 1972). Eight years later, this theme of inevitable tragedy within the Godhead was explored by the Russian mystical philosopher Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948), who argued against the "cold" image of an absolute God in favour of One whose freedom inclines Him to participate in humanity's tragic reality and suffer its affects (Berdyaev 1968:52-58). Unamuno's and Berdyaev's works were translated into English in 1954 and 1939, respectively, and they have served as important resources for contemporary passibilists (cf. Kim 2011:12-17).

Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, Kenotic theology was winning adherents, leading a number of English-speaking scholars to question whether the traditional Chalcedonian Christological formulation adequately reflected the full humanity of Christ. Kenoticism had earlier been developed in Germany by a cadre of theologians, including Ernst Sartorius (1797-1859), Gottfried Thomasius (1802-1875), Karl TA Liebner (1806-1971), Johann CK von Hofmann (1810-

1877) and Franz HR Frank (1827-1894). New generations of primarily British scholars were now exploring its merits as a source for re-envisioning the incarnation and atonement. AM Fairbairn (1838-1912), PT Forsyth (1848-1921), Charles Gore (1853-1932), Frank Weston (1871-1924), William Temple (1881-1944) Clarence Rolt (1881-1981) and Bertrand Brasnett (1893-1988) were among the more influential scholars arguing that God genuinely suffered *as God* in the incarnate Christ (cf. Kim 2011:17-20; Sarot 2012:103-106). On this view, a two-natures Christology was an outmoded conceptual tool that required substantial revision. For these theologians, Christological reformulation necessitated the abandonment of the doctrine of impassibility.

The rejection of a doctrine, so central to centuries of Christian tradition, was understandably of concern to the powers within the Anglican Church. So, in 1924 the Archbishop's Doctrine Committee commissioned John Kenneth Mozley (1883-1946) to research the historical development and contemporary understanding of impassibility. His resulting monograph was later published under the title *The impassibility of God* (Mozley 1926). It became the standard reference work in the field and is still, though dated, of considerable value. In it, Mozley explored the patristic roots of the doctrine, its historical development within scholastic and Protestant theologies, the reasons for its modern reassessment and recommendations for further study. He concluded that a proper accounting of the dialogical nature of divine love, of God's immanent involvement in world processes and of the nature of the cross as revelatory of God's heart, all point to the need to revise the doctrine and allow for some degree of divine co-suffering (Mozley 1926:175-176). After the publication of Mozley's account, numerous works were published in England supporting a passibilist understanding of God, including those by BR Brasnett (1928), HM Relton (1929), ES Jones (1933), HW Robinson (1939), TH Hughes (1949), TE Pollard (1955), KJ Woollcombe (1967), D Jenkins (1967) and LJ Kuyper (1969).

Unquestionably, passibilism became the dominant view among Anglican theologians.

Shortly after Mozley published his monograph, Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) delivered his now famous Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh (1927-28). Later published as *Process and reality,* Whitehead outlined in these talks his project for re-imagining God in contradistinction to the classic theistic tradition. Whitehead's "God" was not Christian in any orthodox sense, but his philosophy of process was later adapted to the Christian message by scholars like Charles Hartshorne (1897-2000), Norman Pittenger (1905-1997), Daniel Day Williams (1910-1973) and John Cobb (b.1925). Process philosophy/theology argues that God is dipolar, with the primordial pole of His being transcending creation and the contingent pole, imbedded within it, sharing in its evolution and suffering. Whitehead's depiction of God as the "fellow-sufferer who understands" is among the most frequently cited passibilist summaries (Whitehead 1929:532). So, too, is his accusation that theologians who attribute transcendent qualities to God (e.g., aseity, omnipotence, omniscience, etc.) are guilty of paying God "metaphysical compliments" (Whitehead 1967:161). Process theism later became closely associated with the University of Chicago Divinity School and the Claremont School of Theology and exerted significant influence throughout the latter half of the twentieth century.

The mid-twentieth century witnessed other significant developments in the area of passibilist reflection. Jewish mystical philosopher Abraham Heschel (1907-1972) wrote his doctoral dissertation at the University of Berlin in 1935 on the *pathos* characterising the Old Testament prophetic literature. God, he insisted, must be envisioned as suffering with and for His people. Heschel later expanded his thesis and translated *Die prophetie* into English, publishing it in 1962. Since that time, *The prophets* has become a frequent reference within passibilist Biblical scholarship (Heschel 1999).

In 1932, Karl Barth (1886-1968) began work on his monumental *Die kirchliche dogmatik.* In it, Barth proposed a God who transcends space-time, the Other, who, following Augustine, is self-sufficient, infinite and impassible in His essence (Barth 2010e:187; cf. 2010c:313). Accordingly, God "in Himself" does not require humanity as a conversation partner and cannot be affected by external influences without His concurrence. However, God is also "for us", and in sovereign freedom, He chooses to include humanity in the fellowship of the Father and the Son (2010a:40). This makes Him vulnerable, endowing Him with the capacity to suffer with and for humanity (Barth 2010d:163; cf. 166, 169; 2010e:79; 2010f:225, 357). Barth's impact on modern theology is incalculably vast, and His passibilist account provided a touchstone for future scholars, engendering discussions that took the colloquy in multiple and hitherto unexplored directions (e.g., Russell 1978; McCormack 2009; Goetz [2014]; others). Later, Moltmann's articulation of passibility would demonstrate striking affinities with Barth's thought (e.g., Russell 1978:229).

In 1946, Japanese Lutheran scholar Kazoh Kitamori (1916-1998) published *Kami no itami no shingaku*. Translated into English in 1965 as *The theology of the pain of God*, the book garnered enthusiastic endorsements by a range of influential theologians including Moltmann (1972), Dorothee Sölle (1973), Hans Küng (1978), Rudolf Bohren (1980), Hans von Balthasar (1983) and Alister McGrath (1994) (Kim 2011:57). Influenced by his wartime experiences and his reading of Luther, Kitamori sought to re-articulate the Gospel in terms of God's own willingness to co-suffer with humanity (Kitamori 1965:11). God's lament over Israel in Jeremiah 31:20 gives a glimpse into the heart of God, in which divine love and holy wrath produce an irresolvable tension and tearing. Pain, then, is part of God's essence (Kitamori 1965:45). Further, God's pain did not begin at the cross. Instead, He has always suffered alongside His people. The cross merely demonstrates the intolerable tension—"God stands over against God"—

as God's will to love confronts God's wrath, eventuating in humanity's redemption (Kitamori 1965:45).

Other significant passibilist proposals during the mid-twentieth century included Dorothee Sölle's 1973 monograph *Suffering* (English translation 1975)*,* and James Cone's attributions of divine affliction within an African-American liberation context (1969, 1970). These contributed to the colloquy in unique ways. Cone's work, in particular, was suggestive of how attributions of co-suffering to God might prove a valuable theological and pastoral resource in helping oppressed people groups understand God's compassion and justice in the midst of a broken world, taking comfort from the fact that God understands and feels human pain and is working to bring the oppressors to account (cf. Cone 2008a).

In summary, the pre-contemporary literature is significant and still offers vast conceptual resources for contemporary passibilists. As important as these works are, however, none gained the degree of scholarly purchase necessary to galvanise a movement. Then, in 1972, Moltmann published his *Der gekreuzigte Gott,* which immediately garnered worldwide attention. Translated into English two years later, *God crucified* distinguished itself as a seminal piece of scholarship, such that its publication is justly regarded as the genesis of the contemporary stage of the historic colloquy, the subject of the next section.

The contemporary stage of the (im)passibility debate spans just over forty years and might, in the opinion of the present author, be usefully imagined as unfolding over that time in three distinct phases: (1) Phase 1: Toward a passibilist hegemony, 1974-1986, (2) Phase 2: Impassibilist counteroffensive, 1986-2000, and (3) Phase 3: Conservative impassibilist awakening, 2001-2014. The following three sections will examine the history of contemporary passibilist claims by means of this three-phase timeline.

4.2.2 Phase 1: Toward a passibilist hegemony, 1974-1986

As previously noted, Moltmann's *God crucified* began a new stage in the centuries-old (im)passibility discussion. Because the work has already been examined (Section 2.5.1), a summary of its central claims will suffice for the purposes here. Moltmann argues in this and his other works that the Church fathers superimposed Greek metaphysical notions on the Biblical narrative; that theology must return to the key revelational event—that is, God's presence in the incarnate Christ—to find its centre of gravity; that Christ's cry of dereliction expresses His own godforsakenness and, thus, His solidarity with a godforsaken humanity; that the crucifixion involved the entire Trinity in suffering—suffering that, whilst historically particularised at Calvary has always been in the heart of God and embraces all suffering everywhere; and that, by choosing to suffer with, for, and because of humanity, God assures humans He loves them, sympathises with their pain and is working to relieve it in the eschaton, offering hope. As has been seen, elements of this proposal were anticipated by earlier writers. But Moltmann systematised these elements in a coherent conceptual framework that, whilst challenging the Great Tradition, did not do so in as radical a way as Whitehead's project. Moltmann hit a nerve, and all future contributors to the debate—both pro and con—have had to wrestle with his conclusions.

The same year Moltmann's work appeared in English, two other passibilist proposals were published. The first was by the French Jesuit François Varillion. His *L'humilité de Dieu*, followed in 1975 by *La souffrance de Dieu,* were published together in English in 1983 as *The humility and suffering of God,* a work frequently noted in the literature. The second was Jung Young Lee's *God suffers for us: A systematic inquiry into a concept of divine passibility*. As shown in Section 2.5.2, Lee's thesis was that God's very nature is love and that He expresses His love, not through sympathy, which Lee defines as emotional

identification with the world, but through empathy, entailing a participation in the world's sufferings. Relying on Barth, Brunner and Tillich, Lee sought to demonstrate the basic compatibility of passibilism with major Christian doctrines.

Two years later, in 1976, the German Lutheran theologian Eberhard Jüngel made a contribution to the colloquy with the English publication of his *The doctrine of the Trinity: God's being is in becoming.* This was followed in 1983 with his *God as the mystery of the world.* In these works, Jüngel builds on Barth's notion of election, arguing that, by determining from eternity to be "for us", God simultaneously determined to embrace suffering and death "for Himself" (Jüngel 2001:98-103). The Son's willing obedience to the Father points the way for how, in freedom, God's being-in-act is a being-in-the-act-of-suffering, in which the Son suffers the cross and the Father suffers the loss of the Son. Yet, because God chose this fate, it cannot be said that He suffered misfortune or diminution (Jüngel 1976:83-88). Hart later critiqued Jüngel's formulation for its "Hegelianism saturated with a palpable metaphysical nihilism" (Hart 2002:189). J Scott Jackson, on the other hand, opined Jüngel offers a "third way" that avoids the pitfalls of a transcendence-depriving theopaschite revisionism, on the one hand, and a moribund classical theism that makes talk of divine compassion unintelligible, on the other (Jackson 2010).

Other passibilist construals offered up in the early 1980s included Francis House's evocative "The barrier of impassibility" (1980), arguing that the notion of a God immune to human suffering is Biblically suspect and existentially off-putting. Ken Surin's *Harvard Theological Review* article "Theodicy?" made essentially same claim: in a world as broken as this one, humans must eschew intellectual arguments about the possible reasons for evil and be content to rest their case on the "only religiously available deity"—that of a God who shares the sufferings of His "tormented creatures" (Surin 1983). Richard Bauckham's 1984 essay, "'Only the suffering God can help': Divine passibility in modern theology,"

offered a concise history of the colloquy (replete with accusations of Hellenisation) and suggested five reasons for the passibilist shift: (1) the context of acute human suffering (e.g., two world wars, Auschwitz, American black oppression, etc.), (2) the "emancipation" of the Biblical God from Greek categories, particularly in recent Old Testament scholarship, (3) the modern notion of love as sympathetic solidarity rather than "one-way" benevolence, (4) the conviction that the cross is central to God's self-disclosure and must, therefore, demonstrate God's suffering as God, not merely as man and (5) the need for a more satisfying theodicy, reasoning that only by co-suffering may God is justified in a suffering universe (Bauckham 1984). Daniel Migliori's 1985 essay, "The passion of God and the prophetic task of pastoral ministry" made a link between the capacity to suffer and the ability to speak and act prophetically for the good of others. God must be capable of suffering, Migliori reasoned, for otherwise He remains apathetic in the face of incalculable human pain (Migliori 1985).

Two influential book-length treatments were published during the early part of this decade. The first, Terrence Fretheim's *The suffering of God: An Old Testament perspective* (1984) was a bold application of process thought to Old Testament studies. Fretheim's thesis was that the tendency to depreciate anthropomorphic metaphors throughout Judeo-Christian history had a deleterious effect on the development of Biblical theology, a deficiency that could be remedied only by taking seriously a literal reading of the Old Testament pathic attributions to God (Fretheim 1984:6-11). The details of his proposal, examined in Section 2.4.3, have been the topic of considerable discussion within the theological guild since the book's publication. The second book was Warren McWilliams' 1985 survey, *The passion of God,* in which the author examined six very different twentieth century passibilist accounts. More descriptive than constructive, the work has become a standard reference in the field. Its contents are described in Section 2.4.4.

It was during this time that open theism formally got its start. When Clark Pinnock presented his 1978 paper, "The need for a scriptural, and therefore a neo-classical theism" at the thirtieth annual meeting of the ETS, it was like a warning shot across the bow of the conservative evangelical flagship, signaling a challenge to the way God had historically been articulated within evangelical circles. Pinnock took direct aim at the doctrine of impassibility, declaring it to be "emphatically Greek", not Biblical, in origin, and urging that it—as well as attributions of immutability and timelessness—be abandoned (Pinnock 1979:38-39). The following year, the Seventh-Day Adventist theologian T Richard Rice wrote the slender volume, *The openness of God: The relationship of divine foreknowledge and human free will* (1980). Pinnock contacted Rice to express his appreciation for the work, and the two later collaborated with several other scholars to define what a open theistic model might look like for the God-world relationship.

Meanwhile, a few lone conservative evangelicals offered a defence of the Great Tradition. In 1977, DG Attfield questioned Moltmann's project in his *Scottish Journal of Theology* article, "Can God be crucified? A discussion of J. Moltmann". In it, he expressed grave doubts about the philosophical difficulties raised by Moltmann's attribution of suffering to God as God, suggesting that a double-role Christology (Christ suffered in His incarnate role but remained impassible in His disincarnate role) provides a more promising solution to the God-suffering dialectic (Attfield 1977). In 1978, Gerald Bray's *Themelios* article, "Can we dispense with Chalcedon?" asserted the adequacy of the orthodox two-natures solution over and against its modern counterparts. And in 1983, Richard Muller wrote "Incarnation, immutability, and the case for classical theism", in which he made a strong case for retaining God's classical attributes against proposals like Pinnock's, which envisioned God as changing and repenting, or Barth's, which interpreted God's immutability as mere moral constancy (Muller 1983).

But these were not the only conservative evangelical voices. There were four other particularly significant ones, none of which was sympathetic to the classical construal of divine *apatheia*. The first was that of Gordon Lewis, highly respected evangelical leader both in the United States and abroad, and professor of theology at Denver Seminary since 1958. Through his *magnum opus*, *Integrative theology*, co-authored by Bruce Demarest in 1987, and over five decades of teaching, Lewis shaped the theological trajectory of thousands of church leaders and future theologians. Lewis's theology is conservative and his tone, objective. Yet in both his *Integrative Theology* and his articles in Walter Elwell's *Evangelical dictionary of theology* (1984), he assumed rather than proved the Hellenistic origins of the *apatheia* doctrine and, by means of a false antithesis, argued its essential incompatibility with the active, passionate "Biblical" God (Lewis 1984:457, 553-554; 2001:497, 598-599; Lewis and Demarest 1987:235-237). His curt dismissal of impassibility is, unlike his normal theological *modus operandi*, highly subjective and decidedly un-conservative.

The second voice was came from Millard Erickson, whose first edition of his *Christian theology* was published in 1985. His book would later go through two subsequent editions and become, for a decade, arguably the most popular theological textbook among American conservative evangelical college students and seminarians. Erickson is known for his conservativism and his willingness to boldly critique the revisionist wing of the evangelical party. Yet his *Christian theology* was, itself, revisionist concerning impassibility, which he considered a Hellenic corruption (2013:304, 672) and Chalcedonian Christology, which—with Barth—he believed to be in need of revision (2013:671-672).

The third voice belonged to John Stott, who wrote an important work in 1986 entitled the *Cross of Christ*. For years a leading light within British evangelicalism and the embryonic international evangelical movement, Stott was admired for his

generally conservative posture toward the Tradition. And his *Cross of Christ* offered a stalwart defence of the substitutionary model of atonement, long an evangelical shibboleth. Yet in his final chapter, he unabashedly aligned himself with Moltmann, Kitamori, Sobrino and other contemporary revisionists, indicating his adoption of passibilist sensibilities (Stott 1986:332-334).

The fourth important conservative evangelical voice was that of JI Packer, whose best-selling *Knowing God*, which first appeared in 1973, solidified his reputation as a leading spokesman for conservative Reformed theology. Yet his position on impassibility—that God cannot experience pain unless He chooses to do so—is closer to Barth than to Calvin. In a 1986 article in *Christianity Today*, "What do you mean when you say God?" he famously suggested tha the "essence" of impassibility is the "chosenness of God's grief and pain" (Packer 1986:§5). His position was not as extreme as Lewis', Stott's or Erickson's, but neither did it take advantage of the conceptual resources the orthodox tradition had bequeathed him.

The passibilist-positive views of these four luminaries contrasted sharply with the traditional impassibilist postures of Attfield, Bray and Muller and created doubts within the conservative evangelical theological guild about whether the doctrine, as traditionally formulated, should be retained in contemporary articulations of the Faith. These doubts would persist for another fifteen years, when a major crisis would galvanise an effort to reappraise passibilist assumptions and return to construals more in keeping with the Tradition.

By 1986, the first phase of the contemporary discussion of (im)passibility was drawing to a close. Looking back on the previous twelve years, the theological landscape was overwhelmingly passibilist. Only a few lone voices spoke out in defence of the Great Tradition, with the vast majority of scholars solidly in the anti-*apatheia* camp. Even among conservative evangelicals, there was a

tendency to accommodate passibilist sensibilities. A passibilist hegemony seemed assured. Reflecting these sentiments, Ronald Goetz wrote an article for the *Christian Century* in April of that year, whose title captured the situation well: "The suffering God: the rise of a new orthodoxy".

4.2.3   Phase 2: Impassibilist counteroffensive, 1986-2000

In Phase 1, impassibilists were routed; in Phase 2, they began to fight back. This important turn in the colloquy opened and ended with two of the most serious challenges to the passibilist hegemony: Richard Creel's 1986 philosophical account and Thomas Weinandy's systematic defence of the doctrine in 2000. Like bookends, they laid out Biblical, philosophical and existential arguments that would shape a nascent impassibilist counteroffensive. Sandwiched between these two seminal works were a number of smaller treatments that collectively fueled a burgeoning resistance to passibilist teachings.

Creel's work was something of a surprise. As already pointed out in Section 2.5.5, where his proposal is detailed, Creel did not interact with Moltmann, who, by 1986, was the primary spokesman for the passibilist revolution. Instead, he engaged Hartshorne, whose influence had waned (e.g., Creel 1986:ix). Also, his proposal was extreme at points (e.g., the suggestion that God is indifferent about whether we choose Him) and contained suspect elements (e.g., his concept of the "plenum"). Later, he saw the need to revise his argument that God does not feel suffering to include the idea that God can be "touched" but not "crushed" by pain (Creel 2010:326-327). Nonetheless, Creel is justly credited with mounting the most sophisticated defence of the traditional impassibilist doctrine up to that point, producing a work that subsequent passibilists would be forced to contend with (e.g., Taliaferro 1989:217). His central thesis was that impassibility of feeling

is a necessary constituent of an account of God that takes seriously God's transcendence.

Other scholars developed arguments in defence of impassibility. Paul Helm evidenced his indebtedness to Creel in his paper, "The impossibility of divine passibility", presented at the Third Edinburgh Conference in Christian Dogmatics in 1989 and published with the other papers presented in 1990 under the title, *The power and weakness of God.* In his essay, Helm argued that God's timeless eternality makes it logically inconceivable for Him to change, including in the affective realm. For Helm, God's timelessness is the proper starting point in discussing impassibility (Helm 1990:119). He argued that the doctrine of divine impassibility safeguards God's transcendent nature by asserting that He is not susceptible to temporal, changing emotions. But this does not make Him impassive or unfeeling: God possesses a full, rich affective life by which He experiences love, grace, joy, delight, and care as part of His "maximally active" set of dispositions (Bray 1990:124-127).

At the same conference, Henri Blocher, in "Divine immutability", criticised Moltmann's abandonment of the Chalcedonian Symbol as unBiblical and, following Van Til, defended a classically orthodox understanding of God as "autarchic" and "non-correlative", possessing a fullness of being that makes Him independent of outside conditioning (Blocher 1990:20-21). In "God and change: Moltmann in the light of the Reformed tradition", Paul Wells argued that Moltmann's concept of God's perichoretic involvement in the world endorses a form of immanence that does violence to the Reformed understanding of God's transcendence (Wells 1990:59-63). And David Cook alleged in his paper, "Weak church, weak God: The charge of anthropomorphism", that contemporary passibilist proposals like Moltmann's are fatally anthropocentric, reductionist and accommodating, refashioning God in terms amenable to contemporary tastes, resulting in a weakened witness for the Church (Cook 1990:69-92).

Other notable impassibilist works during this phase of the colloquy included Ligon Duncan's survey of nineteenth century American Presbyterian theologians' endorsement of divine impassibility (Duncan 1990) and Michael Dodd's essay, "Thomas Aquinas, human suffering, and the unchanging God of love", presenting a Thomist perspective of divine love as fully-in-act, non-passive and benevolently disposed (Dodds 1991). Gerald Bray authored a pair of works during this timeframe: the book *The doctrine of God* (1990), in which he defended classical theism, and the article "Does God suffer?", in which he asserted the enduring relevance of *apatheia* for theology, despite modern appetites and conservative concessions (Bray 1999). Robert Culver gave a helpful overview of the debate whilst making a case for impassibilism in his essay, "The impassibility of God: Cyril of Alexandria to Moltmann" (1996). And Henri Simoni tackled the issue philosophically in "Divine passibility and the problem of radical particularity: does God feel your pain?" In this article, Simoni interacted with passibilists Hartshorne, Shields, Taliaferro and Sarot and impassibilists Helm and Creel, as he investigated the metaphysical plausibility of a suffering God. He concluded that, whilst Helm's and Creel's arguments are flawed in parts (Simoni 1997:337-338), their theses are essentially correct in pointing out that the attribution of suffering to God is philosophically problematic and unnecessary to a Christian theodicy (Simoni 1997:344-346).

At the close of Phase 2, Thomas Weinandy produced the most important impassibilist work of this period. His *Does God Suffer?* (2000) was a *tour de force* of impassibilist logic, Biblical scholarship and existential sensitivity. In it, he discussed the Old Testament conception of Yahweh as the Wholly Other, Greek ideas of impassibility, the patristic revision of the *apatheia* doctrine, the Christian concepts of God's love and the Trinity, the unique sufferings of Jesus Christ per Chalcedonian reasoning and various pastoral reflections on Christian suffering in light of Christ. Weinandy's work immediately became the single most important

treatment produced to date from an impassibilist perspective. It remains a *locus classicus* in the field. Section 2.5.9 examines the book's contents in more detail.

After the passibilist onslaught during Phase 1 (1974-1986), the aforementioned scholars assembled, piece by piece, the conceptual elements of a reasoned defence of the *apatheia* axiom. This was a dramatic turnabout from the previous phase. Whilst it did not overthrow the passibilist majority, it staunched the bloodletting of Phase 1 and gave impassibilists a seat at the table. What, precisely, was going on in the passibilist camp during this counteroffensive? In a word, much. The growing chorus of impassibilist voices challenged, but did not overturn, the passibilist hegemony. During this period, a majority of theologians continued to favour a passibilist account.

One of the more creative proposals put forward during this time was the monograph by the Oxford Baptist Paul Fiddes, *The creative suffering of God* (1988). Published at the beginning of Phase 2, it was followed by a second work at the very end of this period, *Participating in God: a pastoral doctrine of the Trinity* (2000). It is fitting that these original and well-argued works bracket the discussion taking place between 1986 and 2000, parallel to the way Creel's and Weinandy's proposals frame this phase's impassibilist agenda. Section 2.5.6 explores Fiddes' ideas in detail. As was shown, Fiddes—whilst distancing himself from certain elements of Moltmann's project and Whiteheadian-Hartshornian process theism—nonetheless adopts the radical immanentism implicit in Hegelian ontologies and makes a reasoned plea for understanding God to suffer *qua* God eminently whilst remaining God, and universally, whilst suffering uniquely on the cross (e.g., 1988:3, 89; 2000:292). Fiddes is respected on both sides of the debate and quoted liberally, although not as much as one might anticipate, given the volume of his work. This may be due to the dense nature of his prose.

In 1987, Yale's Nicholas Wolterstorff published his heart-rending reflections, *Lament for a son,* in the wake of his son's tragic death four years earlier. Wolterstorff found solace in the thought that God shared His pain. Wolterstorff's mature reflections on God's passibility appeared in his 2002 essay, "Does God suffer?" In it, he argued that the Augustinian tradition essentially recapitulated Stoic ideals and that a truly Biblical—and existentially satisfying—account of God's love requires that it include *Mitleiden,* or "sympathetic suffering". He agrees with Maldwyn Hughes that Christians cannot ingenuously call God a loving Father unless He is envisioned as being affected by the waywardness of His children (2002:118-119).

Throughout this phase, several authors took a similar tact to Wolterstorff's in espousing passibilist ideas. It was shown in Section 2.5.7 how prolifically and creatively Marcel Sarot argued along these lines for a passible God, authoring no fewer than eight pieces—one, *God, passibility, and corporeality,* a full-length book—six of which were published during this phase of the debate (Sarot 1990, 1991, 1992, 1995a, 1995b, 1996; cf. Sarot 2002, 2012). In a fine 1987 survey of the history of the discussion, "The theme of the 'suffering God': an exploration", Marc Steen questioned the degree to which God might be thought of as undergoing suffering, yet acknowledged the value of the proposition in introducing new, promising sources of comfort for human sufferers (Steen 1989:92-93). It and the other papers presented at an interdisciplinary colloquium at the Catholic University of Leuven were published in 1989 as *God and human suffering.* Published that same year was Charles Taliaferro's critique of Creel's monograph, arguing that God's voluntary co-suffering is an aspect of the "beauty of holiness" and that "any tenable notion" of God's goodness must include the capacity for Him to be profoundly distressed by the human plight (Taliaferro 1989:217-224). Barbara Brown Taylor suggested the very uniqueness of the Christian message hangs on the God who hangs on the cross in loving identification (1998:118-119). And in a 1996 article, Santiago Sia noted how

God, in suffering sympathetically with disconsolate human beings, meets a fundamental need, one that is intensified in times of anguish: to overcome a sense of separateness (Sia 1996:§7). The other passibilist scholars writing during this phase—Dennis Ngien (1995, 1997), Amuluche Nnamani (1995), Kallistos Ware (1998) and Richard Bauckham (1990, 1999)—echo similar themes.

During these years, conservative evangelicals were still somewhat on the margins on this issue. The important works were authored by non-evangelicals or, in some cases, non-conservative evangelicals. It would not be until the next phase that conservative evangelicals discovered their voice with sufficient critical mass to significantly influence the conversation. At this point, conservative evangelical contributors appeared about evenly split between passibilist and impassibilist camps. Those on the impassibilist side included Helm (1990), Duncan (1990), Cook (1990), Blocher (1990), Wells (1990), Bray (1993, 1999) and Culver (1998). Two others—Frederick Leahy (c.1996) and Peter Anders (1997)—also published pieces during this time. On the passibilist side, the contributions of Ngien (1995, 1997) and Nnamani (1995) were briefly noted above. Others who contributed to the conversation during this phase included Erickson (1988), Grenz (1994), Grudem (1995), Lewis (1984, 1996), Demarest (1996), Hudson (1996), Carson (2000) and open theists like Pinnock (1994) and Sanders (1994).

An important development took place in the middle of this phase that would have dramatic repercussions for the future course of the colloquy. It was the 1994 publication of a collaborative work entitled *The openness of God: a Biblical challenge to the traditional understanding of God*. Containing contributions from five evangelical theologians, the book was a direct affront to classical theism, one that—because of the book's publishing success and broad public appeal—could not be ignored. *The openness of God* was a major contributing factor to the

ensuing "battle for God" that climaxed within the conservative evangelical camp in 2000-2001. Its tone and content inflamed passions and eventually galvanised the opposition in a way that would move the colloquy from the comparatively calm waters of Phase 2 to the turbulent depths of Phase 3.

4.2.4 Phase 3: conservative impassibilist awakening, 2001-2014

Open theism awakened the proverbial sleeping tiger. Before the mid-1990s, most conservative evangelicals were not overly vexed by differences of opinion being expressed about a relatively obscure and seemingly unimportant doctrine like impassibility. Few recognised then how central the idea is to one's concept of God (Vanhoozer would later call it the "beachhead for a paradigm revolution in theology" and, still later, "nothing less than a referendum on the whole of classical theism" [Vanhoozer 2003:87; 2010:391]). But in the early 1990s it was simply one divine attribute among many—and a rather arcane one at that. So, when passibilists dismissed the axiom as an unwelcomed Hellenistic corruption of the Gospel, few evangelicals expressed alarm. When, however, fellow evangelicals began to radically reinterpret the whole classic-theistic synthesis in the name of open theism, heresy meters around the country began to twitch like seismographs on the San Andreas fault (cf. Cooper 2009:4-5).

Among the first to sound the alarm were Norm Geisler and Wayne House, coauthors of *The battle for God: responding to the challenge of neotheism* in 2001. The book was an unambiguous endorsement of the classical divine attributes, including impassibility, against the open view. Published that same year was another impassibilist polemic, *Bound only once: the failure of open theism* (2001). Edited by Doug Wilson, it contained a series of essays by eleven conservative evangelical contributors affirming the traditional concept of God. The following year saw the appearance of yet another polemic with an incendiary

title, this one edited by Doug Huffman and Eric Johnson: *God under fire: modern scholarship reinvents God* (2002). These twelve essays, largely written by conservative evangelicals, were each built around a single question: e.g., Should the God of historic Christianity be replaced? Is God bound by time? What does God know? Does God have emotions? Collectively, the essays laid out the case for a (mostly) traditional theistic understanding of God. Significantly, all three of these books contained chapters dedicated to defending the doctrine of impassibility. This is remarkable given that the axiom was, until then, the ugly stepsister of the classical predicate family. By the early 2000s, it seems that what once had been regarded as an embarrassing theological addendum was now being treated as though it were central to the defence of the classical constellation of divine attributes.

Not all evangelicals joined the impassibilist bandwagon. In 2001, Clark Pinnock published another defence of freewill theism in *Most moved mover: a theology of God's openness.* John Feinberg (2001) and John Frame (2002) published monographs on the doctrine of God, both of which substantially modified impassibilism. Carson was largely dismissive of the logic of impassibilism in his 2003 publication, *How long O Lord? Reflections on suffering and evil*. Dennis Ngien continued his passibilist campaign to promote his interpretation of Luther's view of the *communicatio idiomatum* (Ngien 2004). And Wayne House teamed with William Grover to coauthor a popular-level work, *Does God feel your pain?* (2009), which—in a chapter written by Grover—espouses a strong passibilist position (House and Grover 2009).

In addition to the above, two conservative evangelical scholars new to the colloquy weighed in on the passibilist side. In 2007, Timothy Wiarda of Golden Gate Baptist Seminary published an intriguing article examining the Holy Spirit's "groaning" intercession on behalf of believers (Ro 8:26-27), suggesting a type of divine passibility as God is "touched" by human suffering through the mediation

of human feelings and the communication of those feelings to the Father by His Spirit (Wiarda 2007:310). In 2013, Australian evangelical Michael Bird wrote his one-volume systematic, *Evangelical theology: a Biblical and systematic introduction,* redefining impassibility along voluntarist lines—that is, God's sufferings are not "surprisingly imposed" but, rather, self-chosen (Bird 2013a:130-131).

Non-evangelicals also published an assortment of passibilist works during this period, including Louw (2003), Shields (2003), Ellis (2005), Scrutton (Foyle 2005; Scrutton 2005, 2009, 2013), Schaab (2006, 2007), Pembroke (2006), Hallman (2007), Matties (2007), Bush (2008), Pool (2009a, 2009b), Silcock (2011), Mostert (2011), Hughes (2011) and Haught (2011). Many of these were descriptive and largely derivative. Others, however, were highly original. For example, as seen in Section 2.5.13, Scrutton used an interdisciplinary approach, appropriating both ancient and modern resources to articulate a mildly passibilist position. Another wonderfully researched, imaginatively conceived and tightly-argued piece was that of Jeff Pool, who employed Langdon Gilkey's eidetic analysis to explore the symbol of divine suffering (Pool 2009, 2010).

There were also important impassibilist works published during this period written by non-evangelicals. The Orthodox Hart produced three books and two articles that dealt with (or touched upon) the subject of divine *apatheia* (2002, 2003, 2005, 2009a, 2009b, 2013). His 2002 *Pro Ecclesia* article, "No shadow of turning", made an especially important contribution to the field, distilling his longer, erudite yet self-confessed "rhapsodic" ruminations contained in his 2003 tome, *The beauty of the Infinite.* Hart's prodigious intellect, broad reading and deft command of the English language are sometimes offset by an acerbic wit and openly pugnacious tone that, perhaps, help account for the fact that his work, to date, has not been given its due. Catholic scholar Brian Davies (2006, 2011) also contributed to the conversation during this period, explicating the

doctrine from a Thomist perspective, and Richard Creel (2010) and Margaret Adam (2012) both published helpful articles, with the latter questioning the logical coherence of a Moltmannian optimism. Finally, Orthodox scholar Gavrilyuk joined the colloquy during this phase. His *The suffering of the impassible God: the dialectics of patristic thought* (2006) was shown, in Section 2.5.11, to be particularly influential in calling into question the passibilist assertion that the Gospel was perverted by Greek metaphysics. Gavrilyuk later published a paper, "God's impassible suffering in the flesh: the promise of paradoxical Christology" (2009), in which he argued for a nuanced, Christologically qualified impassibility consonant with the majority Tradition.

Two academic symposia took place during this phase that addressed—directly in one case, obliquely in the other—the question of impassibility. The first was sponsored by the Forum for Evangelical Theology at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary during the 2006-2007 school year. The papers presented were later published as *The sovereignty of God debate* (2009). They included essays from Cyrillian, Thomist, Calvinist, process, Moltmannian and openness perspectives, and several tackled the question of impassibility head on. Stephen Long and George Kalantzis provided strong defences of the Great Tradition. In his introductory piece, Jimmy Cooper gave a helpful overview of the issues entailed in the contemporary (im)passibility debate, locating the colloquy within the larger discussion surrounding God's sovereignty. The second symposium was sponsored by the faculty of Providence College and took place in March of 2007. These papers—from an array of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant theologians—were published together in Keating and White's edited collection, *Divine impassibility and the mystery of human suffering* (2009). Whilst the majority of presenters represented the impassibilist tradition, important minority voices included those of Gary Culpepper (2009), Robert Jenson (2009) and Bruce McCormack (2009).

The important story during this phase of the colloquy, however, was the number of conservative evangelicals who took up hard or soft impassibilist positions. Several evangelicals expressed a strong commitment to the Tradition as part of their polemic against open theism, including Norm Geisler (2001), Wayne House (2001), Douglas Wilson (2001), Douglas Jones (2001), Ben Merkle (2001), Peter Leithart (2001), Thomas Ascol (2001), R Douglas Geivett (2002), Charles Gutenson (2002) and Gannon Murphy (2006). Others, more generally, wished to identify with the basic grammar of impassibilism as a necessary constituent of contemporary God-talk: Mostyn Roberts (2004), Michael Horton (2005, 2011a, 2011b), Robin Cook (2005), Paul Helm (2005, 2007, 2008), Daniel Castelo (2005, 2008, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2014a, 2014b), Thomas Oden (2006), Vincent Bacote (2009), Mark Baddeley (2010), Paul Kim (2011), Philip Olsson (2012), Mark Smith (2012), Rob Lister (2012) and Nathan Sasser (2013). Kevin DeYoung (2006, 2010), Michael Ward (2007) and Oliver Crisp (2013) all sought to defend the logic of a Chalcedonian two-natures Christology. Bray's 2012 one-volume theology attempted to use God's love, impassibly conceived, as a point of integration for his Biblical and systematic project. Vanhoozer employed speech-act theory to demonstrate the coherence of an impassibilist relationality (Vanhoozer 2002, 2005, 2010) and Robert Heaney explored the conceptual possibilities of impassibility as a resource for pastoral care (Heaney 2007).

In short, Phase 3 of the contemporary debate was a boon to the conservative evangelical impassibilist cause. The number of conservative evangelical scholars who joined ranks with the traditionalists during this phase mushroomed, and the variety of approaches they used to defend impassibilist logic was impressive. If this trend continues, it is not inconceivable that some form of impassibility will again become a standard feature of theological discourse, at least within the conservative wing of the evangelical guild.

4.3 A summary of key existential passibilist arguments

Section 2.6.1 delineated five species of existential arguments that populate the literature. These arguments are frequently marshaled by passibilists to support their thesis that passibilist accounts offer more satisfying explanations for the existential questions raised in discussions of God's (im)passibility and provide, therefore, better resources to meet pastoral needs.

A total of nineteen arguments were cited: seven devotional, five psychological, four ethical, two apologetic and one missional. The arguments are not of equal rhetorical weight; some are more convincing than others. Nor are they equal in terms of frequency of citation. Whilst certain ones enjoy the endorsement of multiple scholars (e.g., the psychological claim that a commiserating God is more consoling), others are employed by a single theologian (e.g., Sarot's missional argument that passibilism incentivises evangelism). The following sections summarise the key rhetorical points in each of the five categories, capitalising on the most frequently cited arguments in the literature. In Chapter 5, these arguments will be critically evaluated by means of Biblical and theological criteria. Here, however, the arguments are merely presented as part of the historical analysis.

4.3.1 Devotional arguments

For purposes of this study, "devotional" refers to how one relates personally to God (cf. Section 2.6.1). Theologians of a passibilist bent are convinced their accounts make it easier for the Christian to relate meaningfully to God, insofar as a divine being capable of suffering is more intelligible, accessible and attractive to suffering creatures than one incapable of experiencing pain. Shared suffering becomes a point of identity between Creator and creatures, facilitating a divine-

human intercourse that is genuinely dialogical and mutually satisfying. Further, on this view, a co-suffering God is easier to love and worship.

Passibilists commonly argue that a God incapable of suffering is incapable of love (e.g., Moltmann 1974b:17; House 1980:412; Carson 2000:59, 60). The reasoning is that in human experience genuine love entails the capacity to share another's pain. This sympathetic identification with the sufferer is a voluntary empathic bond the lover forms with the beloved—a willingness to take upon himself or herself the burden of co-suffering. Thus, a human incapable of forming such empathic attachments is affectively impaired. To extend the logic, a human unwilling to do so is dissocial or sociopathic. In short, love necessarily entails empathic suffering; therefore, a God who loves must be capable of suffering. This is especially so for the God presented in the New Testament, in whose case love is closely identified with His very nature (cf. 1 Jn 4:8, 16). So, passibilists argue, attributing suffering to the divine being makes it easier to conceive of Him as loving, which, in turn, facilitates loving and enjoying relationship with Him (e.g., Moltmann 1974b:17; House 1980:412, 414, 415; Bauckham 1984:10, 12; McWilliams 1985:186; Wolterstorff 1987:90; Taliaferro 1989:222; Clark 1992:§3.3, §5.1; Sarot 1996:234, 235, 236; Sia 1996:§7; Ngien 1997:§2; Ware 1998:63; Carson 2000:59, 60; 2003:186, 190; Breck 2006).

Passibilists use similar reasoning to make three related points. The first is that a passible God is easier to conceive of as personal since, in human experience, normal persons possess the ability to enter into another's pain (House 1980:412, 414; Bauckham 1984:10; Eibach 1990:66-67; Clark 1992:§3.3, §5.1; Sia 1996:§7; Ware 1998:63; cf. Williams 1964:190-192). Second, divine passibility assists in understanding God to be good, since all good persons are profoundly disturbed by evil. If God were not so, one might reasonably question His goodness (Taliaferro 1989:220; Clark 1992:§4.8, §5.1). Third, a passible God is easier to explain (and, thus, relate to) in terms of the *imago Dei*. If humans are

made in God's image and humans experience suffering as a matter of course, then it is reasonable to suppose that God similarly possesses the ability to experience suffering (Clark 1992:§4.6; cf. Wolterstorff 1987:83). Each of these arguments relies on "from below" strategies by extrapolating from human experiences to make predications of God. As will be seen in Chapter 5, each also assumes a degree of univocity in God-talk that is epistemologically suspect (Tanner 2005:165).

A final devotional advantage to passibilist construals, argue their proponents, is doxological: a God who voluntarily shares in human suffering is more attractive and worthy of worship than one who does not (Macquarrie 1975:114; Fiddes 1988:146, 267; 2000:172-173; cf. Kitamori 1965:44-45). The idea here is that, because humans tend to form deeper attachments with other humans who voluntarily suffer alongside them, it is therefore natural to adore and feel affection for a God for whom this is true. The question here, of course, is this: At what cost does this more adorable God come? Genuine worship is the product, not only of grateful affection, but also of reverent fear. It embraces both divine identity with the human condition and divine transcendence of that condition. Whilst attributing suffering to God may render Him more loveable, it also runs the risk of rendering Him less awe-inspiring and fear inducing.

Devotional arguments are the most common species of existential claims found in the literature. This is hardly surprising, given the irreducibly relational quality of the Christian faith. Teachings that affirm this relational dimension are, therefore, to be preferred to those that seem to undermine the God-human relational bond, which impassibilist interpretations are believed to do. The next section surveys a second category of passibilist argument: psychological.

4.3.2 Psychological arguments

What humans believe about God unavoidably shapes how they think and feel about themselves and others. One's psychology is thus inextricably bound to one's theology. This point is assumed by passibilists, who make the case that their view of God confers distinct advantages over impassibilist interpretations. These psychological benefits range from feelings of consolation, to enhanced hope and optimism, to increased resistance to an unhealthy denial of life's difficulties.

Without question, the most pervasive passibilist argument in this category is that a co-suffering provides superior consolation for the sufferer, because the knowledge that God suffers alongside us makes us feel understood and not so isolated (Moltmann 1974b:16-17; Hick 1979:80-82; Young 1979:102-103; Surin 1983:241, 246; Fretheim 1984:124, 126; Wolterstorff 1987:88; Fiddes 1988:31, 32; Taliaferro 1989:222; Sarot 1996:231, 232-233; Sia 1996:§7; Louw 2003:394, 395; Bush 2008:782, 783; O'Brien 2008:§6; cf. Whitehead 1929:532; Taylor 1998:118-124). Clark makes the related point that a passible account makes it easier for humans to experience God's empathy without Anselmic impassibilist-inspired rationalizations (Clark 1992:§4.8, §5.1). His point is that accepting the fact that God has compassion (in the sense of a "suffering-with") obviates the need for Anselm's conceptual gymnastics and promotes psychological health.

Some passibilists argue that their view promotes a healthy psychology in a second way: it encourages humans to adjust to the terrible reality that suffering is normative in a fallen world. The reasoning goes as follows: if we accept the fact that God suffers, we will not attempt to deny, minimise or avoid suffering but accept it as a part of life. This grounds humans in the "real world", discourages triumphalism and neuroses and encourages them to embrace their suffering,

thereby inculcating psychological soundness (Ngien 1997:§4; Taylor 1998:118; cf. Bonhoeffer 1997:360-362).

Fiddes and Lee find another psychological benefit to a passibilist construal: it mitigates human suffering by locating it within the larger narrative of the divine struggle against sin, suffering and death. Believing one's small story to be part of God's larger redemptive story, they argue, validates one's experiences as significant, infusing them with meaning and fostering hope (Lee 1974:84-85; Fiddes 1988:147, 150; 2000:158; cf. Kitamori 1965:52-53). This hope ultimately is eschatological—that is, it looks ahead to a time when sin and suffering will be no more. So, whilst humans now derive consolation from the knowledge that God shares their pain, they also are sanguine in the assurance that a day is coming when neither God, nor they, will be subject to suffering (Lee 1974:86-87; Fiddes 1988:31, 32; cf. Williams 1969:193-194).

4.3.3 Ethical arguments

Contemporary passibilists have historically advanced a third species of argument in support of the existential benefits of passibilist interpretations. Belief in a co-suffering God positively informs how we think and behave ethically. Passibilists have advanced at least four ethical arguments along these lines.

The principal idea here is that belief in a co-suffering God prevents humans from becoming inured and apathetic to the suffering in the world. The reasoning is thus: if it is true that God suffers when humans suffer, then a Christian's love for God will motivate him or her to ameliorate God's suffering by mitigating its causes (i.e., instances of human suffering). Thus, knowing that God Himself is a co-victim of human suffering discourages Christians from becoming desensitsed to the suffering of others (Moltmann 1974b:8, 9; Solle 1975:43, 74, 127;

Bauckham 1984:12; McWilliams 1985:189; Migliori 1985:120, 121, 122-123, 126, 131; Ngien 1997:§2; Ellis 2005:172; Louw 2003:395; Long 2006:147). Instead, it encourages believers to protest the causes of suffering in the world and seek to eliminate oppression and suffering in order to provide relief for God (Sölle 1975:134; Migliori 1985:120, 121, 124, 126, 131; Wolterstorff 1987:91; Fiddes 1988:88, 90; 2000:161; Sia 1996:§5, §8; Louw 2003:395; Ellis 2005:172; Cone 2008:701, 709, 711).

Belief in a passible God is alleged to encourage ethical behavior in another way. By choosing to voluntarily enter into creaturely pain, God sets an example for humans. Following His example, Christians will similarly choose to share the pain of others. Thus, a passibilist account encourages compassion, leading believers to sympathise with, and work to relieve, the pain of others (Fretheim 1984:124, 126; McWilliams 1985:189; Ngien 1997:§4; Long 2006:147).

Finally, passibilists argue, belief in a suffering God can also deter Christians from sin. Ngien reasons that, by understanding sin to occasion pain in God, believers have greater incentive to discontinue those attitudes, words and behaviours that prove offensive to Him (Ngien 1997:§2). Pool takes a similar line, suggesting that this ethical governance improves a Christian's character, making her or him a better person (Pool 2009:15, 196-197).

4.3.4   Apologetic arguments

A fourth species of argument is apologetic in nature. Whilst not so common as those cited above, apologetic claims are nonetheless important, given the missionary character of the Christian faith. This is especially the case with evangelicalism, which, as was discussed in Chapter 3, has a strong conversionist

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impulse and, consequently, places a premium on making the claims of the Christian religion intelligible and attractive to non-adherents.

Passibilists insist that their account is more apologetically compelling than impassibilist versions because a God who voluntarily shares human pain is self-evidently more existentially engaging than one incapable of doing so (Ngien 1997:§4; Fiddes 2000:178; Pool 2009:9). A co-suffering God can never be accused of being apathetic or aloof, but exudes the love, understanding and relational warmth for which all persons long. As a consequence, a God who freely and lovingly shares human suffering forms the basis of a more convincing theodicy than impassibilist construals. Passibilists disparage those theologies which depict God as metaphysically immune to suffering and reserve special disapprobation for any account that sees God as meticulously controlling, believing them to necessarily implicate the divine being in evil. Thus, only a co-suffering God, they argue, provides an existentially satisfying answer to the problems of evil and human suffering (Moltmann 1974b:10; Sölle 1975:134, 149; Surin 1983:246, 247; Bauckham 1984:11-12; Fiddes 2000:164, 168; cf. Jonas 1987:3, 4, 6).

4.3.5 Missional arguments

As previously noted (Section 2.6.1.5), for purposes of this project, missional considerations are those having to do with the mission of the Church, including its evangelistic mandate. This species of argument is rarely employed in the colloquy.

Sarot claims that a passibilist understanding of God incentivises evangelism. His rationale is that the belief that God grieves over the state of a fallen, estranged humanity will cause Christians to more enthusiastically seek to lead others to

Christ to relieve God of His grief. Sarot does not suggest that this is the sole reason for evangelism. But he does contend that the desire to assuage God's yearning for human love is a legitimate and compelling incentive to win others to Christ (Sarot 1996:236).

4.4   Impact of passibilist teaching on conservative evangelicals

The impact of these five species of passibilist existential claims (as well as their foundational assumptions) on conservative evangelicals is varied and complex. Historically, there has been an array of responses ranging from wholesale endorsement (hard passibilism) to outright rejection (hard impassibilism), with degrees of receptivity in-between (soft passibilism and impassibilism). The sections that follow examine these responses on both scholarly and non-scholarly levels. They demonstrate how passibilist construals have influenced the way large numbers of conservative evangelicals frame the debate and, more generally, conceive of God's relationship to human suffering.

4.4.1   Impact on evangelical theologians

Before considering examples of popular-level responses to passibilist teachings, it is important to note how conservative evangelical scholars have historically lined up on the issue. Section 2.7.1 proposed a four-part gradient for evaluating the range of scholarly opinion, with "hard impassibilism" anchoring one end of a continuum; "hard passibilism", the other; and "soft" versions of impassibilism and passibilism in between these two extremes. These four positions are examined below, beginning with the impassibilist pole. The final two positions, "soft" and "hard" passibilism, will receive special attention in later chapters, as these constitute the specific focus of pastoral concern and impetus for this project.

4.4.1.1   Hard impassibilists

Historically, a number of conservative evangelical scholars have retained the ancient doctrine essentially as it has been articulated in the majority patristic, medieval and Reformed traditions. Their motivation is to safeguard the divine transcendence in theological discourse by carefully qualifying attributions of suffering to God Christologically. Representative conservative evangelical scholars in this category include Gerald Bray (1978; 1993; 1999; 2013), Richard Muller (1983), Paul Helm (1990; 2005; 2007; 2008), Peter Anders (1997), Robert Culver (1998), Norman Giesler (2001; 2011), Mostyn Roberts (2004), Gannon Murphy (2006), Thomas Oden (2006), Kevin DeYoung (2006, 2010), Mark Baddeley (2010), Mark Smith (2012) and Nathan Sasser (2013).

None of these theologians fits the stereotype parodied in passibilist literature (e.g., Moltmann 1974a; Baukham 1984; Fretheim 1984; Ngien 1997, et al.) caricaturing impassibilists as espousing a metaphysically inert and relationally impassive God incapable of affect or genuine personal interactions with His creation. Quite the contrary. Each describes a God who is radiantly alive and dynamically engaged both intrinsically, within His triune being, and extrinsically, through His attentive, exuberant engagements with His people, whom He loves and for whom He suffered as a man in Christ (e.g., Muller 1983:40; Oden 2006).

The majority of these scholars stand clearly within the Great Tradition, demonstrating conceptual affinities with the ideas expressed by the orthodox Church fathers, medieval scholastics and Reformers. Many also draw upon the conceptual resources of Catholic (especially Thomist) and Orthodox theologians, who similarly espouse classical theistic ideas. A case in point concerns the employment by some of these scholars of the Thomist doctrine of *actus purus.* Teaching that the infinitely perfect God has no unrealised potential subsisting in Him but is, instead, fully actualised in His triune being (e.g., Helm 1990:124-125;

Long 2009:51-52; cf. Weinandy 2000:120-127; Hart 2003:167; Emery 2009:71-72), the doctrine provides a rich resource for defending divine impassibility. It holds that God is always active, never passive. God is, therefore, never determined by His interactions with beings outside Himself, but is replete in the fullness of His Being and His purely giving love. So, because God is supremely "passionate" or "impassioned" within Himself, He does not experience temporal "passions" (including loss, sadness, regret or other forms of suffering), since He cannot be more passionate than He already is (Helm 2007:102; Long 2009:51-52; Bray 2012:152-153; cf. Weinandy 1985:78-79; 2000:79, 124, 127, 161; Hart 2003:167; 2009:301; Davies 2006:68-74; Emery 2009:59-61).

On a hard impassibilist view, God cannot suffer *qua* God, for His transcendence of the space-time universe renders attributions of suffering to Him a *non sequitur* by virtue of the fact that God exists outside the chain of creaturely causality. God's Being is in no way determined by creaturely existence and activity; rather, He is the ontological ground of them. Thus, Hart conceptualises impassibility as the "infinite innocence" of God. God is immune to suffering precisely because His transcendence absolves Him of finite causality, for He does not share a frame of causal operations with created things but occupies a different order of existence altogether, in which the utter fullness of the Trinitarian love gives and receives all in a "single movement" (Hart 2009:301). Divine *apatheia* is a function of divine transcendence. So, to speak of God as unable to suffer—a statement true enough, so far as it goes—as if, like created things, suffering and non-suffering were the only options available to Him, is inadequate. Instead, God transcends the very distinction between responsiveness and unresponsiveness, suffering and non-suffering, for He does not occupy the realm in which those terms obtain (Hart 2009:299-302). For these reasons, "hard" impassibility might best be construed as ontological impassibility: an immunity to suffering due to God's unique order of being.

God's transcendent immunity to suffering, however, does not mean that God is incapable of sympathising with hurting humans. Quite the contrary: hard impassibilists agree that God's omniscience and love assure Christians of His ability to understand their suffering and console them genuinely. In fact, it is His transcendence that makes it possible for God to be supereminently near to His creation, so that, in Augustine's (1952:16) words, He is *superior summo meo et interior intimo meo* ("higher to me than my highest part and more intimate to me than my most inward part"). Wholly other yet supremely near, God knows, understands and loves His people to their uttermost depths and is compassionately concerned about the details of their lives (cf. Bloesch 1995:99).

Furthermore, consistent with a Chalcedonian two-natures Christology, hard impassibilist scholars hold that, in the person of the Son, who became historically incarnate as Jesus, God truly experienced suffering in the medium of Christ's humanity, suffering, not *as* God but *as* a man (Bray 1978; DeYoung 2006; cf. Ward 2009:59-69). For this reason, God can fully identify with human experiences of loneliness, abandonment, derision, physical suffering and death, for Jesus experienced all of these in His humanity. Cyril's *communicatio idiomatum*, foundational to the logic of Chalcedon, means that these experiences of suffering may be predicated of the single subject, Christ, the Word and second Person of the Trinity, which means that these sufferings were in some way experienced by God. In this (limited) respect, it may be affirmed that God experienced suffering in the passion of Christ, or, in Cyril's famous paradoxical formula: "the Impassible…suffered" (Bettenson 1999:52; cf. Lamont 2006). Thus, whilst eschewing casual attributions of suffering to God, these scholars are not afraid to predicate genuine suffering of God in a Christologically qualified way by appealing to Chalcedonian reasoning.

As noted in Section 4.2, few conservative evangelicals took a hard impassibilist position early in the colloquy. Muller was one of the first, responding in 1983 to

Pinnock's provocative proposal to revamp the classical view of God expressed in the Great Tradition (Muller 1983:22; cf. Pinnock 1979). In his essay, Muller defends the logic of classic theism's account of incarnation and immutability against Barthian and other post-Kantian—specifically Hegelian—ontologies (Muller 1983:30-34). Five years prior, Bray had written an article defending Chalcedonian Christology (Bray 1978). Blocher (1990), Wells (1990) and Cook (1990), would later make similar defences of the Tradition, and Anders (1997), Culver (1998) and Giesler (2001) would follow. But during the early years of the contemporary debate, the majority of conservative evangelicals appeared to forget or abandon Chalcedonian reasoning and opt for positions that made direct predications of suffering to God *as* God via soft impassibilist (e.g., Packer, Ware), soft passibilist (e.g., Lewis, Demarest, Erickson, Grudem) or hard passibilist (e.g., Pinnock, Stott, Ngien) accounts. The last decade, however, has witnessed a resurgence in the use of Chalcedonian reasoning to articulate impassibilist positions consistent with the Great Tradition (e.g., Cook 2005; Murphy 2006; DeYoung 2006; 2010; Baddeley 2010; Kim 2011; Smith 2012; Olsson 2012; Sasser 2013, et al.).

4.4.1.2   Soft impassibilists

Moving along the continuum, the next position might instructively be referred to as "soft" impassibilism—impassibilism because it wants to uphold God's inability to suffer and "soft" because it seeks to do so, not by affirming God's ontological immunity to suffering as in hard impassibilism, but by limiting God's experience of suffering in some way. On this view, God, through His interactions with His creation, exposes Himself to suffering. He is not ontologically removed from suffering as in hard impassibilism but is susceptible to it because of His free decision to live in genuine relationship with His creation. However, God is

prevented from actually suffering—according to soft impassibilists—for one or more reasons.

One argument is that He cannot suffer because of His sheer immensity. This might be called the argument from plentitude—that is, God's utter vastness and fullness preclude His being inordinately affected by suffering. On this view, God can "feel the force" of suffering and "be affected" by it, yet not be overcome by it (Vanhoozer 2002:93; Horton 2011a:242-253: cf. Horton 2005:43, 45, 48; Horton 2011b:80). Like an invincible army that can be attacked but never conquered, so God is regarded as impregnable to suffering due to his vastly superior strength. God's inability to suffer is, on a soft impassibilist view, due to quantitative rather than qualitative considerations, an appeal to what Hart critically labels the "sheer mathematics of omnipotence" (Hart 2009:301). So, as opposed to being "ontologically immune" to suffering, soft impassibilism describes a God who is "quantitatively impregnable" to suffering.

A second argument is that God does not suffer due to volitional considerations. The idea here is that God should not be thought to actually suffer since He cannot be affected by external forces except by choosing to be so affected. This allows Lister, for example, to affirm that, whilst God can be "grieved" by humans when they violate His revealed will, this should not be construed as suffering, since such grief is an expression of God's freely chosen love within the economy of salvation, not part of the "eternal metaphysical fabric of the Trinity" (Lister 2013:256-57). Soft impassibilists who hold this view argue that impassibility means not that God cannot be affected by His creation, but that He cannot be affected *involuntarily* by His creation (Packer 1986:§3, §5; 1998:277; Bird 2013a:131; Lister 2013:231, 256; cf. Bloesch 1995:95; Carson 2000:60). Advocates of this position believe divine volitional control adequately safeguards divine transcendence from inappropriate pathic attributions.

This argument has been criticised for its departure from the classic theistic understanding of impassibility (Hart 2009:299-302). As noted in Chapter 2, it relies on similar reasoning to Barth's sovereignly free God, who chooses in freedom to participate in the suffering of His creation out of love (Barth 2010:370-371). It is thought by some to be simply another variant of passibilism, not essentially different from other forms, including open varieties (Olson 2011; cf. Bird 2012), for suffering is suffering, whether freely chosen or not. Lister's model, to be convincing, requires that he explain how God's temporal expressions of covenantal grief absolve the "eternal metaphysical fabric of the Trinity" (an ambiguous phrase at best) from being implicated in suffering.

A third argument, related to the second, holds that God does not suffer because all of His affective dispositions are foreordained. Because He is never surprised by suffering nor made its victim but only experiences pathic states He Himself has decreed, He is not affected by things other than Himself, except in ways and to the degree that He determines (Lister 2013:229, 256-257; Gonzales 2012d). This argument assumes, rather obviously, that God possesses exhaustive divine foreknowledge (EDF), an assumption not readily granted by the Arminian side of the perennial Calvinist-Arminian intramural debate. It suffers from the same criticism as the second argument above—namely, granting that God freely chooses and foreordains his experiences of suffering, they are still forms of suffering, thus rendering the divine nature passible (by a straightforward definition of passibility). Proponents of arguments two and three counter that impassibility only precludes involuntary negative affect, not negative affect itself (Lister 2013:254; Bird 2013a:130-131).

It has become somewhat common for soft passibilists to distinguish between "relational" passibility and "essential" passibility", predicating the former of God whilst denying Him the latter (e.g., Ware 1986:444-446; Cole 2011:11-12; Lister 2013:253; Gonzales 2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2012d). On this view, whilst God

remains unchanging and unconditioned by outside sources with respect to His nature, will and decrees, He chooses to "be open" to feelings of pleasure or grief caused by the actions of other beings (Cole 2011:11). It is thought that, by restricting mutability to God's affective or relational life, His ontological immutability is preserved, a claim classical theists find unconvincing.

Some soft passibilists are explicit in maintaining that God has chosen to participate temporally with His creation, believing Him to be, post-creation, temporal (so Craig 1998; 2001) or "omnitemporal" (so Ware 2004:133-139; Frame 2002:543-559; Lister 2013:226-231). This allows God to experience changing affective states occasioned by His interactions with humans. However, hard impassibilists point out that such temporal involvement also implies that God's Being is determined, to a limited degree, by these interactions—that is, they become necessary to His becoming (Hart 2002:190; 2009:300-302). To safeguard divine transcendence, then, soft impassibilist scholars must resort to arguments of volition, proportion or foreordination, or some combination of these.

Conservative evangelical scholars who appear to best fit the soft impassibilist label include Bruce Ware (1986; 2004), JI Packer (1987; 1988), John Frame (2002), Michael Horton (2005; 2011), Daniel Castelo (2005; 2007; 2008a; 2009, 2010a; 2010b; 2012), Kevin Vanhoozer (2010), Graham Cole (2011), Michael Bird (2013), Rob Lister (2013) and Bob Gonzales (2012a; 2012b; 2012c; 2012d; 2014). Each of these scholars demonstrates a concern that theological discourse should preserve a proper sense of God's ontological uniqueness. All express dissatisfaction with unqualified passibilist interpretive schemes. But instead of defending divine impassibility by appealing to God's unique ontological status by which He transcends suffering (as historically maintained in the orthodox tradition and defined in the Chalcedonian formula), they use arguments based on volition, proportion and/or foreordination to affirm a type of impassibility. The majority

strongly affirm Chalcedonian Christology yet, rather inconsistently, do not rely on its logic when defending (im)passibility.

4.4.1.3 Soft passibilists

Moving still further along the continuum and crossing a subtle line dividing soft impassibilist from passibilist leanings, is the position that may usefully be denominated "soft" passibilism. The line demarking this position from the previous one has to do with the relative willingness to predicate suffering of God *simpliciter* and abandon impassibility as a viable theological category. Soft passibilism comprises two different groups.

The first consists of those who are critical of the impassibilist tradition and affirm that God may suffer as God by virtue of His interactions with humanity, but who nonetheless do not align themselves with the passibilist tradition either, of which, they, too, may be critical. The theologians in this group have, therefore, modified the concept of impassibility in more or less significant ways, to allow for some degree of divine suffering within the divine nature itself, whilst avoiding more extreme theopaschite predications like those of Lee, Moltmann and Kitamori. Erickson, for example, repudiates the equating of the Father and Son in Praxeas' model of patripassibilism, yet believes patripassianism is partly correct insofar as it affirms that the Father and Spirit both shared in Christ's passion (Erickson 1995:236-237). In addition to Erickson (1985, 1988, 1995, 2013), other conservative evangelical scholars who appear to best fit in this group include DA Carson (2000, 2003), John Feinberg (2001) and Haydn Nelson (2005).

The second group is composed of those dismissive of impassibilist speech, who may avoid extended discussions of the doctrine and who, in some instances, appear uncertain of its actual claims. Wayne Grudem (1994:165-166) exemplifies

this position. His widely read *Systematic theology* is over 1100 pages in length, yet his treatment of impassibility amounts to less than a page and is dismissive in tone, based on a false dichotomy between a God capable of emotions and a totally apathetic being. There is no mention of the historical discussions contrasting "affections" and "passions" or voluntary and involuntary affect. Indeed, there is no apparent effort whatsoever to acknowledge and responsibly engage the nuances of the debate. Instead, he debunks a single proof-text (Ac 14:15) contained in the Westminster Confession whilst dismissing a doctrine almost universally endorsed within orthodox Christian tradition from its earliest days. Lewis and Demarest similarly base their rejection of impassibility on a false antithesis. Whilst giving a bit more attention to some of the historical dimensions of the debate, they nonetheless reject impassibility out of hand without a real attempt to understand and describe what it actually affirms (Lewis and Demarest 1987:235-237). Their collaborative work, *Integrative theology,* places them in the soft passibilist camp, although two later articles by Lewis suggest he might best be categorised as a hard passibilist (Lewis 2001a, 2001b).

These two groups share a desire to attribute, in a qualified way, suffering to God *qua* God (rather than in a Chalcedonian suffering-as-man manner). Scholars in these groups argue that the doctrine of impassibility is a holdover from Greek philosophical reflection and that it was illicitly incorporated into the Christian theistic tradition during the patristic era (e.g., Erickson 2013:304). They thus concur, in part, with Harnack's proposal that the Gospel was Hellenised, although not to the extent hard passibilists avow. The arguments of soft passibilists typically either ignore Chalcedonian logic entirely or dismiss it as a viable conceptual alternative to passibilist predications (Carson 2003:186; 2007:165). They thus affirm a mild passibilism as the best way to account for the varied Biblical depictions of Yahweh's pathos and Christ's sufferings.

At the same time, they wish to resist a wholesale or extreme passibilism that would undermine God's transcendence (e.g., Erickson 2013:401). Carson, for example, proposes a "constrained impassibility" model—better understood as a constrained passibility model—as a means of avoiding portraying God as merely a "souped-up" human in need of His creation as much as His creation needs Him (Carson 2000:59-60). Further, he limits God's suffering to the divine will and God's love of humans to the divine nature, as opposed to something inherently and irresistibly attractive in humanity (Carson 2000:60, 61-64; cf. 2003:179-195). Finally, Carson emphasises—as do others in the soft passibilist camp—that, although God can voluntarily experience suffering, He cannot be overwhelmed or controlled by it (Carson 2007:167).

4.4.1.4 Hard passibilists

At the far end of the continuum are the "hard" passibilists. These conservative evangelical scholars have rejected the doctrine of impassibility outright, finding it to be an unhelpful qualifier on the divine relatedness. All affirm the Hellenisation hypothesis, holding that impassibility reflects Greek metaphysical categories unwisely imported into the Christian tradition by the Church fathers (e.g., Pinnock 1979:39; Stott 1986:330; Sanders 1994:59-85; 2014; Hudson 1996:§3; Ngien 1997:§1; McGrath 2002b:18). Some (e.g., open theists) go further still, insisting that divine *apatheia* is just one of many classical attributes that owe more to Greek than Biblical origins—others being divine perfection, aseity, omnipotence, atemporality, omniscience, etc.. According to these scholars, this Greek philosophical overlay on the Biblical material has had the unfortunate effect of obscuring the truth about the active, passionate Lord of salvation history, who experiences pronounced pathic states including that of suffering. On this view, both the Old and New Testaments depict a God shown to suffer with, for and on

behalf of His people. This position might be characterised as "ontological passibility", for it is rooted in God's very Being.

Critical of the classical-theistic tradition, most hard passibilists argue that Chalcedonian Christology obscures the degree to which God entered into human suffering. In their view, by confining Christ's suffering to His humanity, the fathers were guilty of a tacit Nestorianianism in an ill-conceived effort to preserve the divine transcendence (Stott 1986:333-337; Ngien 2004:54-65; 2008:§3; cf. Varillon 1983:169). In their view, the Biblical account testifies that God suffered *as* God on the cross. The cross thus is the quintessential identification of God with suffering humanity (Stott 1986:329, 330, 334-336; Hudson 1996:§4; Ngien 2004:64; 2008:§3).

Hard passibilist scholars are largely sympathetic to the passibilist proposals of Kitamori, Bonhoeffer, Moltmann and Lee (e.g., Stott 1986:332-334). They frequently cite Fretheim and Heschel to support a pathic reading of the Old Testament witness, especially the prophetic literature. Some appeal to the (alleged) minority passibilist voices among the Church fathers: Origen (c.184-c.253), Gregory Thaumaturgus (c.213-270), Lactanttius (c.240-c.320), Philoxenus of Mabbug (440-523) and Maximus the Confessor (c.580-662) (e.g., Sanders 1994:74-77; cf. Hallman 2007:43-48, 66-69, 161-176) as well as the idiosyncratic—and not altogether coherent—teachings of Martin Luther (e.g., Ngien 1995). Allusions to the latter's "theology of the cross" is commonplace within passibilist accounts (cf. McGrath 1990:148-181; Forde 1997:1-102; Thomsen 2007:456-466).

The work of Dennis Ngien (1995, 1997, 2004) along these lines has already been noted (Chapter 2). Other conservative evangelical scholars who fit the hard passibilist category include John Stott (1986), Kelley J Clark (1992), Don Hudson (1996), William Lane Craig (2001, 2011), and William Grover (House and Grover

2009). Alister McGrath, who has no qualms about identifying the doctrine of *apatheia* as a prime example of the fathers subordinating Biblical depictions to Greek philosophical constructs (2002b:17-18), also fits in this category. Finally, self-identifying evangelicals who espouse open theism are hard passibilists. Within the evangelical world, the works of Richard Rice (1980), William Hasker (1989), Clark Pinnock (1994), David Basinger (1996), John Sanders (1998) and Greg Boyd (2003:27) are especially representative of open theistic proposals.

4.4.1.5 Summary of impact on theologians

The overall impact of passibilist teaching on conservative evangelical scholars is considerable. When a teaching appears on the scene at variance with the received tradition, it has two predictable effects: it attracts followers and galvanises opponents. This is precisely what occurred in the case of contemporary passibilism, and it unfolded over time in two stages. These are examined below. Following this historical summary, Section 4.4.1.5.2 discusses three passibilist presuppositions that have been widely adopted by conservative evangelical passibilists.

4.4.1.5.1 Historical summary: two stages

The contemporary colloquy surrounding the question of divine suffering has gone through three phases, delineated in Section 4.2. Conservative evangelical scholarship, however, demonstrates a two-stage response: general acceptance of passibilist assumptions (Stage One) and general rejection (Stage Two).

4.4.1.5.1.1 Stage one: 1974-2000

In the early years (Phases 1 and 2 discussed above: 1974-2000), passibilism appeared to win over conservative evangelical scholars in large numbers. Most conservative evangelicals who wrote on the subject adopted distinctly passibilist understandings, either in soft (e.g., Erickson, Grudem, Lewis, Demarest, Carson) or hard (e.g., Pinnock, Rice, Stott, Hasker, Clark, Ngien, Hudson, Basinger, Boyd, Sanders) forms. Others adopted a soft impassibilist position by modifying the impassibility axiom to—in their view—better account for God's relatedness to a suffering world (e.g., Ware, Packer). Rather than rely on Chacedonian reasoning to account for God's relationship to suffering, they constructed arguments based on proportion, volition and divine decree to safeguard the divine transcendence whilst, at the same time, affirm His direct participation in suffering *qua* God. During this early stage, comparatively few scholars publicly defended the historic orthodox view of impassibility with its Chalcedonian logic. Attfield (1977), Bray (1978) and Muller (1983) were the lone voices until the 1990s, when Helm (1990), Blocher (1990), Wells (1990), Cook (1990), Anders (1997) and Culver (1998) joined the discussion.

4.4.1.5.1.2 Stage two: 2001-2014

In 2001, however, there was a shift. The contemporary (im)passibility dialogue entered a new stage (Phase 3 discussed above: 2001-present). A major reason for this shift was the intra-evangelical skirmish taking place within American theological circles over open theism. Open theistic accounts had been proposed for two decades (e.g., Pinnock 1979; Rice 1980), but had not generated a sizeable reaction until the mid-1990s, when the *Openness of God* was published (Pinnock et al. 1994). As discussed in Section 3.2.2.2, the ensuing firestorm

climaxed in 2000/2001 with battles within ecclesiastical bodies, the academy and the ETS.

The threat of open theism galvanised the opposition. As a result, more conservative evangelical scholars began to promote classical-theistic accounts of God-world interactions including—in a majority of cases—the historically orthodox position on impassibility. Conservative evangelical scholars who have produced works defending classical theism since 2001 include: Norm Geisler (2001), Douglas Wilson (2001), Douglas Jones (2001), Ben Merkle (2001), Peter Leithart (2001), Thomas Ascol (2001), R Douglas Geivett (2002), Charles Gutenson (2002), Thomas Oden (2006), Kevin DeYoung (2006), D Stephen Long (2009), George Kalantzis (2009), Vincent Bacote (2009), Paul Inwhan Kim (2011), Philip Olsson (2012) and Nathan Sasser (2013).

Signs of a renewed emphasis on classical theistic accounts are not confined to the American academy, however. In the last five years, strong historic defences of impassibility have also appeared overseas, both in the United Kingdom— Mostyn Roberts (2004), Robin Cook (2005), Gannon Murphy (2006) and Mark Smith (2012)—and in Australia—Mark Baddeley (2010). Each of these can best be described as hard impassibilist in tone.

The backlash to open theism among conservative evangelical scholars has also resulted in a spate of soft impassibilist accounts. Different perspectives on how God can be genuinely touched by suffering *as* God have been advanced in recent years by a wide range of scholars, including John Frame (2002), Michael Horton (2005), Daniel Castelo (2005), Kevin Vanhoozer (2010), Graham Cole (2011), Michael Bird (2013), Rob Lister (2013) and Bob Gonzales (2012). In each of these cases, a strong view of divine transcendence has been wed to a dynamic relational account of God's interactions with the world.

During the same period under discussion (2001-2014), the output of hard and soft conservative evangelical passibilist accounts was comparatively minor. John Feinberg (2001), John Frame (2002), DA Carson (2003) and Haydn Nelson (2005) advanced soft passibilist models whilst William Lane Craig (2001), Alister McGrath (2002), Dennis Ngien (2004) and William Grover (2009) argued for stronger passibilist accounts. This shows a pronounced movement away from passibilist to impassibilist sympathies within conservative evangelical scholarship. In dramatic contrast to the hegemony of passibilist construals during Stage One of the contemporary (im)passibility debate (1974-2000), Stage Two (2001-2014) demonstrates a marked increase in impassibilist approaches with a corresponding decrease in passibilist models. The "new orthodoxy" of passibilism, pronounced by Goetz in 1986—whilst still regnant in the broader theological guild—appears to be giving way to a new "new orthodoxy" within the conservative evangelical academy (cf. Cooper 2009:6).

4.4.1.5.2 Content summary: three passibilist assumptions

What are, precisely, the passibilist teachings that have affected conservative evangelical scholarship? Having looked at how passibilism has impacted conservative evangelical scholars historically, it is expedient to now examine the phenomenon doctrinally to better understand the contemporary (im)passibility framework. A review of the literature reveals three passibilist assumptions that have been widely adopted by hard and soft passibilist—as well as some soft impassibilist—conservative evangelical theologians. These assumptions are conspicuous features of conservative evangelical passibilist accounts. Each is summarised below with examples from representative conservative evangelical works.

4.4.1.5.2.1 Hellenistic corruption

The first passibilist premise discernable in conservative evangelical scholarship is the Hellensation hypothesis—the theory that the Church fathers corrupted the dynamic Biblical portrait of the Biblical God with static categories of Greek metaphysical thought, distorting the message of the passionate Yahweh of the Old Testament and Jesus of the New by rendering God immutable, impassible and inaccessible by the superimposition of Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic categories of thought. Following in line with Baur, Neander, Ritschl and Harnack, this was, of course, a central thesis of Moltmann's project at the outset of the contemporary colloquy (Moltmann 1993:21-25; cf. 1974b:10-13). And it is a leitmotif in the passibilist literature since 1974. Having already considered the substance of this argument elsewhere (Section 2.5.1), it remains to provide examples illustrating how and to what extent this belief has influenced conservative evangelical scholars.

Stott avers that the early Church fathers adopted the doctrine of impassibility "uncritically" from Greek philosophy, the result being a God who sounded "more Greek than Hebrew" (Stott 1986:330). Unfortunately, he does not specify which of the many Greek philosophical schools he means nor which Hebrew notion of God he is contrasting. Similarly, Bloesch does not hesitate to suggest that Greek-inspired attributions of impassibility (*impassibilitas*), immutability (*immutabilitas*), completeness (*actus purus*) and possession of "all possible values" (*ens realissimum*) results in a God "at variance with" the Biblical narrative (Bloesch 1995:91). Citing the patristic predilection for conceptualising God by means of "absolute"—versus Biblical—attributes such as simplicity, goodness and justice, Fennell cites Cyril's second letter to Nestorius (in which Cyril affirms Christ's human versus divine suffering) as symptomatic of this tendency (Fennel 2008:125). He suggests that the resulting deity is more a metaphysical abstraction than the covenantally related and—in Christ—incarnated God of

Scripture (Fennel 2008:127). Arguments like these abound in the conservative evangelical passibility literature (e.g., Pinnock 1994:101, 103; Hasker 1994:127-134; Ngien 1995:8, 175; 1997:§1; McGrath 2003:274; Fennell 2008:125, 127; Bush 2008:774, et al.). Some passibilists have given these considerations more extended treatment (Forster 1990:24-51; Sanders 1994:60-85).

Impassibilists make three important observations. First, they point out that passibilist claims of Hellenisation are overly broad. Bray (2002) explains that the multiplex nature of Greek philosophical thought defies facile reductionism—a point deftly argued by other evangelicals (Frame 2001a:32; Carson 2002:310-3100) and, most thoroughly, by the Orthodox scholar Gavrilyuk (see Section 2.5.11; Gavrilyuk 2006; cf. Soskice 2006; Silcock 2011:199). Second, they emphasise the fact that the Biblical account itself contains the metaphysical ground of impassibilism. Helm suggests that Scripture contains not one but two data sets relative to God's nature: the first describing God in human-like terms and the second emphasising the disparity between God and humans. Both must be accounted for (Helm 1990:128-29; cf. Mostert 2011:174-175). To characterise the first as inclusive of the whole of Biblical revelation and then compare it to so-called "Greek" concepts is disingenuous. Third, arguments of Hellenisation are countered with allegations of the Hegelianisation or Teutonisation of passibilist accounts (e.g., Vanhoozer 2010:458, Castelo 2009:82-85; cf. Carson 2002:311; Hart 2002:190). The fact remains: every theology borrows conceptual resources—including technical vocabulary—from the regnant philosophical milieu. This appropriation of contemporareneous metaphysical idioms is not in itself problematic so long as it is undertaken with careful reflection and close attendance upon the Biblical witness (cf. Carson 2002:312). The doctrine of impassibility, argue impassibilists, is consistent with and logically derivative from what the Old and New Testaments teach regarding God's aseity, immutability, perfection and bliss.

4.4.1.5.2.2 Affective impassivity

The second passibilist assumption that occurs frequently in conservative evangelical expostulations of the doctrine is the conflation of "impassibility" (immunity to suffering) and "impassivity" (the property of being unimpressionable or unfeeling). It has been suggested that the etymological similarity between the two words contributes to the problem (Helm 2005:§2). But whatever the reason(s), the two terms have been taken by passibilists to be essentially coterminous. "Immobility" (inert, static, incapable of movement) is another term sometimes treated as though it were synonymous with impassibility (cf. Ngien 1995:8; Feinberg 2001:265). Similarly, the Greek equivalent, *apatheia*, is generally understood by passibilists to convey a meaning identical with the modern English "apathetic" (indifferent, uninterested). Given this conflation of terms, it is easy to understand why passibilists would wish to dismiss impassibility as incompatible with the Biblical witness. Besides, on purely personal grounds, a loving, co-suffering God is far more attractive than a detached, indifferent One. Catholic scholar Michael Dodds puts it well: most people, when given the choice between Whitehead's "fellow sufferer who understands" and an "apathetic alien who could care less" would gladly opt for the former (Dodds 1991:331-332).

Impassibilist scholars consistently deny these associations (e.g., Huffman and Johnson 2002:27; Erickson 2013:250). They have sought to demonstrate how the majority of the Church fathers used "apatheia" and "impassibility" in distinctly different ways from their Platonic, neo-Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic predecessors to accommodate Biblical depictions of divine wrath, joy and other affective displays as well as the unique *pathos*-laden episodes throughout Christ's life (e.g., Castelo 2009:40-68; Lister 2013:41-106). Despite their efforts, the facile equating of the *apatheia* axiom with affective inertia and stoic dispassion remains a perennial issue within the colloquy (e.g., Bird 2013a:131).

Pinnock is among the most vocal opponents. He alleges the God of classical theism to be "unapproachable", remaining at a "safe distance" from human troubles, "worrying" about His honour—an "aloof monarch" and stern judge, indifferent to human needs. Pinnock's open model, on the other hand, depicts a God who is generous and sensitive, "deeply involved" with His creation as a "caring parent", responsive to human needs and vulnerable to pain (Pinnock 1994:102-104, 112-119). This simplistic comparison is grounded in a false disjunction—the passionate God of the Bible versus the impassible God of "Greek" philosophy. Perhaps his argument would have rhetorical merit were he contrasting the Biblical God, in all His nuanced, multiplex wonder, with the unmoved Mover of Aristotle or the dispassionate Divine Reason of Zeno. But to claim his impassible caricature accurately represents the majority patristic/medieval position demonstrates either a gross misunderstanding of the Tradition (implying an inexcusable scholarly sloppiness) or an intentional distortion of the Tradition in order to make his revised account appear more attractive (implying intellectual dishonesty). After all, Pinnock wrote apologetically: his stated aim was to present an alternative model to the way God has been traditionally understood throughout the two thousand year history of the Church (e.g., Pinnock 1994:101, 105-107; cf. 1979; 1998; 2005; 2006). So, one might reasonably chalk up Pinnock's line of argument to rhetorical hyperbole: a straw man strategy intended to use classical theism as a foil against which to demonstrate the alleged superiority of his revised model of God-world interactions.

As tempting as it is to attribute Pinnock's semantic carelessness to his proselytising zeal, the same false dichotomy is, unfortunately, employed by the majority of non-openness evangelical passibilists as well. For example, Lewis contrasts the "apathetic, uninvolved, impersonal" God of impassibilism with the God who "deeply cares when the sparrow falls" (Lewis and Demarest 1987:237;

Lewis 2001:497, 599). Cole disavows a "frozen absolute" in favour of the Scriptural God who chooses co-suffering (Cole 2011:15). Fennell contrasts the "aloof, disconnected, unaffected First Principle" with the personally invested God of the Bible (Fennell 2008:127, 129). And, surprisingly, the redoubtable Packer famously urged a rethinking of the doctrine of impassibility to allow for a voluntary divine suffering, arguing that a "totally impassive" God (note the assumption of equivalence) is at odds with the "God of Calvary" (Packer 1986:§5; cf. Ferguson, Wright and Packer 1988:277). Similar arguments occur with shocking frequency in the conservative evangelical literature (e.g., Stott 1986:334; Hudson 1996:§2, §3; Ngien 1995:8; Feinberg 2001:265; Carson 2003:186; Bird 2013a:130-131; cf. Erickson 2013:251; Clark 1992:§4.3).

Interestingly, scholars who affirm passibility in some form almost invariably neglect or dismiss Chalcedonian Christology as a historically legitimated means of affirming God's ability to identify with human suffering to the fullest possible extent whilst, at the same time, upholding the Scriptural emphasis on God's transcendent otherness (Stott 1986:331, 334; Packer 1986: §5; Ngien 1997:§3; cf. Bauckham 1990:108-113; Fennell 2011:127, 129, 132). Carson reasons, for example, that limiting Christ's suffering to His human nature runs the risk of making Him schizophrenic (Carson 2007:165). Stott opines that only a God who suffers *simpliciter* is justifiable in a world such as ours. Favourably citing the works of Forsyth, Temple, Heschel, Robinson, Bonhoeffer, Kitamori, Moltmann and Sobrino, Stott asks how, in a world filled with pain, one could worship a God who is invulnerable to it? (Stott 1986:330-336). Tellingly, Stott makes no effort to engage the reasoning behind the Chalcedonian symbol but instead ignores it—a rather extraordinary omission. Conservative evangelical impassibilists, on the other hand, insist on the critical importance of Chalcedon for a proper understanding of how one might predicate suffering of God in the person of the Son (e.g., Bray 1978; Ward 2007; DeYoung 2006; Lamont 2006; Castelo

2009:121-132; Lister 2013:260-279; cf. Shults 1996; O'Keefe 1997; Dunn 2001; Stang 2012; Crisp 2013).

4.4.1.5.2.3   Vulnerable love

The third passibilist assumption frequently cited in conservative evangelical proposals is the late modern notion that—in order to be genuine—love must be bilateral, reciprocal and vulnerable to feeling the other's pain. Particularly since Moltmann made his famous charge that one incapable of suffering is incapable of love, the traditional understanding of God's love as an unconditioned, ever-active benevolence is judged to be relationally deficient on the grounds it precludes a genuine give-and-take in which each party to the relationship affects—and is affected by—the other (Moltmann 1974:222; cf. Schilling 1977:253-254; Macquarrie 1978:69; Stott 1986:329; Fiddes 1988:16; Eibach 1990:66-67; Brümmer 1993:161; Pinnock 1994:119; Ngien 1997:§2; Long 2006:146). Fiddes insists that, because love is "essentially mutuality", with God and humans living in partnership, God is thereby unavoidably exposed to the pain of His creatures (cf. Fiddes 1988:173). Love, to be real love, must open itself to such pain: it must be vulnerable.

The argument is based on human experience. All human love makes room for co-suffering. Since this is true for God's image bearers, how much more true must it be for God? Stott approvingly quotes Robinson, who asks: What meaning is there to love that is not "costly to the lover"? (Stott 1986:332; Robinson 1939:176). Ngien asserts the impossibility for an impassible God to engage in any friendship or love (Ngien 1997:§2). Similarly, Fennell agrees with Moltmann that merely empathising with suffering humans is not enough; instead, God must actually suffer with His creation if He is to be thought of as loving (Fennell 2008:139).

The problem with these constructions is that they propose a view of love that makes God, to varying degrees, dependent on His creation for His fulfillment. This means, as Vanhoozer observes, that "not-God" conditions God (Vanhoozer 2001:21). Insofar as the Great Tradition has maintained God's self-sufficiency as an aspect of His aseity, this runs counter to the way God has been classically understood within historic orthodoxy. Fiddes, following Barth, gets around this difficulty by differentiating God's self-existence and self-sufficiency. God, he argues, is necessarily self-existent for, as the uncreated One, He is the ground of His own being. Yet this fact does not preclude His choosing—in sovereign freedom—to make Himself conditioned by His creation. Fiddes agrees with Barth that the Tradition got it wrong when it associated the notion of divine aseity with that of "necessary being" (Fiddes 1988:66-68). Other passibilists follow a similar line of reasoning, believing the Tradition to have been co-opted by such unBiblical influences as the eudaemonistic ideal of happiness, the apototheosis of selflessness and the agapic understanding of love (cf. Lewis and Demarest 1987:235; Clark 1992:§2, §3; Hudson 1996:§2; Ngien 1997:§1; cf. Post 1988; Henriksen 2011).

Impassibilists disagree. They point out that the Tradition evolved over the long history of the Church in response to historical exigencies and that—whilst it is an important function of theology to challenge accepted assumptions—those wishing to modify the Tradition bear the burden of proof to demonstrate how their revisions provide a more faithful account of God and His ways (Cook 1990:72; Oden 1998; Crisp 2013:21-22, 27, 39). Anders notes that the notion of love as relational reciprocity is a recent innovation, drawing its insights from modern psychology (Anders 1997:§2). The understanding of love as benevolence, on the other hand, has a venerable history and Biblical roots (cf. Grogan 2001:47-66; Carson 2002:280-312). Such a love reconciles God's transcendent sovereignty with His relatedness, whilst avoiding Feuerbachian projections of human loves.

This last point is germane since a major issue raised in this discussion is, How are humans to understand what God's love is like? Do we begin with what we know to be true of human love in the present world and apply those observations, by extension, to God? Or, do we begin with the premise that—as One belonging to a different ontological order—God's love must be fundamentally different from human love in certain important respects? Scholars with passibilist sympathies favour the former approach whilst those with impassibilist tendencies prefer the latter. Vanhoozer aligns himself with the Tradition when he asserts that God's love is not His determination to enter reciprocal, give-and-take relationships with His creatures, but His "disposition to communicate His goodness" in Christ through His Spirit to others (Vanhoozer 2010:457).

A conceptual correlate concerns one's understanding of compassion. Passibilists generally take the position that true compassion includes the capacity to commiserate—that is, to feel the pain of one who is suffering (e.g., Wolterstorff 1987:90; Carson 2003:186, 190). Depending on the author, this may be termed "empathy" or "sympathy". In either case, the capacity is conceived as the ability to feel the pain of the other and to take that pain into oneself. Again, impassibilists disagree. They argue that it is possible for humans to care deeply about the misfortunes of another without taking on the other's suffering. Compassion, they argue, seeks not to commiserate with one in pain, but to act on behalf of that one to relieve the pain (e.g., Bray 1999:§3; Helm 2005:§2; Herdt 2010). Thus, compassion has more to do with remediation than commiseration.

Vanhoozer helpfully distinguishes "commiseration", "empathy", "sympathy" and "compassion". Commiseration is what he calls "weak care" for—whilst it co-suffers with the one in need—it does not provide practical help to relieve his or her pain (Vanhoozer 2010:441). "Empathy" feels what the sufferer feels, imaginatively reconstructing the other's experience (Vanhoozer 2010:436).

However, it regards the other's pain as uniquely his or her own, understanding that it is not one's own. Furthermore, empathy does not necessarily elicit a motivation to help the other. "Sympathy", on the other hand, feels sorry for the other, without imaginatively feeling that other person's actual emotions. Further, it involves a "recognition-response" whereby the perception of another's suffering elicits a desire to help relive it. Finally, "compassion" entails perceiving, judging and acting. It perceives another's pain, assesses it and seeks to ameliorate it (Vanhoozer 2010:437).

Vanhoozer argues that God is best viewed as sovereignly and covenentally compassionate. His relationship with humans is asymmetrical, similar to the sovereign partner in a suzerain-vassal covenant. As such, God perceives human suffering from the standpoint of His overall redemptive-historical plans. He then assesses the particular instance of suffering based on that individual's covenant privileges and responsibilities, making a determination whether the suffering is remedial and proportionate, or disproportionate, or undeserved. Finally, God takes action to "remedy the situation" and promote His larger redemptive agenda (Vanhoozer 2010:445). God's compassion, therefore, is self-moved rather than reactive: a predetermination to communicate His goodness to the one in need. His compassion is effectual, a type of "strong care", eventuating in the relief of the needy. It is also consoling in the best sense, for is re-situates one's personal pain within its larger redemptive-historical framework, reminding us of Christ's efficacious work on our behalf and the eschatological assurance that suffering will one day be eradicated. Finally, God's compassion is also "perpetual", rooted in God's unchanging character and the asymmetrical nature of the covenant, in which His patient, long-suffering faithfulness and *chesed* protects and provides for us what we need in any given situation (Vanhoozer 2010:447, 457).

4.4.1.5.2.4 Conclusion

This trio of concepts—the hellenisation of the Biblical God, the equating of impassibility with impassivity and the understanding of love as vulnerable and co-suffering—is the stock of conservative evangelical passibilist reflection. These ideas reflect prior passibilist sentiments articulated by Moltmann and other contemporary non-evangelical scholars. Collectively, they have led to certain assertions that would have sounded alien to the Church fathers, medieval schoolmen, the Reformers and their heirs. They include such claims as: the entire Godhead suffers (Fennell 2008:127); God continues to suffer up to the present time (Stott 1986:329, 335); God's suffering is, like God Himself, infinite (Hudson 1996:§4; Craig 2011a); God's suffering is eternal (Stott 1986:330; Hudson 1996:§4) and inconsolable (Hudson 1996:§1); in giving His Son, the Father was made "destitute" (Hudson 1996:§4); and that, in anticipation of our final relief, God "impatiently and dramatically paces back and forth", yearning for that day to come (Hudson 1996:§4). These conclusions are rooted in passibilist assumptions and they exert a significant influence on large numbers of evangelical opinion shapers and rank-and-file believers.

4.4.2 Scholarly influence on conservative evangelical influencers

Scholars, of course, do not work in a vacuum. Their work helps shape current and succeeding generations of students. With regard to the current topic, the impact of soft and hard passibilist scholars on conservative evangelicals is sizeable, as their teachings have theologically formed a large number of pastors, elders, missionaries, editors and other Christian leaders. For example, Wayne Grudem's *Systematic theology* has become one of the most popular texts used to teach theology in conservative evangelical seminaries. According to his website, his text has sold over 450,000 copies, has been translated into eight

foreign languages and is in the process of being translated into at least eight others (Grudem [2014]). It is a lucid and valuable book, but its flippant dismissal of impassibility is intellectually inexcusable and theologically irresponsible. Yet his passibilist bias continues to form the theology of conservative evangelical pastors in America and abroad who will pass these teachings on to others.

A similar criticism might be made of Stott's *The cross of Christ,* a wonderfully written and justly lauded work on Christ's crucifixion. Stott's influence is immense. Acknowledged by *Time* magazine in 2005 as one of the 100 most influential people in the world, Stott was a primary author of the 1974 Lausanne Covenant and was, for decades, Britian's most recognisable evangelical. Upon his death in 2011, the pastor, author and evangelical pillar was euglogised by Billy Graham as one of the evangelical world's "greatest spokesmen" (Norton 2011). Yet his *The cross of Christ* betrays stong passibilist sympathies that will continue for years to help shape the thinking of Christian leaders and rank-and-file believers.

The writings and lectures of evangelical leaders like Stott and Grudem have exerted a formative influence on certain key opinion shapers—popular authors, devotional writers and mega-church pastors. The result is that, on the popular level, passibilist assumptions are largely taken for granted, where comments like: "God feels your pain", "God hurts with you" and "God is disappointed" have become commonplace assertions within conservative evangelical books, articles and sermons. Whilst there exist examples of popular-level impassibilist accounts (e.g., Barczi 2011a, 2011b; Snoeberger 2012; Kendrick 2013; Rennie 2014), they are comparatively rare. One of the exceptions is Dinesh D'Sousa's, *God forsaken*. In it, D'Sousa argues strenuously for a strong form of impassibilism (so strong, in fact, he denies emotions to God) in line with Calvin and Aquinas, and extols the existential benefits of a non-suffering God (D'Sousa 2012:79, 211-213, 231-233; cf. 252, 258).

Far more common are unqualified pathic attributions to God that either tacitly assume or explicitly assert passibilist sensibilities. A few examples will show how widespread this tendency is among conservative evangelical influencers. In a 2013 article in *Christianity Today,* "A beautiful anger," Linda Falter suggests that what motivated Christ to die on the cross was His determination to do all that was necessary to "extinguish the pain of losing us forever". The cross, thus, reveals God's broken heart over sinners, and its desperation and shame "drove a knife" through both Father and Son (Falter 2011:36).

Megachurch pastor Bill Hybels routinely resorts to passibilist imagery in his popular sermons and books. For example, in his 1997 collection of sermons, *The God you're looking for,* he asserts God feels our pain actuely as a "rip" in His heart and a lump in His throat. Through His tears, He whispers to us, "your suffering affects my soul too". Despite such overt compassion, humans still resist Him. When they do, they "break God's heart" by violating His friendship and betraying His trust (Hybels 1997:64, 70).

Lawrence Lee points out how three of conservative evangelicalism's most influential authors—John Eldredge, Rick Warren and Phil Yancey—all resort to unqualified pathic attributions to God (Lee 2005:20-26). In his best-selling *Disappointment with God,* Yancey laments the "shock" and "grief" experienced by God over human rebellion and His "helplessness" to stop His children from self-destructing (Yancey 1988:64-65; cf. 1990:68-69). Warren, in his hugely successful *The purpose driven life,* describes how God yearns for friendship with humans, whom He is "mad about" (Warren 2002:85, 98). And throughout his numerous writings, Eldredge portrays God as a wild romantic longing for love, who takes risks on His creation and reacts like a jealous lover when His affection is not reciprocated (e.g., Curtis and Eldredge 1997:78-79; Eldredge 2001:32-37).

Examples like these could be multiplied *ad infinitum,* given the profusion of popular-level passibilist accounts (e.g., Olrich 1982; Lucado 1986; Tada 1997; Taylor 1998; Comerford 1999; Storms 2000; Ferrante 2006; Young 2007, et al.). Such unuanced and unqualified pathic predications illustrate just how pervasively passibilist assumptions color the thinking and pepper the rhetoric of conservative evangelical opinion shapers. It is not the presence of pathic speech that is of concern, of course. After all, the prophets made copious use of it. Rather, it is the intemperate ways such speech is employed and the univocal quality of the assorted pathisms that proves problematic. These ways of speaking about God invariably diminish the divine transcendence and run the risk of caricaturing Him as a pitable victim of human capriciousness. The result is a far cry from the Biblical God, high and holy, inhabiting eternity, inscrutable in His judgements and dwelling in unapproachable light (Is 57:15; Ro 11:33; 1 Tm 6:16). To thus reduce God is to create an idol, which is deeply troubling. Of equal concern is the effect such imbalanced teaching exerts on rank-and-file evangelicals who download the podcasts and read the books of these highly influential opinion shapers, and, in the process, adopt—often in unreflective ways—the passibilist sentiments they espouse.

4.4.3   Impact on rank-and-file evangelical Christians

The confusion surrounding how divine (im)passibism is to be understood and the blatant passibilist bias of contemporary conservative evangelical scholars and opinion leaders has led to considerable uncertainty in the pew about what Christians are to believe about God's relationship to human suffering. Does God bear some resemblance to Aristotle's unmoved mover, as so many contemporary Christian leaders insinuate is the classical theistic deposit of faith? Or is God, per open theistic avowals, participating in space-time to such an extent that His own happiness and being are partly determined through His relational intercourse with

humanity? Or is God somehow both transcendently removed from, yet intimately present to, human suffering? Does God weep over us? Does He flinch at our peccadilloes? Do humans possess the capacity to break His heart?

These are important questions. And the smorgasbord of theological options on offer aggravates the confusion felt by average believers. The more philosophically minded Christians find the intellectual challenge stimulating and a spur to spiritual growth. But they are few in number. The average churchgoer finds the lack of clarity immensely frustrating. And when, as is common to all people, they experience tragedy and hardship, their frustration metastasises into disconsolation, discouragement and even depression. For want of clear answers, some stop attending church. Some abandon the faith. As a pastor for over two decades, the present author has encountered these downward spiritual spirals countless times, and they bear collective witness to the magnitude of the problem—a problem approaching crisis proportions.

What is needed is unambiguous teaching about God's relationship to the world in general and His relationship to human suffering in particular. This teaching must be Biblically balanced, avoid heterodox extremes and take into account the variegated panoply of the "whole counsel of God" (Ac 20:27). The teaching must be rationally coherent, historically informed, existentially viable and pastorally sensitive. It must give clear answers to the most pressing questions and provide a factual accounting of the Gospel—the wondrous news of the transcendent and luminous Lord, who lives in unobstructed freedom, yet who mercifully condescends to relate to his people with unparalleled intimacy, understanding and concern. This God expressed the depth of His love in unmistakable terms when, in the person of Christ, He entered space-time history, joined Himself to human flesh in magnanimous solidarity and redeemed us from estrangement through Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and coming *parousia*. Chapter 6

proposes a conceptual framework for such teaching and a constructive model suggesting how it might be implemented.

4.5   Chapter summary and its relevance to the overall research agenda

This chapter has provided a historical analysis of contemporary passibilism and its effect on the conservative evangelical subtradition, thus describing the contemporary framework of the debate. It began with an examination of the pre-contemporary, twentieth century roots of the discussion (Section 4.2.1), then proceeded to examine three phases of the contemporary stage of the colloquy: (1) Phase 1: Toward a passibilist hegemony, 1974-1986, (2) Phase 2: Impassibilist counteroffensive, 1986-2000, and (3) Phase 3: Conservative impassibilist awakening, 2001-2014. It was shown that the initial passibilist juggernaut, which gained momentum throughout the first phase, was blunted during the second as impassibilist theologians began to mount a credible defence. With the third phase came a pronounced increase in the number of conservative evangelical scholars willing to identify as impassibilists.

Section 4.3 summarised five species of existential arguments that have been featured in the debate: devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional. These claims—of which there are numerous subspecies—populate the literature and have exerted a significant influence on the conservative evangelical subtradition. They will be critically engaged both Biblically and theologically in the following chapter.

Section 4.4 explored the impact of passibilist teaching on the conservative evangelical community. First, it looked at the impact on conservative scholars. It was shown that scholarly reactions to passibilist teaching fall into four general categories: hard impassibilist, soft impassibilist, soft passibilist and hard

passibilist. The impact on the conservative academy was then summarised historically, by noting a two-stage response (stage one: general acceptance; stage two: general rejection). The impact on the conservative academy was then summarised doctrinally, by noting three passibilist presuppositions that appear commonly in the conservative passibilist literature: (1) the idea the Gospel was Hellenised by the Church fathers, (2) the equating of impassibility with affective impassivity and (3) the concept of love as necessarily vulnerable to suffering.

Having considered the impact of passibilist teaching on the conservative evangelical academy, the analysis then explored the impact on key evangelical influencers (Section 4.4.2) as well as rank-and-file evangelical believers (Section 4.4.3). It was shown that the impact of passibilist accounts on the conservative evangelical substream is indeed marked and of serious pastoral concern.

The present chapter is essential to the overall research aims insofar as it delineates the history, luminaries and core rhetorical claims of the passibilist movement of the late twentieth century—a movement that has exerted a pronounced influence on conservative evangelicalism. This historical analysis and contemporary framework, considered in tandem with the literary and eccesial analyses presented in Chapters 2 and 3, permit a comprehensive assessment of the present problem: the adverse effects of passibilist theology on both scholars and non-scholars within the conservative evangelical subtradition. This, in turn, allows for a close inspection—both Biblically and theologically—of passibilist rhetorical claims (the purpose of Chapter 5) as well as considered reflection on what corrective steps might be taken to mitigate the negative effects of passibilist teachings within the subtradition (Chapter 6). The current chapter is, thus, critically relevant to the overall research agenda.

CHAPTER 5

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS – AN EVALUATION OF PASSIBILIST EXISTENTIAL CLAIMS

5.1 Chapter introduction

At this juncture in the dissertation, the situation analysis is complete. Chapter 2 examined the state of the literature, Chapter 3 analysed the ecclesial setting and Chapter 4 evaluated the historical development and contemporary expressions of the problem occasioned by contemporary passibilist assertions. Following the LIM model of practical theological research, the next step is to describe a preferred future by means of explicating the Biblical parameters and theological themes used to evaluate truth claims about God's relationship to suffering and to apply those criteria to specific passibilist arguments. The research question addressed by this chapter is the fourth subsidiary question identified in Section 1.2: What are the key Biblical teachings and theological commitments required to appropriately evaluate passibilist teachings? This chapter addresses this question in the following way.

First, the chapter provides an exegetical analysis of two Biblical passages that are central to a proper evaluation of (im)passibilist construals: Acts 17:24-28 and Hebrews 2:17-18. The first text was chosen because it prescribes parameters for thinking Biblically about God's relationship to His creation, holding in tension two seemingly disparate dimensions of the divine nature—that is, God's transcendence of space-time constraints and God's intimate involvement in

creaturely (specifically human) affairs. As has already been seen (e.g., Sections 1.7.4; 3.4.1; 4.3.1; 4.1) asserting both of these truths simultaneously, without attenuating one or the other, is essential to a balanced, Biblical conceptualisation of God and God's relationship to the created order. The second text was chosen because it goes to the heart of a uniquely Christian and Christologically conceived understanding of God's relationship to human suffering, positing that—in Christ—God authentically experienced suffering as a man in compassionate solidarity with humanity, yet without changing or compromising the divine nature.

In each case, the passage is examined by means of the following criteria: (1) background analysis including author, date of composition, historical context, audience and purpose, (2) literary context, involving a consideration of the outline and genre of the book, as well as the historical setting and structure of the literary unit, (3) exegesis of the passage, exploring its composition and authorial intent and (4) contribution of the passage to the broader (im)passibility debate (cf. Smith 2014). In each case, the objective is to, first, understand the text and, second, apply that understanding to the problem under consideration with a view to helping solve that problem and thereby create an improved state of affairs for the Church and world (cf. Fee 2002:2; Smith 2014:6). The problem this project addresses is the existential damage done by widespread acceptance of passibilist construals within both scholarly and non-scholarly ranks of conservative evangelicalism.

Second, the chapter critically engages five species of arguments—devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional—commonly featured in contemporary passibilist accounts. This examination makes use of the Biblical criteria, established in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, coupled with the twin conservative evangelical theological commitments—God's transcendence and God's relationality—delineated in Section 3.4. The objective is to determine whether

passiblist existential arguments hold up under scrutiny employing these Scriptural and theological criteria.

After undertaking the two objectives described above, the chapter concludes with a summary and a discussion of how the chapter contents relate to the overall research agenda.

5.2   An exegetical analysis of Acts 17:24-28

Acts 17:24-28 provides a fascinating glimpse into Paul's understanding of the divine nature and his way of communicating it to a cultured Gentile audience. There are several texts in both Old and New Testaments that highlight the transcendent nature of the divine being, underscoring God's essential dissimilarity to created things including humanity: Genesis 1; Exodus 33:19; Psalm 89:6-14; 93:1; 94:10; 96:4-13; 113:4-6; Isaiah 14:24-27; 55:8-9; Jeremiah 23:24; Romans 11:33-36; 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:15; Hebrews 12:28, et al. There are also a large number of texts that emphasise God's relatedness to His creation, including predications of His immanent proximity (e.g., Ps 23; 139), providential care (e.g., Ps 104:24-30) and compassionate love (e.g., Ps 103:1-18). And there are a few passages that distill these twin truths into a single pericope, juxtaposing these two dimensions of the divine life in arresting and wonderful ways (e.g., Ps 34:18; 145:18; 147:3; Is 40:10-12; 57:15). The latter verses, especially, represent invaluable theological resources insofar as they suggest a means of honouring both facets—transcendence and relatedness—of God's posture toward His creation. They thus teach interpreters of God's Word how to hold these binary truths in tension without reverting to the extremes of a radical immanentism on the one hand or a hyper-transcendence on the other.

One of the most suggestive texts in this regard is Paul's famous speech to the Athenian Areopagus recorded in Acts 17:22-31. The text has spawned a vast literature, examining the Lukan account of Paul's rhetoric from a number of different—and often overlapping—perspectives: dogmatic (Pelikan 2005; Pardigon 2008), social-scientific (Malina and Pilch 2008), rhetorical (Legrand 1981; Kennedy 1984:129-132; Zweck 1989, 1995; Sandnes 1993; Soards 1994; Strother 1995; Gray 2005), literary-historical (Gempf 1988), cultural-educational (Parsons 2008), socio-rhetorical (Witherington 1998), apologetic (Davis 2003; deSilva 2004; Dunham 2006), intertextual (Lioy 2013), literary-critical (Given 1995), Hellenistic (Dibelius 1956), Hebraic (Gärtner 1955; Barr 1995:36; cf. McArthur 1956; Filson 1956), Hellenistic-Septuagental (Jipp 2012), etc. These are all legitimate considerations, and each makes an important contribution to the understanding of the passage as a whole. The objective of the present analysis, however, is necessarily modest, delimited by the aims of the overall research agenda. It looks at a portion of the speech in an effort to ascertain what the text teaches about God in both His transcendent and proximate dimensions. Accordingly, whilst conforming to established standards of exegesis (cf. Carson 1996; Fee 2002; Klein, Blomburg and Hubbard 2004; Osborne 2006; Köstenberger and Patterson 2011; Smith 2014), its scope is narrowed by its argumentative aims.

5.2.1 Background considerations

The text under consideration is a portion of a much longer narrative account, the Acts of the Apostles (hereafter referred to simply as "Acts"), which details the activities of the early church and God's interactions with this embryonic Christian movement. The sections below discuss issues related to the authorship of this book, its time of composition and its purpose, audience, structure, genre and relation to the Gospel of Luke. Later sections set the text within its specific

literary or narrative frame, whose historical setting and structural components are explored. The text is then analysed exegetically, noting important lexical and grammatical features and summarising the original author's intent (cf. Smith 2014). Finally, Section 5.2.4 describes how the text contributes to the larger (im)passibility discussion.

5.2.1.1 Author, date and historical context

The New Testament book of Acts is an anonymous composition. The traditional view is that it, like the Gospel bearing his name, was authored by Luke the physician and traveling companion of Paul, mentioned in Colossians 4:14, Philemon 24 and 2 Timothy 4:11. Vielhauer argues against the traditional view, believing that, because the portrayal of Paul in Acts differs in significant respects from the one gleaned from the Pauline letters (e.g., the former's positive use of general revelation, more positive attitude toward *torah*, more primitive Christology and the absence of imminence in his eschatology), Acts could not possibly have been written by a close traveling companion (Vielhauer 1968:33-50). Wenham and Walton, however, dispute the significance of the disparity in the two portrayals, suggesting Vielhauer overlooks the considerable similarities in the two portraits, and that the differences that do exist can be attributed to differences in rhetorical aims (evangelistic in Acts; pastoral in the epistles) and authorial perspective (Wenham and Walton 2001:296; cf. Marshall 1969:296).

Two arguments favouring the traditional view are: (1) the use of first-person plural language in parts of the narrative (16:10-17; 20:5-15; 21:1-18; 27:1-28:16) and the unlikelihood that Timothy, Epaphroditus or other traveling companions mentioned in Paul's letters authored Luke-Acts and (2) the strong patristic support for Lukan authorship. Luke is identified as the author in the Muratorian Canon (late second century) and in one or two recensions of the text prior to that

time (Bruce 1971:19). And from the third century forward, there was unanimous agreement among Christian writers that Luke composed the two works (Wenham and Walton 2001:295-296). Lacking conclusive evidence disqualifying Lukan composition, and finding both internal and external evidence supporting it, then, there are no compelling reason to doubt the traditional attribution of authorship to Luke.

The question of the date of composition is closely tied to that of its authorship. Assuming Luke wrote the narrative, and did so soon after the events described in Acts 28 (ca. AD 62) but before Paul's execution (traditionally held to have occurred under Nero around AD 65), then a date of AD 63 or 64 is not unreasonable (cf. Bruce 1971:21-22; Hemer 1990:365-410; Carson, Moo and Morris 1992; Wenham and Walton 2001:297). Whilst it is impossible to say definitively where it was written, both Irenaeus and Eusebius place its composition in Rome, although Achaia, Caesarea, Corinth and Ephesus have all been proposed (Bock 2007:27-28). Some scholars favour a later date of composition: sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in September of AD 70 on the basis of the theory that Luke's gospel reflects a knowledge of the actual event (Lk 21) and the observation that it differs slightly from its parallel passages in Matthew and Mark in a manner consistent with this knowledge. Either date is possible, and the absence of incontrovertible evidence supporting its compositional date ought to make the exegete reticent to be overly dogmatic on the point (Bock 2007:25-27). In any event, the precise date is comparatively inconsequential with respect to the purposes of the present analysis.

5.2.1.2 Audience and purpose

Luke-Acts was written to a certain Theophilus, mentioned at the outset of both books (Lk 1:3; Ac 1:1). Who this individual was is not known. That he was Luke's

literary patron or a member of Paul's legal defence team are both possibilities. The wording of Luke 1:4 suggests that Theophilus was a believer, and that—whatever the author's larger rhetorical aims—the narratives were intended to provide documentary evidence to bolster his faith.

It is most likely Luke did not write with Theophilus alone in mind, however. Scholars have pointed out that Luke-Acts is written in such a way as would make it accessible to a large audience, including Gentile Christians and "godfearers" as well as diaspora Jews. It is written in an educated style, but not necessarily a "highly" educated one. Luke-Acts generally omits Semitic language and Jewish customs, whilst Mark typically explains them and Matthew assumes his readers to be already familiar with them (cf. Lk 21:20 vs. Mk 13:14 vs. Mt 24:15f.). And Luke-Acts normally relies on the Septuagint, rather than the Hebrew scriptures, for its Old Testament quotations and allusions (Wenham and Walton 2001:294-295).

What, then, was the main purpose of Luke-Acts? Wenham and Walton list five different scholarly opinions on the matter and Green, no less than seven (Wenham and Walton 2001:295; Green 1997:17). What they seem to agree on, however, is that the dominant themes developed in the two-volume narrative—God's overriding purposes to redeem humanity including the Gentiles, the centrality of Jesus in salvation-history, the power of the Holy Spirit in the Church's witness and the serious call to discipleship for all believers—make Luke-Acts equally serviceable as an evangelistic tool for the uninitiated, an apologetic resource for legal purposes or a catechetical device for the instruction of believers. Thus, whilst it is impossible to know what was in Luke's mind as he undertook the project, the resulting documents would both legitimate the Christian movement as part of the planned unfolding of God's metanarrative in salvation-history and provide assurance and instruction to individual believers as they lived out their role in these divine plans (Green 1997:16-23; Wenham and

Walton 2001:290-295; cf. deSilva 2004:354-356). Green summarises the purpose of Luke-Acts as an effort to encourage the persecuted Christian movement to remain true to the faith and bold in their witness by legitimating their place within God's overarching salvific scheme (Green 1997:17; cf. Bruce 1971:23-24).

5.2.2 Literary context (Luke-Acts)

Although the narrative unity of Luke-Acts is not uniformly acknowledged (e.g., Parsons and Pervo 1993), the general scholarly consensus since Cadbury (1922) is that Acts is the continuation of Luke, with a shared initial dedicatory preface (Lk 1:1-4) and with the Acts preface (Ac 1:1-3) serving as a brief recapitulation of the former. Green notes that it was a common expediency among ancient authors to divide longer works into two or more parts to accommodate the physical limitations of the papyrus rolls on which the works were written. The maximum length of these rolls was thirty-five feet, and Luke and Acts would each require a single roll (Green 1997:12). Further, Green notes that ancient writers valued symmetry in the way they divided their works, so they would proportion the constituent parts accordingly. The respective lengths of the Gospel of Luke (comprising approximately 19,400 words) and Acts (approximately 18,400 words) demonstrate this concern for symmetry (Green 1997:12). These observations—coupled with the thematic similarities of the two books—support the thesis that Acts constitutes part two of a two-part narrative.

5.2.2.1 Structure and outline

The outline of Acts is straightforward. The book opens with the dedication to Theophilus (Ac 1:1-5), in which the author notes Christ's post-resurrection

appearances to his disciples and His command that they remain in Jerusalem to receive the "promise of the Father"—the baptism of the Holy Spirit—which was soon to be given them. Luke then describes Christ's ascension into heaven, immediately preceded by these important words of instruction: "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Ac 1:8). The rest of the book describes the persecution, growth and missionary endeavors of the early Church as it extended its influence throughout the northern rim of the circum-Mediterranean basin. From Chapter 13 onwards, special attention is devoted to the miracle-laced evangelistic and church planting ministry of the Apostle Paul, formerly Saul of Tarsus. The book concludes with an extended narrative of Paul's arrest and legal hearing in Jerusalem (21:27-23:22), his confinement and trials in Caesarea (23:23-26:30) and his long and dangerous journey to Rome to appear before the emperor (27:1-28:16). The book concludes with Paul under house arrest in Rome, appealing to Jews, then Gentiles, to heed the Gospel, whilst waiting for his hearing with the emperor (28:17-28:31).

Scholars have long called attention to the book's organisational possibilities found in Jesus' final pre-ascension address to His disciples described in Acts 1:8, cited above. The command to carry the Gospel to Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria and to the rest of the known world outlines the movement of the narrative. On this view, the book of Acts describes the fulfillment of Christ's missionary mandate, with 1:1-5:52 detailing the church's witness to Jerusalem, 6:1-11:18 describing its witness to Judea and Samaria and 11:19-28:31 delineating the Church's witness to the ends of the earth (e.g., Wenham and Walton 2001:271). FF Bruce offers a more descriptive outline of the book (Bruce 1971:13-14):

      I.   1:1-5:42   The birth of the church

II.	6:1-9:31	Persecution leads to expansion
III.	9:32-12:25	The acts of Peter and beginnings of Gentile Christianity
IV.	13:1-16:5	Paul's first missionary tour and the apostolic decree
V.	16:6-19:20	Evangelization on the Aegean shores
VI.	19:21-28:31	Paul plans to visit Rome and gets there by an unforeseen route

5.2.2.2 Genre

The precise genre of Acts has been the subject of some scholarly debate. The prefaces to both Luke and Acts, connecting the two works, offer a major clue (Lk 1:1-4; Ac 1:1-3). Whilst other genres have been proposed—ancient novel (Pervo 1987), biography (Talbert 1974) and scientific treatise (Alexander 1993)—the general consensus is that Acts best fits the genre of ancient historiography (Cadbury 1922; Aune 1987; Sterling 1992; deSilva 2004:348; cf. Green 1997:7-8). Not only does Luke identify his project as an orderly account of a complex narrative (Lk 1:1-3), but, as Green notes, his work contains formal features such as letters, speeches, symposia and travel stories that are typical of Greco-Roman historiography (Green 1997:8). Further, whilst suggesting Acts might not fit readily into a single literary genre, Wenham and Walton note the striking resemblance between Luke's prefaces and those of Josephus in the latter's *Against Apion*, Books 1 and 2 (Wenham and Walton 2001:268-269).

David deSilva observes that ancient historiagraphical works fell into one of three subgenres: (1) general histories: narrative accounts of a people group from their origins to sometime in the recent past, (2) antiquarian histories: stories focusing on specific genealogical, geographic and ethnographic features, often as part of larger, general histories and (3) historical monographs: narratives focused on

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single subjects (e.g., the Peloponnesian War or the Jewish War) and the sequences of events related to their causes and effects. Using this typology, the book of Acts best fits the third of these subgenres, being a monograph on the spread of the Gospel from the infancy of the Church in Jerusalem to Paul's trip to Rome (deSilva 2004:349-350).

First century Greco-Roman historiographical standards were significantly different from our own modern, positivist inclinations, an observation that—together with the paucity of corroborating physical or literary evidence for certain Lukan assertions—has led a number of scholars to question the veracity of Luke's accounts. But some recent studies (Hengel 1979; Hemer 1989; Hahn 1995; deSilva 2004:350) have called into question the propriety of judging ancient historiography by modern standards and have advanced cases for a more sanguine assessment of the accuracy of Luke's historical claims (Green 1997:8-9).

A final consideration has to do with the nature of the speeches attributed by Luke to various individuals in Acts. Soards points out that, of the approximately 1,000 verses in Acts, 365 make up speeches and dialogues (Soards 1994:1: cf. Liefeld 1995:61-77). Scholarship ranges widely regarding the question of Luke's source material used to construct these speeches. Whilst virtually all scholars agree they do not represent verbatim reproductions of what was communicated, opinions run the gamut from pure Lukan artistic licence (e.g., Dibelius and Fitzmyer), to ancient historiographical-conscious speech events (e.g., Gempf), to rhetorically tailored Lukan instruction tools (e.g., Jipp), to trustworthy summaries of what was actually communicated by these speakers to these audiences on these occasions, based on recollection or on written and oral sources (e.g., Bruce and Lioy). The question of Luke's sources is clearly beyond the scope of this project. However, the question of whether his words accurately reflect the theology of Paul (and/or Luke and the early Christian community) is pertinent to the aims of

the present treatment, which proceeds on the basis of the conviction that Luke had reliable source material available to him (at times himself, at other times first-hand witnesses—including Paul—as well as oral and written tradition) such that he was able, with help from the Holy Spirit, to faithfully reconstruct the gist of what was said on these occasions (cf. Green 1997:10-11; Wenham and Walton 2001:289; Lioy 2013).

5.2.2.3   Literary unit (17:22-24) and pericope (17:15-34)

The specific passage under discussion, Acts 17:24-28, is part of Paul's Areopagite speech and is embedded within a larger pericope, Acts 17:22-34, containing the entire speech as narrated by Luke. The speech, in turn, is situated within a still larger literary or narrative unit, Acts 17:15-34, which describes Paul's time in Athens from his arrival (v. 16) to just before his departure (v. 34). Before exegeting the passage, a brief history and outline of the literary unit is in order.

5.2.2.3.1   Historical setting

The speech before the Areopagus occurred during Paul's second missionary tour (c. AD 49-52), described in Acts 15:39-18:22. Like the Apostle's first and third tours, this one originated in the church of Syrian Antioch, where Paul, Silas and Barnabas all ministered (Ac 15:32-35). Wanting to assess the spiritual health of the believers in the communities visited on the first missionary journey, but dividing with Barnabas over the inclusion of Mark on this second trip, Paul took Silas through Syria and Cilicia, "strengthening the churches" (Ac 15:41).

In Lystra, they added a young disciple, Timothy, to their entourage (Ac 16:13). They proceeded through Phrygia and Galatia, delivering to the various churches

the decision of the Jerusalem council on the question of Gentile observance of the law and encouraging them (Ac 16:4-6). Intending to continue their journey through the interior of Anatolia by going to Bithynia, they were disallowed by "the Spirit of Jesus" and were led to Troas, then, via a night vision, to Macedonia (Ac 16:7-10). In obedience, they sailed to Samothrace, then Neapolis, the port of Philippi. In Philippi, they were instrumental in the conversion of the God-fearer Lydia and her household, who together formed the nucleus of a small Christian community (Ac 16:11-15).

One day Paul exorcised a prognosticating spirit from a slave girl, provoking her owners—who had commercially benefited from her supernatural ability—to outrage. Paul and Silas were seized, tried by the magistrates and beaten with rods before being imprisoned. An earthquake damaged the prison that night, however, allowing the prisoners to escape their cells. Distraught, the warden prepared to take his own life when Paul and Silas intervened. After the two shared with him the message of Christ, the man and his household became believers. The next day, the magistrates intended to release Paul and Silas. But, learning they were Roman citizens (making the act of punishing them the previous day illegal), they apologised to them and escorted them out of the city (Ac 16:16-40).

The group continued on to Thessalonica, where Paul preached the Gospel on three Sabbath days. A number of Jews and Greeks were converted, but some Jews violently opposed the message and gathered a mob and created a disturbance so threatening that Paul's group left the city by night for Berea (Ac 17:1-10). In Berea, Paul again reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue, the result being that "many of them believed". A number of Greeks also were persuaded. However, when the Jewish agitators from Thessalonica learned of Paul's success in Berea, they created a disturbance there as well, forcing Paul to flee for his safety. Whilst Silas and Timothy remained in Berea, the Christian

brothers conducted Paul to Athens (Ac 17:11-15), providing the occasion for his speech, which is analysed in the following section.

Athens was named for the patron goddess Athena, whose temple, the Parthenon, dominated the top of the rock outcropping known as the Acropolis, standing in the centre of the town. Legend held that the city had been founded by Theseus, the Attic hero of Greek mythology, who destroyed the Amazons and slew the Minotaur (Longenecker 1981:473). Having been home to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus and Zeno, Athens enjoyed an unrivalled intellectual reputation in antiquity and experienced a full blossoming of its cultural and architectural achievements under the great statesman Pericles (495-429 BC). Its loss to Sparta, Persia and disaffected members of the Delian Confederation during the Peloponnesian War put an end to its political, commercial and military hegemony. However, its subsequent conquests by Philip II of Macedon in 338 BC and the Romans in 146 BC had the reverse effect, enhancing its influence and reputation throughout the known world (Longenecker 1986:473).

Piraeus, Athens' harbor on the Saronic Gulf, lie four miles to the west, as measured from the Acropolis (McRay 2000:139; cf. Longenecker 1981:473). Once the centre of classical philosophical, artistic and literary life in the ancient world, Athens had been eclipsed by such thriving intellectual centres as Alexandria, Antioch and Rome and was, by Paul's day, a small university town of between ten and twenty-five thousand residents (Longenecker 1981:473; McRay 2000:139). Nevertheless, it was an important city symbolically and culturally, and one renowned for its religious life (Malina and Pilch 2008:126). Under the current emperor, Claudius (AD 41-54), Athens had experienced a brief resurgence of construction (McRay 2000:139-140), adding to its beauty and sense of civic pride.

When Paul, whisked out of Berea by obliging Christian friends, arrived in Athens, he took stock of his new surroundings. Luke describes how he was "provoked" (παρωξύνετο) by the rampant idolatry he found in the city, using a strong verb in the imperfect indicative that underscores Paul's ongoing state of agitation. The cognate noun for this word is employed by Luke in Acts 15:39 in reference to the intense relational rupture that occurred between Paul and Barnabas a short time earlier (Jipp 2012:570). Lioy suggests that Paul's response was to begin to formulate an anti-idol polemic (Lioy 2013:22; Pardigon 2008:217-219). The text indicates that Paul was engaging the locals in religious discussions: he "reasoned" (διελέγετο) with the Jews and God-fearers in the synagogue and with Gentiles in the marketplace. Pardigon notes that the verb Luke uses here implies audience involvement, address and reply, and of the thirteen times the term is used in the New Testament, ten refer to the activity of Paul in Acts 17-24 (Pardigon 2008:220; cf. Jipp 2012:571). Paul's debates in the agora and forum sometimes involved Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, who were known to frequent these public venues.

Suspected of preaching a potentially subversive message of "foreign divinities" (ξένων δαιμονίων), Paul was apprehended. Authorities "seized him" (ἐπιλαβόμενοί τε αὐτοῦ) and took him before the ruling magistrates, the Areopagus, to give an account of his teaching (Ac 17:16-21). In the decades preceding Paul, the Areopagus had begun to function as the municipal senate and had jurisdiction in religious matters (McRay 2000:140). The name of this ruling body came from *Areios pagos* ("Rock of Ares", Romanised to Mars Hill), the location to the west of the Acropolis, where the group traditionally met. In Roman times, however, the Areopagus held most of its meetings in the *stoa basileios* ("Royal Portico") in the *agora* (Bruce 1971:351-352).

Paul's address before the Areopagus, therefore, was technically a defence of his alien religious views. As such, Paul makes several emphatic assertions about the

nature of the true God in contradistinction to the idols of Athens, describes God's way of relating to the world in general and humanity in particular and issues a summons for his hearers to repent, lest they be judged by God for their ignorance and offensive idolatry. Lioy points out the irony of the scene: calling Paul to be judged for his religious views, the Areopagites are themselves called by God through His messenger Paul to be judged for theirs (Lioy 2013:32). The discourse, within its narrative frame, is the subject of the following examination.

5.2.2.3.2 Structure

Mark Given points out that Acts 17:15-34 constitutes both a narrative discourse unit and a narrative schematic unit, both of which employ three criteria that are quite different from one another (Given 1995:357-360). The narrative unit encompassed by these verses can be outlined with a simple three-part organisational scheme: prologue (vv. 15-21), address (vv. 22-31) and epilogue (vv. 32-34). The structure may be usefully represented as follows:

    I. Prologue (vv. 15-21)

        1. Paul's arrival in Athens (v. 15)

        2. Paul's distress by the idolatry (v. 16)

        3. Paul's reasoning with the locals (v. 17)

        4. Paul's discussions with the philosophers (v. 18)

        5. Paul's arrest and presentation to the Areopagus (vv. 19-20)

        6. Luke's comment: the Athenian infatuation with novelty (v. 21)

    II. Speech

        1. Paul's acknowledgment of the Athenian's religiousity (v. 22)

        2. Paul's use of the altar to *Agnosto Theo* as a touch-point (v. 23)

3. Paul's assertion that the God who created all things, being Lord of all, does not live in man-made temples (v. 24)

4. Paul's assertion that God is not served by human hands, as though He needs anything, but instead gives to all life, breath and all things (v. 25)

5. Paul's assertion that God made from one man all nations to live on earth, having determined their times and boundaries of habitation (v. 26)

6. Paul's assertion that God did this that people would seek and grope after and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us (v. 27)

7. Paul's assertion that it is in God that we live, move and are; possibly a quotation from Epimenides (v. 28a)

8. Paul's citation of Aratus: We are God's offspring (v. 28b)

9. Paul's deduction from his assertions: being God's offspring, we should not think God is reducible to human-made objects (v. 29)

10. Paul's assertion that, having overlooked the times of ignorance, God now commands all people everywhere to repent (v. 30)

11. Paul's assertion that repentance is necessary because God has fixed a day to judge the world in righteousness through a man He appointed, Jesus Christ, having furnished proof to all by raising Him from the dead (v. 31)

III. Epilogue

1. The hearer's immediate response: some mock Paul's mention of the resurrection, but others express curiosity in Paul's teaching, wanting to hear more (v. 32)

2. Paul's exit from the Areopagus (v. 33)

3. The result: some join Paul and believe, including Dionysius, Damaris and others (v. 34)

Witherington analyses Paul's speech based on ancient rhetorical models, complete with *exordium* (including *capitatio benevolentiae*), *propositio*, *probatio* and *peroratio* (cf. Zwek 1989; Parsons 2008:245). The speech has affinities with certain Stoic theological commitments, yet is undeniably Biblical. In fact, building on the work of Mánek, Anderson, Daube, Fishbane, Pao and others, Pardigon makes a strong case for the affinities between Paul's anti-idol discourse and those found in Isaiah 40-55 (2008:203-207). And Lioy (2013) has demonstrated the conceptual, linguistic and argumentative similarities between Paul's address and the Song of Moses (De 31:30-32:44). Lioy makes the case that Paul self-consciously employed the conceptual and linguistic resources embodied in the Song of Moses—and more generally the *Tanakh*—to confront the religious bankruptcy of the Athenians, much as Moses confronted the waywardness of the Israelites (Lioy 2013:10, 21-36). In so arguing, Lioy understands the Areopagite address, whilst underscoring the universal scope of God's redemptive activity, to be essentially corrective in tone, challenging prevailing religious notions and proposing a theological grammar at variance from that employed by the Greeks, a point corroborated by other scholars (e.g., Lioy 2013:21, 23; Gärtner 1955; Gangel 1970; Harrison 1975; Rowe 2011; cf. Jipp 2012).

5.2.3 Analysis of Acts 17:24-28

Having considered the background (author, date, historical context, audience and purpose) and literary context (structure and outline, genre) for Acts and the historical setting and structure for the discrete narrative unit, Acts 17:15-34, the analysis now focuses on the pericope embedded within this narrative unit, Acts 17:24-28. First, the Greek text (UBS 4th rev. ed.) is presented with three accompanying English translations (ESV, NASB and NIV), followed by an analysis of certain key words and phrases, a synthesis of the passage's teaching and a discussion of the text's contribution to the larger (im)passibility discussion.

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5.2.3.1 Greek text and comparative English translations

(1) UBS Greek New Testament (4th rev. ed.)

²⁴ ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ, οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ ²⁵ οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται προσδεόμενός τινος, αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα· ²⁶ ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προσώπου τῆς γῆς, ὁρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν, ²⁷ ζητεῖν τὸν θεὸν εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὕροιεν, καί γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἑνὸς ἑκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα. ²⁸ ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν, ὡς καί τινες τῶν καθ᾽ ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν.

(2) English Standard Version (ESV)

²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in temples made by man, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything. ²⁶ And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, ²⁷ that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, ²⁸ for 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we are indeed his offspring.'

(3) New American Standard Bible (NASB)

²⁴ The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself

gives to all *people* life and breath and all things; [26] and He made from one *man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, [27] that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; [28] for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His children.'

(4) New International Version (NIV)

[24] The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by human hands. [25] And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything. Rather, he himself gives everyone life and breath and everything else. [26] From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands. [27] God did this so that they would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from any one of us. [28] 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.'

Textual notes

1. Verse 26: The Western and Byzantine texts read ἐξ ἑνὸς αἵματος ("from one blood") in place of ἐξ ἑνὸς ("from one").
2. Verse 27: The Western text reads ζητεῖν τὸ θεῖον ("to seek the divine being") in place of ζητεῖν τὸν θεὸν ("to seek God").
3. Verse 28: B and P[74] read ἡμᾶς ποιητῶν ("our poets") in place of ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν ("your poets").

As the above notes attest, the textual variants are minor, and none of them changes the meaning of the text substantially.

5.2.3.2 Composition (key words and phrases)

ὁ θεὸς ὁ ποιήσας τὸν κόσμον καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτῷ,

After his opening remarks or *exordium* (vv.22-24), Paul begins to declare to the Areopagus what this "unknown God" (Ἀγνώστῳ θεῷ) is like. Paul observed an altar dedicated to Him, and now he uses that fact as his rhetorical starting point. In the verses that follow, he makes several assertions about this God—either directly or by inference—that provide the contours of a Pauline (hence, Biblical) conception of both the divine nature and the God-world relationship. What Paul says, therefore, is immensely informative with regard to discussions surrounding the doctrine of (im)passibility.

The first assertion, contained in verse 24, is that this God made the entire κόσμος and all it contains. Whilst *cosmos* is a Hellenic rather than Hebraic term, the use of it is consistent with Old Testament construals of the all-inclusive scope of Yahweh's creative work. Intertextual echoes can be found throughout the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g., Ge 1:1-2:3; Ex 20:11; 1 Ki 8:27; 2 Ch 6:18; Ps 24:1; Is 42:5) as well as within Greek-speaking Judaism (Ws 9:9; 11:17; 2 Mc 7:23). Conzelman cites Philo's remark (*De opificio mundi,* 2) that, "the cosmos is a whole compounded of heaven, earth, and all that is contained within them" (Conzelman 1987:141). Lioy observes the conceptual connections between Paul's language here and the Song of Moses' depiction of God as the Creator (De 32:6) and possessing the attribute of "greatness" (De 32:3) (Lioy 2013:28).

Contra Greek notions of a demiurge fashioning material creation from preexisting matter, Paul assumes a *creatio ex nihilo* and emphatically underscores the Biblical logic of a single Creator, responsible for making not just some things, but everything that exists through the exercise of His sovereign freedom, wisdom and power (e.g., Is 40:25-28; Jn 1:1-4; Re 4:11). Further, the act of creating

confers upon the Creator an implied universal authority: He is the Lord or master of all He has made. The connection between the two ideas is grammatically reinforced by Paul's use of hypotaxis, by which the second clause in the sentence, "being Lord of heaven and earth", is subordinate to the first, "The God who made the world" and is used in reference to the same subject, "God" (cf. Pardigon 2008:252). This Creator of all is also master of all.

οὗτος οὐρανοῦ καὶ γῆς ὑπάρχων κύριος

The formula "heaven and earth" is a common Hebrew designation for "all things", highlighting the universal scope of the divine rule: nothing is precluded from God's rightful authority. The Old Testament is replete with references to God as "Maker of heaven and earth" (e.g., Ge 1:1; 14:19, 23), and the Greek term κύριος embodies ideas of both power and authority (Foerster 1992:492) as well as ownership (Bietenhard 1976:510; Foerster 1992:487, 493). Paul's use of the term in verse 24 thus highlights God's authority, implying His ownership of all things, an idea with both Old (1 Ch 19:14; Ps 24:1) and New Testament (Ro 11:36; 1 Co 3:21-23; Re 4:11) parallels. This supreme Lord who transcends creation is conceptually cognate to the "Most High" in the Song of Moses (De 32:8; Lioy 2013:28) and elsewhere in the *Tanakh* (Pardigon 2008:259), and He is functionally equivalent to the Supreme Being or Good of higher pagan philosophical reflection (Pardigon 2008:256). Further, His reign is ongoing. Pardigon notes that the use of κατοικεῖ (indicative present) has a gnomic force in the verse, suggesting a permanent state of affairs—that is, God is not Lord only at particular times but perpetually and permanently (Pardion 2008:252-253). This idea, too, has solid Biblical support (Da 4:3, 34; 7:14; Re 11:5).

By inference, God's ownership of the entire *cosmos* and its contents entitles Him to dispose of his creation as He chooses. This theme is explored in both Hebrew

(e.g., Ex 33:19; De 32:39-41; Ps 33:10-11; 115:3; 135:6; Is 14:24-27; Da 4:34-35) and Christian (e.g., Ro 9:19-24) Scriptures, where, for example, the potter-clay relationship is used analogically to portray God's unique prerogatives within this God-world dialectic (cf. Is 29:16; Je 18:1-11). Under the terms of the old covenant, God invoked those rights to vindicate Israel and vanquish her foes (Dt 32:36, 43; cf. Lioy 2013:28), and He will invoke those rights in the future, when He calls all humans to account for their individual responses to the evangel (vv.30-31).

Establishing God's rightful reign over His creation is central to Paul's larger rhetorical aims. In their ignorance (ἄγνοια), the Athenians have worshipped false gods and neglected the one true God. Despite this being an egregious moral breech, God previously overlooked (ὑπεροράω) this ignorance, but He now "commands all people everywhere to repent" and acknowledge His lordship, having "fixed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness" (vv. 30-31). He has the right to demand such a change of heart, mind, will and dispositions precisely because—as Creator and Lord of all—He has the right to demand that His creatures acknowledge His authority and comport themselves in ways consistent with the ethical guidelines He has established (cf. Pardigon 2008:258).

οὐκ ἐν χειροποιήτοις ναοῖς κατοικεῖ

Paul continues his description of the divine being by asserting God's independence of spatial constraints: "He does not live in temples made by man" (v.24). In a city filled with temples to assorted deities and dominated by the Acropolis with its towering Parthenon, this, of course, was a serious indictment. In this, Paul was simply restating the ancient Hebrew acknowledgement that, although Yahweh condescended to make Himself manifest in His temple, this

was not the *locus* of his presence or authority, nor could humans determine that *locus* by constructing shrines (Pardigon 2008:260; cf. Bruce 1971:357). God was too big to contain. In Isaiah 66:1, God is depicted as using heaven as His throne and earth as His footstool, and in Jeremiah 23:24, Yahweh asks rhetorically: "Do I not fill heaven and earth?"

God's freedom from spatial restrictions was not exclusively a Hebrew idea. Conzelman quotes Seneca, Hereclitus and Lucian, who all disavow any notion that God can be contained in sanctuaries made by humans (Conzelman 1987:141). Similarly, Bruce provides a line from a fragment by Euripides (Frag. 968): "What house fashioned by builders could contain the form divine within enclosing walls" (Bruce 1976:9; cf. 1990:382). Paul's point is clear: the one true God is not to be thought of as needing humans to build Him a home, for, as Jipp—echoing Calvin—expresses it, the "entire cosmos is the theater of God's presence" (Jipp 2012: 581).

οὐδὲ ὑπὸ χειρῶν ἀνθρωπίνων θεραπεύεται προσδεόμενός τινος,

This clause is thematically linked with the preceding one. Having asserted God's independence of spatial restrictions, Paul now proceeds to aver God's independence of anything humans might offer Him: "nor is He served by human hands, as though he needed anything" (v. 25a). The οὐδὲ ("nor") connects the clauses grammatically. Paul's line of argument shows how the ideas are conceptually related.

Whilst Bruce sees in this assertion an allusion to the Stoic doctrine that God is the source of life and the Epicurean belief that God needs nothing from us (Bruce 1990:383; cf. Barr 1995:28-29), Pardigon, following Haenchen, argues that sacrifices are principally in view. He notes that the verb θεραπεύεω is used in the

LXX and Greek literature with reference to one's service to the gods or to Yahweh (Pardigon 2008:262). The meaning is this: not only does God not need temples to live in, but He does not need sacrifices to nourish Him. Unlike the thousands of Greek gods requiring offerings for their happiness, the true God is entirely self-sufficient. Lenski's summary is apt: in this text, Paul represents God as the all-powerful Creator, Lord and benefactor "who is absolute and sufficient in himself" (Lenski 1961:725).

Again, Paul is being faithful to the Biblical tradition. The *Tanakh* describes the folly of caring for gods that have to be fashioned by hand, carried about and nailed to the floor and cannot speak, walk or save (e.g., Is 46:1, 6-7; Je 10:5). In contrast, the Old Testament consistently portrays Yahweh as requiring nothing from His creatures for His own existence or happiness. In fact, its more ontologically suggestive texts teach something akin to the Greek idea of God's aseity—the self-existence and self-sufficiency of the divine Being. In 1 Chronicles 29:14-16, King David acknowledges that even the gifts humans give to God come from Him. In Psalm 50, Yahweh, the Mighty One (v. 1), summons the earth to judgement and comes in a tempest and devouring fire to call Israel to account (vv.1-4), rebuking Israel's doxological laxity and reminding the people that He owns every creature on earth (vv. 10-11) and that—were He ever to be hungry— He would not be obliged to inform them of the fact (v. 12). Job 38:1-41:34 provides an image-rich description of God's incomprehensible vastness and ontological stature, a theme developed at length in the latter chapters of Isaiah (40:1-66:24). And Lioy demonstrates how themes of God's sovereign self-reliance play out in the Song of Moses: Yahweh, the Most High, does not need humans for His satisfaction, but they need Him, for He is the "Rock" (De 32:4) who brings about the existence of Israel (vv. 6, 9) and establishes all nations, fixing their boundaries for their benefit (v. 8) (Lioy 2013:28).

Once again, there was support outside the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures in Greek and Roman philosophical literature for God's independence of human service. Philo and Lucretius both taught the divine self-sufficiency. Seneca and Heraclitus stressed that divinity cannot be contained (Jipp 2012:580). And, as numerous scholars have pointed out, in Plato's *Eutyphro* (12E-15E) Socrates discusses whether human service of God is even possible (e.g., Bruce 1990:382; Witherington 1998:525).

Whilst the specific context of verses 24b-25a addresses the fact that God is not in need of human sacrifices (or religious services more generally), the larger implications are difficult to ignore. The God Paul describes to the Athenians appears to be autarchic, autonomous, independent, self-existing and self-sufficient (cf. Barr 1995:24; Jipp 580). This has momentous implications for the (im)passibility discussion. In popular and some scholarly literature, passibilists routinely portray God as desperately longing for human affection, love and trust to make Him happy. When humans do not respond to His overtures, He is heart-broken (e.g., Fretheim 1984:107-126; Hybels 1997:64, 70; Falter 2011:36). There are, indeed, several Biblical texts that represent God as a grieving Creator, unappreciated father and jilted husband that—when read univocally—could lead to passibilist conclusions. However, it is the thesis of this project that these representations are metaphorical, employing anthropomorphic language for rhetorical purposes and not meant to offer an ontology of the divine Being. In order to be interpreted accurately, these passages must be read within the larger context of God's self-disclosure, including ontologically suggestive texts like Acts 17:24-28.

Paul advances his argument one step further. Having stated his case negatively (by disavowing divine neediness) he now states it positively by depicting God as the source of all life.

αὐτὸς διδοὺς πᾶσι ζωὴν καὶ πνοὴν καὶ τὰ πάντα·

Paul spells out in this clause the creation's utter dependence on its Creator. According to Paul, God gives to all (πᾶς) three gifts essential to creaturely existence. The first is life (ζωὴ). Popularly associated with Zeus, ζωη is the most elemental need of living things (cf. Witherington 1998:525). That God is the source of it was the common assumption of the *Tanakh* (e.g., Ge 1-2; Ps 50:7-15; 104:24, 30) and of Greek-speaking Judaism (2 Mc 14:35; 3 Mc 2:9). The Stoics also taught God to be the source of all life (Barr 1995:28). The second gift is breath (πνοή), commonly associated with life, underscoring again God's provision of this most basic of creaturely needs (Ge 2:7; Ps 104:29b; Is 42:5; cf. 2 Mc 7:23). The third, "all" (πᾶς) is all-inclusive, echoing the Biblical witness that God is the source of everything, including all things required by His creatures to survive and thrive (Ps 104:27-30; Ja 1:17). The total and absolute dependence of creation—including humanity—on God is thus asserted.

Conzelmann observes that this tricolon—life, breath and all—was intended to highlight the contrastive ideas that God takes nothing, yet gives all. He notes that this sentiment appears both in pagan (Euripides, Seneca, Lucian) and Hellenistic Jewish (2 Mc 14:35; Josephus) sources (Conzelmann 1987:142). Taken together, verses 24-25 teach that this God cannot be manipulated or cajoled by means of human religious observances to act in certain ways (Pardigon 2008:266). He does not need human devotion. He is not reciprocally related to His creatures nor dependent on them in any way. Instead, they are entirely dependent on His benevolent providence for their existence, protection and care.

ἐποίησέν τε ἐξ ἑνὸς πᾶν ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων κατοικεῖν ἐπὶ παντὸς προωόπου τῆς γῆς,

Although the Western and Byzantine texts read ἐξ ἑνὸς αἵματος ("from one blood") rather than ἐξ ἑνὸς ("from one")—evidently added to eliminate any referential ambiguity—the context is clear that the "one" here refers to the aboriginal human progenitor from which all of humanity descends. The assertion substantiates the Biblical teaching of humanity's biological descent from a common ancestor (e.g., Lk 3:38; Ro 5:12, 15-17; 1 Co 15:21-22, 45-49), exemplifying Paul's belief in Adam and Eve as the original "parents" of the human race (cf. Gartner 1955:229; Marshall 1980:287; Bruce 1988:332; Pardigon 2008:270, 274; Lioy 2013:29).

Paul's assertion was a direct challenge to the Athenian claim they were autochthonous, having sprung from the soil of Attica (Bruce 1971:357; Longnecker 1981:476), and that they were, therefore, superior to other ethnic groups. Bruce suggests this mythological account of Athenian origins is due to their coming to the Attic peninsula in the earliest wave of Greek immigration (the Ionian) and—unlike other Greeks on the European mainland—lacking any tradition of their ancestors' coming to Greece (Bruce 1971:357-358). Paul's insistence on a common human ancestor is calculated to reinforce his argument that all nations owe their existence to God, to whom they are accountable (cf. Witherington 1998:527).

ὁρίσας προστεταγμένους καιροὺς

Scholars divide over whether to understand these καιροὺς ("allotted periods") as seasons of year (so Dibelius 1956:29-34; Bruce 1971:358; Barrett 2002:843-844) or as the times associated with the rise and fall of different nations (so Robertson

1930:288; Gartner 1955:147-151; Harrison 1975:270; Marshall 1980:287-288; Barr 1995:25; Witherington 1998: 526-528; Lioy 2013:29). Whilst the former is a possible parallel to Paul's allusion to seasons in Acts 14:17 (cf. Ps 74:17), the latter interpretation makes more sense in view of Paul's larger rhetorical aims—that is, to teach that the true God, who created all humanity from a common ancestor and rules as Lord over all, providentially determines the ascendency and decline of nations according to His sovereign purposes (cf. Pardigon 2008:273; Lioy 2013:29). Further, this view accords with other Biblical assertions of God's sovereign action in determining national destinies (e.g., De 32:8; Da 2:36-45; Lk 21:24; cf. Is 40:23-24; 45:1-7).

καὶ τὰς ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν,

Following Dibelius, Bruce argued in 1971 that ὁροθεσίας τῆς κατοικίας αὐτῶν ("boundaries of their dwelling place") should be interpreted as the "habitable zones of the earth" (Bruce 1971:358; cf. Dibelius 29-34; Barrett 2002:843-844). However, he later revised his opinion to include the possibility that Paul is referring to national frontiers here (Bruce 1976:10; 1990:283). Jipp thinks convincing answers elusive (Jipp 2012:582) and Bock tends to agree (Bock 2007:566; cf. Conzelmann 1987:142). Both interpretations have Biblical precedent: national frontiers (De 32:8; Ez 16:27; 25:8-11; Da 4:17, 25, 32ff.) and habitable zones (Ps 104:5-9; Jb 38:8-11) are both within the divine purview. However, contemporary scholarship tends to favour the former view (Gartner 1955:147-151; Harrison 1975:270; Marshall 1980:287-288; Barr 1995:25; Witherington 1998: 526-528; Pardigon 2008:279-283; Lioy 2013:29), and the assertion that God ultimately is responsible for determining the geopolitical influence and demarcating the physical boundaries of nations supports Paul's major thesis in the speech that God is both transcendently sovereign over—and intimately involved in—the affairs of humanity.

ζητεῖν τὸν θεὸν εἰ ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν καὶ εὕροιεν,

Verse 27 continues the thought of verse 26, the two forming a single sentence. Pardigon argues that κατοικεῖν and ζητεῖν, being parallel final or epexegetical infinitives, explain the reason God created humans, constituting a twofold "creational mandate"—to "dwell" on the earth and to "seek" God (Pardigon 2008:271-273). He argues against the view that the two infinitival clauses are causally related (i.e., "He made them dwell in order to seek Him"), pointing out the asyndetic relationship of the clauses and the implied independence of the first clause suggested by the *inclusio* formed by the verb κατοικεῖν and the noun κατοικία (2008:272). Less convincingly, he insists the "dwelling" and "seeking" spoken of here have a precise correspondence to "Adam's kingly and priestly" roles in the Garden (2008:273). Bruce argues that what these verses teach is a natural human desire for God by virtue of our being God's offspring (1976:10), an idea that certainly suggests itself, whilst not stated explicitly.

Conzelmann's claim that the seeking here is not a seeking of the heart but an intellectual species of seeking peculiar to the Greeks has not gained much scholarly currency (Conzelmann 1987:144). The Old Testament, of course, is filled with language of seeking and finding God (e.g., Ps 14:2; Pr 8:17; Is 55:6; 65:1; Je 29:13; Am 9:12), and it seems a more defensible strategy to read Paul's speech in light of His familiarity with the *Tanakh* (cf. Barrett 2002; Pardigon 2008; Lioy 2013). Thus, Paul's intent in verse 27 is not to depict a Greek philosophical quest for God (perhaps as part of an apology for natural revelation) but rather, consistent with the rest of this anti-idol polemic, to underscore the gross culpability of the Athenians who—having been created by God and are, thus, responsible to seek Him—have instead turned aside to offensive idols and vain philosophical musings.

The tentative connection between ζητεῖν and εὕροιεν has occasioned a good deal of scholarly attention. That the εἰ ἄρα γε plus a verb in the optative mood indicates uncertainty about whether the seeking will prove successful is frequently noted (Witherington 1998:528; cf. Barrett 2002:844; Pardigon 2008:290). Pervo (2009) opines this conditional clause dramatically portrays the "gap" obtaining between humanity and God and the relative impotence of human efforts to discover Him. The uncertainty is accentuated by Paul's use of ψηλαφάω ("feel" ESV; "grope" NASB). Used only four times in the New Testament (here, Lk 24:39, 1 Jn 1:1 and He 12:18) it generally means to "touch" or "handle" (Bock 2007:556-567). In extra-Biblical Greek and the LXX, however, it has more negative connotations, depicting the actions of a blind man groping his way in the darkness (Ge 27:12, 21-22; De 28:29; Jg 16:26; Jb 5:13-14; 12:25; Is 59:10). The context suggests Paul's use of ψηλαφάω here is pejorative, expressing a spiritual groping after God in an uncertain way (Harrison 1975:270; Bruce 1990:383; Witherington 1998:528-529; Bock 2007:567; Lioy 2013:29-30). Whilst the reason for the groping is not made explicit in this passage, Paul elsewhere describes the spiritual blindness that results from the inveterate human tendency to suppress the truth of God's revelation due to human sinfulness (Ro 1:18-21; 2 Co 4:3-4; cf. Harrison 1975:270). In essence, what Paul appears to be saying in the Areopagita is that any merely human effort to discover the incomparable God, apart from God's self-disclosure, will fail (Lioy 2013:29-30) and, therefore, all pagan religious seeking "proceeds with uncertainty" until such time as the seekers come to an understanding of what God has revealed (Bock 2007:567). Similarly, Lioy agrees with Garrish that the speech teaches God's essential incomprehensibility apart from special revelation, a truth suggested elsewhere in Scripture such as Job 38-41; Psalm 18:11; 89:6-14; 113:4-6; 147:4; Isaiah 40:14; 45:15; 55:8-9; Jeremiah 23:23-24; Romans 11:33-36; 1 Corinthians 2:11-12, 16; and 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16 (Lioy 2013:27).

Verse 27 is a bridge in two important respects. First, as Pervo observes, the uncertainty expressed in 27a about the success of finding God is mitigated by the certainty, asserted in 27b, that God is close at hand (Pervo 2009:438). Second, the ontological discontinuity of God (divine transcendence) which was the focus of verses 24-26 will, with this verse, give way to a consideration of God's relatedness to creation (divine immanence), an idea Paul develops in verses 27b-28.

καί γε οὐ μακρὰν ἀπὸ ἑνὸς ἑκάστου ἡμῶν ὑπάρχοντα.

Paul's description of this autarchic, ontologically distinct Creator and sovereign Lord, who predetermines dynastic periods and national boundaries, tips the transcendence-immanence balance heavily in the direction of the transcendent and might be understood to be teaching, anachronistically, a form of deism. However, in verse 27b, which is syntactically connected to verses 26 and 27a, Paul balances the scales with a comparable emphasis on the divine relatedness, the result being a summary synthesis of the Biblical data related both to God's otherness and relationality.

Paul avers to his audience that the true God is οὐ μακρὰν ("not far") from humans. Some have suggested Paul's language here reflects Stoic ideas and cite Seneca's *Moral Epistle* 41.1 as a close parallel: "the god is near you, he is with you, he is in you" (Bock 2007:567; Jipp 2012:583). But surely it is better to see the basis of Paul's assertion to be the *Tanakh*, whether the Song of Moses (e.g., De 4:7; Lioy 2013), the "New Exodus" material in Isaiah 40-55 (Pardigon 2008; cf. Treat 2014:75-86) or other Old Testament texts that extol God's incomparable closeness (e.g., Ps 139:1-18) . God's proximity to humans is an essential part of the logic of redemptive history. He is not a distant, uncaring God but one who is, instead, near to all who call on Him (Ps 34:17-19; 65:4; 145:18-

20). Throughout the course of salvation-history, God is depicted as "visiting" His people with voices, angels, visions, dreams, fire, clouds and other theophanies—all of which provide the basis for Paul's confident assertion that this unmistakably transcendent Being is also exquisitely immanent (cf. Zemek 1989; Parsons 2008:247; Lioy 2013:30).

It is noteworthy that, as if to match the tone of his new subject matter, Paul shifts to first-person plural pronouns in verse 27a. Pervo believes this is done to eliminate the ethnic barrier between himself and his audience, as if to say: we Jews are no closer to God than you (Pervo 2009:438). Whether this is the case, or whether Paul (or Luke) is consciously or unconsciously mood-matching his language to this theme of God's proximity, cannot be ascertained with any certainty. But the rhetorical effect is pronounced: it invites his listeners to imagine God's nearness.

Witherington notes the irony of the human condition captured by the juxtaposition of the two claims in verse 27: God is omnipresent and thus near to every person, yet humans stumble in the dark in an effort to find Him (1998:529). Taken together, the two claims highlight the tragedy of the human situation in a fallen world.

ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέν,

The fact the ESV and NIV use quotation marks to set off this phrase, whilst the NASB does not, illustrates the difference of opinion surrounding the question of whether Paul is quoting a source or speaking for himself (perhaps in an original fashion; perhaps in allusion to a more or less common saying). Conzelmann agrees with Hommel that Poseidonius is the original source of the triad—"live", "move", "exist". Malina and Pilch believe the tricolon to be a Lukan invention

reflecting a pattern of expression common in the Greek language. Gärtner similarly believes the triad to originate with either Luke or Paul (Conzelmann 1987:144; Malina and Pilch 2008:128; Gartner 1955:195).

A number of scholars believe Paul to be quoting the fourth line of a quatrain attributed to Epimenides the Cretan (Bruce 1971:359; 1990:384-385):

> They fashioned a tomb for thee, O holy and high one—
> The Cretans, always liars, evil beasts, idle bellies!
> But thou art not dead; thou livest and abidest forever;
> For in thee we live and move and have our being

The original Greek text has been lost. The poem is cited in Syriac by the Nestorian bishop Ischodad of Merv (c. 850) in his commentary on Acts and attributed to an address made by Minos to his father, Zeus (Bruce 1990:384-385; Witherington 1998:529-530). JR Harris translated the Syriac back into Greek in 1907 and suggested the quotation might be from Epimenides' poem on Minos and Rhadamanthys, referenced by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives and opinions of eminent philopsohers*, 1.112. Line two of the ode is quoted by Paul in Titus 1:12 (Bruce 1971:359; 1990:384-385; Marshall 1980:288-289; Witherington 1998:529-530; Bock 2007:568; Pardigon 2008:298-305; Jipp 2012:583-584; Lioy 2013:30).

The view that Paul is quoting Epimenides is not without difficulties, however, as the literature has shown. First, Paul does not use the poetic metre or dialect one would expect were he quoting the Cretan (Marshall 1980:289; Pardigon 2008:302). Second, with the original lost, and the Syriac version suspect (Bruce 1990:384), it is impossible to be certain of its connection, if any, to Paul's statement in verse 28a. Finally, Paul does not claim to be citing a source in verse 28a as he does in verse 28b. And whilst ὡς καί τινες τῶν καθ᾽ ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν can be taken to refer back to the tricolon as well as forward to the

quotation in verse 28b, such an awkward phrasing would be surprising and unnatural (cf. Pardigon 2008:301). Given these considerations, it seems prudent to regard the tricolon as originally Pauline or a Pauline allusion to Epimenides or some other commonly known formula rather than a direct quotation. The point is of small consequence for the purposes here. Whether Paul was quoting or not does not materially affect the force of his argument, for if he was quoting, he was doing so affirmatively in support of his thesis that God is near to His creation.

But what, exactly, was Paul's point? Paul's theological stance, in general—and the anti-idol nature of the speech in particular—ought to rule out any pantheistic interpretations (contra Bock 2007:568). Paul was no Stoic, and his argument that humans are in God is exactly opposite the Stoic belief that God is in humans, as others have pointed out (Pardigon 2008:300; cf. Bruce 1990:384; Witherington 1998:529). Pervo detects an ascending order in ἐν αὐτῷ γὰρ ζῶμεν καὶ κινούμεθα καὶ ἐσμέντο, where ζῶμεν ("live") is a faculty shared with all organic beings, including plant life; κινούμεθα ("move") is a faculty shared with the animals; and ἐσμέντο ("have our being") is a capacity enjoyed only by humans (Pervo 2009:438). Although possible, this interpretation appears forced and suffers the additional weakness of relying on an understanding of ἐσμέν that perhaps overemphasises its ontological weight (Pardigon 2008:304). Interestingly, Lenski describes an order in the triad that moves in the exact opposite direction (Lenski 1961:731).

Pardigon signals a better approach. He notes the conceptual, rhetorical and linguistic similarities between this triad and the one Paul uses earlier in his speech: "life and breath and everything" (v. 25b). Both tricolons are central to his anti-idol argumentative aim of demonstrating total human dependence on God (and not vice versa), and both ought to be read in that light. This preserves the rhetorical integrity of the speech and guards against reading into verse 28b a philosophical ontology when none is intended (Pardigon 2008:304). Pardigon,

following Barrett, believes it is proper to conceive of God as the "environment in which we live", but only in a relational sense (Pardigon 2008:305). On this view, the ἐν is understood to mean "by", a position supported by Cadbury and Lake as well as Witherington (Pardigon 2008:300; Witherington 1998:529). The central thrust of verse 28b, then, is to argue that humans are entirely dependent upon the one true Creator and Lord for all things for every dimension of their existence. Essentially, this represents the position of Harrison (1975:271), Bruce (1990:384-385), Witherington (1998:529) and Parsons (2008:247).

That human dependence on God is the central thesis Paul is here advancing is, in the mind of the present author, beyond doubt. What is not so clear is whether ontological considerations may be excluded from this text. Surely there is a very Biblical sense (Ps 139:5-12, for instance) in which God's omnipresence may be conceived as, in the words of James Barr, an "all-encompassing medium", one that "surrounds and envelops us all" (Barr 1995:24). As an extra-dimensional Being, God's being-near-us will look quite different from our-being-near-each-other. Nonetheless, a balanced theology that takes into account the "whole council of God" (Ac 20:27) will give proper weight to God's immanence as well as His transcendence. It will not do to throw out the Biblical baby with the pantheistic (or panentheistic) bathwater. However, regardless of the position one takes on the possible ontological dimensions of verse 28a, Paul's main point is clear: God is near and available to those humans who look for Him, a point he builds upon in verse 28b.

ὡς καί τινες τῶν καθ᾽ ὑμᾶς ποιητῶν εἰρήκασιν Τοῦ γὰρ καὶ γένος ἐσμέν.

The alternative reading, ἡμᾶς ποιητῶν ("our poets") in B and P[74], does not alter the overall meaning significantly. The plural ποιητῶν may indicate that this statement was meant to refer back to the triad of verse 28a as well as anticipate

the following quotation. More likely, however, Paul is using the term because the quotation he is about to cite was attributed to more than one author in antiquity.

The most frequently cited source is the poet Aratus of Soli or Tarsus in Cilicia (b. ca. 310 BC). Referring to Zeus (here, the Supreme Being of Hellenic philosophy, not the mythological head of the Greek pantheon), Aratus wrote in his *Phaenomena*, a hexameter poem on astronomical phenomena, "In every direction we all have to do with Zeus; for we are also his offspring" (Bruce 1971:360; 1990:385; LeGrand 1981:162). A second source known to have made a statement very similar to this was the Assos-born Athenian Stoic philosopher Cleanthes (300-220 BC) in his *Hymn to Zeus* (Robertson 1930:289; Lenski 1961:732-733; Bruce 1998:385). According to Lenski, there is a possible third source for the quotation cited by Chrysostom in this connection: the writer and teacher of rhetoric, Timagenes, of whom little is known (Lenski 1961:733).

Whomever was ultimately the source for Paul's quotation, his use of the line does not imply that he thought it to be inspired but simply that it supported a truth he sought to establish with an audience that would accept its authority (Lioy 2013:30). Paul quoted pagan sources on other occasions as well: a line from Menander in 1 Corinthians 15:33 and, as noted above, a full hexameter from Epimenides of Crete in Titus 1:12. Paul's use of these quotes is not an endorsement of pagan philosophy but, instead, an appeal to sources his audiences would recognise as authoritative to corroborate Paul's theological agenda (cf. Rowe 2011:42).

In what sense may it be affirmed that all humans are the offspring of God? Clearly not in the same sense that Christians enjoy a privileged relationship as God's children (e.g., Jn 1:12; Ro 8:17-19; Ga 3:26; 1 Jn 3:2-3). Harrison correctly delineates between the special status enjoyed by the regenerate—that is, one that requires personal faith in Christ—and the general sense that all humanity

enjoys as God's "offspring" insofar as all have been created by God (Harrison 1975:271).

Paul uses this quotation to set up the final part of his argument: the fact that the Athenians were God's offspring implied an obligation to worship and serve God in acceptable ways. Their idols were offensive to Him, being utterly beneath His dignity. As God's offspring, the Athenians should realise that the divine being is not reducible to material objects or human ingenuity (v. 29). Whilst God overlooked such ignorance in the past, He now summons the Athenians to repent, demanding they change the entire orientation of their lives so as to conform to His righteous standards, having preordained a day when all the world will be called to account by Christ (vv. 30-31).

5.2.3.3 Synthesis of authorial intent

The purpose of Paul's address to the Areopagus was unambiguous. Whilst ostensibly a legal defence of his novel theological agenda, Paul uses the occasion to present a hard-hitting yet skillfully wrought anti-idol polemic calculated to provide clear teaching about the Christian God in both his transcendent and immanent dimensions, condemn Athenian idolatry as unworthy of Him and warn the Athenians to repent in view of God's coming judgement through Christ. More succinctly, Longenecker summarises the theme of the speech simply as the nature of God and man's responsibility to Him (Longenecker 1981:476). Paul achieved his aim through the use of the altar to an "unknown god" as a touch-point, the skillful employment of rhetorical skills and the citation of authoritative supporting material from at least one Greek poet.

In this passage, Paul makes a number of assertions that have immediate and direct bearing on the Christian conception of God's relatedness to the world and,

consequently, to His relative (in)vulnerability to suffering. Specifically, he offers eleven propositions (seven related to God's transcendence and four to God's relatedness) that inform the discussion and invite brief comment. With regard to divine transcendence, Paul states in the Areopagita that: (1) God created all things in heaven and on earth (v. 24a), meaning everything that exists owes its existence to God's determinative will and pleasure (cf. Rev 4:11), (2) God is "Lord of all" (v. 24a), implying His ownership of all things and His sole prerogative to dispose of them as He deems appropriate, (3) God does not live in temples made by humans (v. 24b), implying His transcendence of spatial restrictions, (4) God is not served by human hands, as though needing anything (v. 25a), teaching His autocracy and aseity, (5) God gives to all life, breath and all things (v. 25b), underscoring the all-inclusive extent of God's providence and the scope of the creation's utter dependence on its Creator, (6) God made from one human progenitor all nations to live on the earth and to seek Him (26a, 27a) and (7) God predetermined all national dynastic time periods and geographical boundaries (v. 26b) in ways congruent with His overarching plan and purposes. Collectively, these assertions paint a compelling portrait of a transcendent Creator who is in no way determined by, but instead determines, His creation. Related asymmetrically to humans beings, He does not need them to complete or satisfy the divine self, yet they desperately need Him for their existence and continuance, being utterly and entirely dependent on God for their most basic necessities. Such a God is worthy of reverential awe, ecstatic worship and whole-hearted love, gratitude and obedience. Professing ignorance of Him and worshiping rival gods are, therefore, ethically inexcusable actions, constituting heinous violations of creaturely responsibility.

And yet, this self-existent, self-sufficient Ground of all existence is not a distant deity. Paul states four propositions related to His immanence, completing the picture begun in the preceding verses. Here, Paul asserts that: (1) one of the reasons God created humans was to seek after and find Him (v. 27a), implying

divine invitation to fellowship, (2) God is not far from each one of us (v. 27b), teaching His relational and, likely, ontological proximity, (3) God is so close, in fact, that it can be affirmed that "in Him we live and move and exist" (v. 28a) and (4) all humans are God's offspring (v. 28b) in consequence of their having been created by Him. In offering these theses, Paul balances his previous predications of transcendence and undercuts all accusations that the Christian God is distant, indifferent, uncaring and uninvolved. Whilst clearly not confined to the world, this God is demonstrably involved in the world and concerned particularly for His human creatures. Far from being distant and removed, the God Paul preached was related to His creation in the most intimate ways imaginable.

Having presented to his audience this nuanced portrayal of the divine being, Paul then commands them to "repent" (μετανοέω), a choice entailing a turning away from their current mode of existence toward an utterly new orientation in which God and His kingdom agenda become the central foci of one's life, eventuating in a comprehensive reconfiguring of one's relational, ethical and doxological commitments (cf. Rowe 2011:46; Lioy 2013:32). In a word, Paul calls them to abandon their idolatrous representations of God and embrace a new conceptualisation of deity—one which balances divine otherness and proximity— and a whole new way of life.

5.2.4   Contribution of passage to the (im)passibility discussion

A common strategy among passibilists is to capitalise on certain (primarily Old Testament) texts that ascribe strong pathic responses to God (e.g., Ge 6:6; Ex 4:14; 32:14; Ps 78:40-41, 49; Is 16:11; Je 31:20; Ho 11:1-9, et al.), insist that these attributions be taken at face-value and conclude that God must be construed as emotionally mutable, temporally related, and—according to some passibilists—ontologically determined by His interactions with humanity and

consequent experiences of suffering (e.g., Kitamori, Moltmann, Fiddes, et al.). The problem with this approach is that it leaves out an important step: harmonising the disparate Biblical data so that they present a coherent picture of the divine nature. By eliminating this step, a distorted, imbalanced image of God emerges: one that emphases one element of the Biblical witness (*pathos*) at the expense of the other (ontological uniqueness). The resulting theology is partial and, therefore, skewed—in a word, idolatrous, for it fails to take into account the "whole council of God" (Ac 20:27). True, there are representations of God in Scripture that make Him appear quite humanlike in His pathic expressions, and these must be taken seriously. But there are also numerous texts that emphasise God's essential otherness. These, too, must be taken into account. Ignoring or minimising one or the other is not a hermeneutically sound option. Instead, a responsible approach requires that both data sets be taken together.

Acts 17:24-28 is not only a highly suggestive text in this regard. It is, perhaps, the Bible's *locus classicus* on the God-world relation, the quintessential statement of how God's transcendence and immanence correspond. It provides a glimpse into how the Apostle Paul conceptualised God's relatedness to the world. In his speech, Paul preached a God who was Creator and Lord of all that exists and who is in no respect dependent on His creation for His own life or happiness. Instead, it is He who provides the most elemental realities—life and breath—to every creature. Indeed He gives to His creatures "everything" (πάντα) they need. This God is conceptually far removed from process or open accounts of the divine being emphasising reciprocal relational arrangements whereby God acts and responds as a partner and is, to varying degrees, dependent on His creation to help foster His own becoming (e.g., Schaab 2006:542-566). And it is difficult to imagine how the God depicted in this text can be thought to suffer in a way analogous to human suffering. This impression is reinforced by Paul's assertion, in verse 26, that God steers the course of human history, determining the rise and fall of kingdoms and nations. This God clearly conditions the world. How He

could be said to be conditioned by the world, as maintained in contemporary passibilist accounts, is not so easily understood.

Yet, the God of Paul's Areopagitica is not a distant deity. Instead, He is incomparably close to "each one of us" (ἑνὸς ἑκάστου ἡμῶν). So close, in fact, that Paul can affirm (or approvingly quote a pagan source that affirms) the immediacy of God's ubiquitous presence—an immediacy that is the ground of all life, all movement and all existence. In fact, as Paul makes unmistakably clear in verse 27, it is God's determination to open the door to fellowship with Himself that informs His providential ordering of events in human history, regulating the rise and fall of nations for the express purpose of creating conditions favourable to inculcating human hunger for divine companionship.

In summary, Paul's discourse to the Athenians is important insofar as it models a way to affirm both the incalculable transcendence and inexpressible immanence of God in theological discourse. Equally importantly, the text describes how Paul communicated this understanding of God to a cultured, philosophically trained, polytheistic and pluralistic audience—one not unlike the one twenty-first century conservative evangelicals deal with, particularly in the academic world. Paul did not compromise his message to accommodate Athenian tastes. At great personal risk, he challenged the religious conventions of the regnant Greco-Roman religio-philosophical synthesis and unapologetically elucidated the ontological uniqueness and sole regency of the Biblical God, the exclusivist nature of Biblical truth claims and the inexorable demands that God's Lordship makes on every human life. This God summons all to repentance.

In this respect, Paul's address to the Areopagus is an example for the Church as it carries out its evangelistic and apologetic work in the contemporary world. Whether the ambient intellectual climate is amenable to Biblical conceptualisations of God or not, Paul's example challenges theologians, pastors

and laypeople alike to be unflinchingly faithful to the Biblical text in all its multiplex witness, resisting the urge to subordinate dogmatic formulations to theodical concerns or contemporary philosophical conventions. As was the case with Paul's experience in Athens, the visible fruit of the Church's witness may be comparatively spare, but it shall have proven itself faithful to stewarding the deposit of faith (1 Tm 6:20; cf. Jd 3), thus avoiding the Lord's disapprobation reserved for those who fail to do so (Re 2.14-16; 20-25) and earning the right to say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith" (2 Tm 4:7).

5.3 An exegetical analysis of Hebrews 2:17-18

Hebrews 2 is a critically important and often overlooked resource informing the (im)passibility debate, for it provides a uniquely Christian answer to the question of evil and suffering. Whilst many religious traditions offer solutions to the conundrum of human pain, Christianity alone proposes that God identifies with human suffering in the most intensive and extensive way imaginable: by becoming incarnate and suffering at the hands of other humans and dying as a man. The revolutionary nature of this message must not be minimised. It is central to the evangel and has momentous implications for a Biblical account of divine (im)passibility, for it suggests how it is that God can be essentially impassible yet suffer with and for humanity in the historically particularised events of Christ's incarnation, passion and death.

5.3.1 Background considerations

The text being examined is part of a sustained argument establishing the superiority of Christ to even the most revered elements of second temple

Judaism, including angelic authority, Moses, the law and the old covenant cultus (Lane 1991:liii-lv; 7:445). Hebrews, in fact, contains the longest sustained Christological reflection found anywhere in the New Testament letters (cf. Treat 2014:205), a fact that establishes its indispensibility to a Biblical Christology.

The following sections explore the authorship and date of Hebrews, its date of composition, and its purpose, audience, structure and genre. The text, Hebrews 2:17-18, is then examined with respect to its literary frame, historical setting and structural features. The passage is analysed exegetically by considering its salient lexical and grammatical features, and the author's intent is examined. Finally, Section 5.3.4 describes the contribution the text makes to the (im)passibility colloquy.

5.3.1.1 Author, date and historical context

It is not known who authored the book of Hebrews. The author gives no indication of this identity within the text, and the external evidence is inconclusive. In the Chester Beatty papyri, the text P[46] is included amongst the Pauline letters, just after Romans, reflecting Alexandrian attribution of Pauline authorship in the mid-second century (Attridge 1989:1). Likewise, both Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) and Origen (185-253) attested to Pauline authorship, whilst noting the differences between it and the other Pauline epistles. In the western Church, Jerome (347-429) and Augustine (354-430) championed the view that Paul wrote the work, a view that became the majority opinion (Attridge 1989:2).

Yet there are several reasons to doubt Pauline authorship. These include the following: (1) the elegant, polished style of the book and refined rhetoric is not matched anywhere in the Pauline corpus, (2) Hebrews uses unique vocabulary

absent from the established Pauline writings (Ellingworth 1993:12), (3) the author of Hebrews identifies himself as a secondhand recipient of the Gospel (He 2:3) in contrast to Paul's insistence elsewhere (e.g., Ga 1:12) of having had a firsthand encounter with the risen Christ and (4) the letter develops theological themes (e.g., Christ's high priestly office, His Melchezidekian connection, the interpretation of his redemptive work through cultic categories, etc.) uncharacteristic of Paul's other letters and—conversely—does not use common Pauline categories of thought (Attridge 1989:2). Whilst it is possible some of these differences could be accounted for by the supposition that Paul employed an amanuensis or translator for the work, not all can (e.g., the third), and contemporary scholarship has, therefore, largely dismissed the claim of Pauline authorship (Attridge 1989:2).

But if not Paul, then whom? Tertullian (c. 155-220) attributed the letter to Barnabas (Attridge 1989:3). Much later, Luther (1483-1546) proposed Apollos as the author, a position that has attracted some modern scholarly support (Manson 1948:1-17; LoBue 1956:52-57; Montefiore 1964:9-11; Lane 1997). The facts that Apollos was Jewish, Alexandrian, erudite, "an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures" (Ac 18:24), comport well with what may be surmised of the author based on the work itself, making him an excellent candidate. They are not, however, conclusive. Other possible candidates appearing in the literature include Priscilla, Silvanus, Epaphras and Timothy (Attridge 1989:4-5; deSilva 2004:788). The absence of incontrovertible evidence should make scholars reticent to take too strong a position.

Whilst his identity is impossible to ascertain, the text suggests the author was male (cf. He 11:32), was of Jewish ancestry, had formal education including rhetoric, was acquainted with Greek philosophy and had received thorough exegetical training in the LXX. The author also seems to have been connected to the Pauline branch of the early Hellenist Jewish-Christian movement (Attridge

1989:5). Further, internal evidence (10:32-34; 13:19, 23-24) suggests the author was acquainted with his audience (Attridge 1989:9; Lane 1997:444). Finally, whilst some of the author's themes are idiosyncratic, his theology is consistent with other canonical writings and should be considered authoritative and representative of the early orthodox tradition (Lane 1997:454).

Establishing the date and circumstances of the composition is equally problematic, since these considerations are inextricably linked to the question of authorship. The earliest date would be a few decades following Pentecost and the initial missionary outreach of the Jerusalem church, allowing time for a second generation of believers to be raised up. The uppermost date is tied to the dating of *1 Clement*, ranging between 80 and 140 (Lane 1997:448; cf. Holmes 2006:37-38), since *1 Clement* cites Hebrews (cf. 1Cl 17:1; 36:2-6; 36:3 and He 11:37; 1:3-5, 7; 1:7). Dates for the composition of Hebrews therefore range from 60 to 140 (cf. Lane 1997:448).

Another possible clue to the date of composition appears in the text itself. The fact the letter uses the present tense while referring to the sacrifical cultus (e.g., 7:27-28; 8:3-5; 9:7-8, 25; 10:1-3, 8; 13:10-11) seems to support a pre-AD 70 date, although critics cite post-70 works (Josephus' *Antiquities, 1 Clement, Barnabas, Diognetus*) which refer to the temple and sacrifices in the present tense even after the temple's destruction (Lane 1997:448). More telling, in the mind of the present author, is the fact that no mention is made in Hebrews of the temple's destruction—and the corresponding dissolution of the cultus—when such a mention would significantly bolster his supercessionist agenda (e.g., 7:27-28; 8:3-13; 9:11-10:14). The non-canonical letter of *Barnabas* (16:4), for example, does precisely this. The fact the author did not make reference to this monumental event suggests it had not yet occurred, supporting a date of composition somewhere in the 60s (cf. Bruce 1972:xliii; Hughes 1979:30-31; Lane 1997:448-449; Johnson 2006:39).

That the author was writing to pastorally exhort the flagging faith of disaffected Christians in danger of apostasising is generally affirmed in the literature (Lenski 1969:98; Attridge 1989:21-23; Carson, Moo and Morris 1992:402; Gundry 1994:424; Lane 1997:443-449; daSilva 2004:776-781; DeYoung 2006:48-49; Johnson 2006:33-38; Thompson 2008:8-10, 20-21). That the text was written sometime after the initial proclammation of the Gospel to a second generation of Christians reliant on earlier eyewitness accounts (e.g., 2:3-4) is also widely held (e.g., Attridge 1989:12; Lane 1991:lxii). What remains uncertain are the precise historical conditions under which the letter was written, although various accounts have been proposed.

One of the more creative and compelling proposals comes from William Lane. He believes the evidence favours Apollos as the author, who addressed his exhortation to a predominately Jewish-Christian house church in Rome at the outset of the Neronic persecution, somewhere between 64 (the date of the great fire) and June of 68 (Nero's suicide). The members of this small community had, as yet, to experience the full force of Nero's Draconian measures but were scared and losing heart. Apollos reminds them (10:32-34) of their previous steadfastness in the face of mistreatment (probably a reference to the hardships endured after the Edict of Claudius around 49, when a number of Jews and Jewish-Christians lost their property upon their expulsion from Rome; see Ac 18:2). On this view, the "greeting" in Hebrews 13:24 from "those who come from Italy" is a reference to Aquila and Priscilla (Ac 18:2) or other Jewish-Christians in his present company who had been separated from their friends in Rome as a result of the Claudian edict (Lane 1997:447-449; cf. Johnson 2006:43, who lists nine arguments in favour of Apollonian authorship).

Lane's scenario is admittedly speculative, but it is certainly plausible, and it is likely something very like this that accounts for the historical occasion of the text:

a concerned leader in the Christian movement writes a homiletic exhortation, which distance prevents his delivering in person, to a community of believers, with whom he has acquaintance, who are wavering in their faith due to the threat of persecution. He writes a sermon, since it is meant to be read aloud, but appends some personal notes and a benediction, since it is send in letter form.

5.3.1.2 Audience and purpose

As early as the second century, the Church concluded from the internal evidence that the original audience of Hebrews consisted of Jewish Christians, and the title "To the Hebrews" was amended to manuscripts of the text as a result (Attridge 1989:12; deSilva 2004:776-777). This fact, together with many of the letter's *leitmotifs* (temple, priesthood, sacrificial system, etc.), tend to support the theory the text was written to Hebrew believers (Lane 1991:liv; 1997:445; Johnson 2006:33). Some scholars locate these Hebrew Christians in Palestine (Hughes 1979:19), whilst others suggest Rome (Attridge 1989:10; Lane 1997) or elsewhere (Manson 1948:1-17; Howard 1951:80-91; Bowman 1962:390-414; LoBue 1956:52-57; Montefiore 1964:9-11, 254).

However, a number of scholars since the early nineteenth century have contested the hypothesis the letter was addressed to a distinctly Hebrew group, believing the evidence supports a more ethnically diverse audience (Attridge 1989:11; deSilva 2004:776-778). Scholars who argue along these lines cite a number of considerations in support of their view, including: (1) the relatively late (i.e., second century) identification of the letter with a Jewish audience, (2) the fact that other New Testament Gentile Christian-addressed letters—Galatians and 1 Peter for instance—assume their hearers had the same thorough knowledge of the Old Testament presupposed by the author of Hebrews, (3) the Gentile-like way of reading the Old Testament epitomised in Hebrews, rejecting

the sacrificial cultus whilst respecting its revelatory content and (4) the fact that the author employs some non-Rabbinic exegetical methodology, such as the Greco-Roman "lesser to greater" argument (deSilva 2004:776-778; cf. Attridge 1989:11).

On balance, the present author finds these arguments unpersuasive. The major reason is the pervasiveness of Jewish themes in the discourse. Whilst it is true that other New Testament letters appeal to Old Testament, none does so as consistently and pervasively as Hebrews, in which allusions are woven throughout its rhetorical fabric. For this reason, a Jewish-Christian—or at least mixed Jewish-Christian/Gentile-Christian audience—seems likely (cf. Gundry 1994:423; Lane 1997:445; Johnson 2006:33). In any event, the ethnic makeup of the audience has no material bearing on the argument of the present study. Whether a Jewish, Gentile or mixed community made up the original audience, the Christological focus of the work and the stated reason behind the Son's suffering remain unchanged.

What is beyond reasonable doubt is that the audience was disaffected and in serious danger of lapsing in their faith. This faith community had been introduced to the Christian message through the preaching of the Gospel and miraculous demonstrations of God's power by eyewitnesses to Christ (1:3-4). The new disciples were instructed in Christian doctrine and praxis (6:1-6) and were not put off by the ensuing persecution they endured from their neighbours and society but, instead, endured insults and the confiscation of their property (10:32-34). Now, however, their zeal had cooled (12:3). Some had begun to disassociate themselves from the community (10:25) and others had failed to evince the mature behaviour the author had reason to expect from them (5:12). Collectively, they were in danger of falling away from God's message of salvation (2:1-3; 3:12; 12:3), an eventuality that would bring catastrophic consequences (e.g., 4:1, 11; 6:6; 10:29). They therefore needed to be warned of the dangers such a lapse

invites (2:1-4; 3:7-19; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39; 12:14-29) and be reminded of the rewards of persevering faith and of the surpassing excellence of Christ, His sacrifice and the salvation He guarantees for those who endure (10:35-39; 12:1-4). The author's self-professed "word of exhortation" (13:22) suits these purposes admirably (deSilva 2004:778-781).

5.3.2 Literary context (Hebrews)

The letter to the Hebrews is commonly regarded as the most sophistically argued and elegantly penned document in the New Testament (Attridge 1989:1; cf. Hughes 1979:1; Lane 1997:443; Johnson 2006:15). The prose is refined, exemplifying a mastery of Koine Greek, and the argumentative structure demonstrates the author's proficiency in both Greco-Roman rhetoric and Old Testament exegesis. The vocabulary is extraordinarily varied. Of the 4,942 words comprising the composition, the author uses 1,038 different words. Of these, 154 are *hapax legomena* found nowhere else in the New Testament (Attridge 1989:21; Lane 1991:l; Ellingworth 1993:12; Koester 2001:43). The following sections explore the structure of the letter and its genre, and then examine the setting and structure of the pericope in which Hebrews 2:17-18 is embedded.

5.3.2.1 Structure and outline

The structure of Hebrews is a cause of ongoing discussion. Scholars typically take one of four approaches in outlining its contents (cf. Johnson 2006:11-15; Lane 1997:450-453). The first is homiletic. Lane notes that the author's description of his letter as a "word of exhortation" (13:22) is code within Hellenistic-Jewish and early Christian circles for the preaching that would occur after the public reading of Scripture in a synagogue or church service (cf. Ac

13:15 with Ac 13:16-41). Research has shown these homilies to follow a common threefold pattern of *exempla* (e.g., evidence by way of Biblical citations, exposition, and examples from real life), a conclusion (practical application to the current situation inferred from the *exempla*) and a final exhortation. Often in longer sermons, this threefold pattern was repeated in cyclical fashion, and Hebrews appears to be an example of such a homily (Lane 1997:450).

A second approach is thematic. This focuses on the individual topics being discussed at various points in the discourse and simply outlines where they occur in the work (Johnson 2006:11). The subdivisions are merely descriptive, listing the work's themes, but do not attempt to show the argumentative flow of the discourse or the connections between themes. Bruce takes this approach, identifying eight major divisions and fifty subdivisions in the letter (Bruce 1972:lxiii-lxiv).

A third approach is rhetorical. Hebrews presents a sustained and complex argument as it seeks to persuade and elicit a positive response from its auditors. Some scholars analyse it from this standpoint, appealing to the works of ancient rhetoricians like Aristotle, Ouintilian, Dio Chrysostom and Cicero to understand Greco-Roman rhetorical principles (Lane 1997:450-451; Johnson 2006:12-15). Scholars therefore examine the sermon for rhetorical devices such as *inclusio, responsio*, *synkrisis,* anaphora, repetition, parallelism and "hook words" connecting one section to another (Lane 1997:451). They also evaluate the specific arguments using the threefold typology of *logos* (appeals to reason), *pathos* (appeals to feelings) and *ethos* (appeals based upon the credibility of the rhetorician and others mentioned in the speech) (Johnson 2006:14). And, using Aristotle's threefold classification of speeches (forensic, deliberative and epidictic), they approach Hebrews as a speech sharing features of deliberative and epidictic rhetoric as it instructs and seeks to persuade its hearers to take a specified course of action. Analysing the letter rhetorically yields a fivefold

arrangement: (1) exordium (1:1-2:4), (2) proposition (2:5-9), (3) arguments (2:10-12:27), (4) peroation (12:28-13:21) and (5) postscript (13:22-25) (Johnson 2006:13; cf. Attridge 1989:14-20; Lane 1997:451). DeSilva (2000) and Thompson (2008) represent scholars favouring a rhetorical approach.

A fourth approach is discourse analysis, attending to the lexical and linguistic interconnections and the unit boundaries occurring throughout the work (Johnson 2006:12). The goal is to understand the meaning of the individual paragraphs as the basic building bocks of meaning. It therefore concerns itself with the semantic cohesion of individual sections and the functional role these play in the development of the overall discourse. It analyses the various literary devices and shifts in genre but does not concern itself with the historical or social factors that might have informed the work (Lane 1997:451-452). A discourse analysis of Hebrews might look like this: (1) Thematic introduction (1:1-4), (2) Point 1 (embedded discourse, 1:5-4:13), (3) Point 2 (embedded discourse, 4:14-10:18), Peak (embedded discourse 3, 10:19-13:19), (5) Conclusion (13:20-21) and (6) *Finis* (13:22-25) (Lane 1997:454). This approach has noted a chiastic structure to Hebrews, such that the book's arguments form concentric circles around a central point—Hebrews 8:1. Johnson gives a description of the structure in his commentary on the book (2006:12). Craig Koester (2001) also exemplifies this approach.

Each of these approaches has its merits. Insights from all four are included in the analysis in Section 5.3.3. For organisational purposes, this dissertation makes use of the outline developed by William Lane, in a slightly edited form (Lane 1991:viii-ix, cii-ciii; 1997:455):

I. The revelation of God through His Son (1:1-2:18)
  A. God has spoken His ultimate word in His Son (1:1-4)
  B. The transcendent dignity of the Son (1:5-14)

C. *First warning*: the peril of ignoring the Son's Word (2:1-4)

D. The humiliation and glory of the Son (2:5-9)

E. The solidarity of the Son with the human family (2:10-18)

II. The high priestly character of the Son (3:1-5:9)

A. Worthy of our faith because He is a faithful Son (3:1-6)

B *Second warning:* the peril of refusing to believe God's word (3:7-19)

C. Rest as Sabbath celebration for the people of God (4:1-14)

D. Worthy of our faith because He is a compassionate Son (4:15-5:10)

III. The high priestly office of the Son (5:11-10:39)

A. *Third warning*: the peril of spiritual immaturity (5:11-6:12)

B. A basis for confidence and steadfastness ((6:13-20)

C. Melchizedek, the royal priest (7:1-10)

D. Jesus, eternal priest like Melchizedek (7:11-28)

E. Sanctuary and covenant (8:1-13)

F. The necessity for new cultic action (9:1-10)

G. Decisive purgation through the blood of Christ (9:11-28)

H. Christ's single, personal sacrifice for sins (10:1-18)

I. *Fourth warning*: the peril of disloyalty to Jesus (10:19-39)

IV. Loyalty to God through persevering faith (11:1-12:13)

A. The triumphs of perseverance in faith (11:1-40)

1. In the antediluvian era (11:1-7)

2. In the patriarchal era (11:8-22)

3. In the Mosaic era (11:23-31)

4. In subsequent eras (11:32-40)

B. The display of the necessary endurance (12:1-13)

V. Orientation for life as Christians in a hostile world (12:14-13:25)

A. *Final warning*: the peril of refusing God's gracious word (12:14-29)

B. Life within the confessing community (13:1-25)

    1. Pastoral precepts (13:1-6)

    2. Communal directives (13:7-19)

    3. Closing doxology (13:20-21)

    4. Personal note (13:22-25)

5.3.2.2 Genre

Lane points out that the canonical ordering of the New Testament documents groups Hebrews in with the letters (1997:449). However, he goes on to note what other scholars have pointed out: it lacks the conventional prescript, opening prayer and expression of thanksgiving or blessing—all of which are common to first century Greco-Roman epistolary literature (Lane 1997:450). The way the document begins provides a clue to its genre: the dramatic periodic sentence, designed to arrest the hearer's attention and introduce its theme, is characteristic of a homily or sermon. Contemporary scholarship supports this conclusion (e.g., Attridge 1989:14; Carson, Moo and Morris 1992:391; Lane 1997:449-450; Johnson 2006:10; Thompson 2008:10-13).

As a sermon, the text lends itself to the various types of analysis discussed in the previous subsection: discourse, rhetorical, sermonic and thematic. Each approach has its strengths and weaknesses, and a careful exegesis will seek to incorporate the insights of each to obtain a comprehensive picture of the book and its individual parts. It will also be sensitive to the juxtaposition of didactic and paraenetic elements throughout the composition, a salient feature of the book. This dialectic of instruction and exhortation forms a recurring pattern throughout the work. The back-and-forth thesis/paraenesis structure is traced by Lane as follows (1997:455):

1. Thesis 1 (1:1-1:14)
2. Paraenesis 1 (2:1-4)
3. Thesis 2 (2:5-18)
4. Paraenesis 2 (3:1-4:14)
5. Thesis 3 (4:15-5:10)
6. Paraenesis 3 (5:11-6:12)
7. Thesis 4 (6:13-10:18)
8. Paraenesis 4 (10:19-39)
9. Thesis 5 (11.1-40)
10. Paraenesis 5 (12:1-13)
11. Paraenesis 6 (12:14-13:25)

5.3.2.3 Literary unit (Heb 2:5-18) and pericope (Heb 2:14-18)

The verse under consideration is part of the author's initial set of arguments regarding the superiority of Christ. Having established that God has spoken to humanity preeminently through His Son, who is the ἀπαύγασμα ("radiance") of His glory and χαρακτὴρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ ("exact imprint of His nature"; 1:1-4), the author proceeds to argue for the incomparable excellence of Christ, whose exalted status exceeds that of angels (1:5-14). This leads to the first of his five warnings in the letter (2:1-4): pay closer attention to the message heralded by the Son so as not to παραρυῶμεν ("drift away") from it. For if violations of the old covenant announced by angels—whom he has shown to be inferior to the Son—occasioned severe retribution, how much worse shall it be for those who τηλικαύτης ἀμελήσαντες σωτηρίας ("neglect such a great salvation"; cf. McAffee 2014)?

This sobering warning sets up the verses to follow. Broadly, in verses 5-9, the author discusses the humiliation and subsequent glory of the Son by means of a

Christological reinterpretation of Psalm 8 (2:8b-9). Then, in verses 10-18, he reflects on the solidarity of the incarnate Son with humanity, highlighting Jesus' suffering—an experience He shared with His human family, including those to whom this letter is addressed.

5.3.2.3.1 Historical setting

The members of the community to whom the author wrote were facing the threat of renewed persecution and were, in consequence, discouraged and tentative in their faith, wavering on the brink of apostasy (Lane 1991:lxi; 1997:445-446; Johnson 2006:36-38; cf. Ellingworth 1993:78-80). The author describes in 10:32-34 how they had previously faced public reproach, affliction, imprisonment and the confiscation of their property. In 12:4, the writer intimates that "the shedding of blood" might potentially be in their future (DeYoung 2006:48). As a result, some members had disassociated themselves from the group, and the remaining believers were demoralised (Lane 1991:lvi-lviii; 1997:446). The historical circumstances, therefore, called for strong action. The writer responds by addressing the community's needs with a rhetorically powerful array of warnings, reminders, encouragements, rebuffs and teachings calculated to support their flagging faith and persuade them to stand firm against the temptation to renounce their commitment to Christ. A number of these rhetorical strategies are employed in the unit to be examined as will become evident through an analysis of its overall structure and compositional makeup.

5.3.2.3.2 Structure

The literary unit, Hebrews 2:5-18, is bracketed by means of thematic *inclusio* in verses 5 and 16 (Lane 1991:44; cf. Koester 2001:234):

Verse 5:   οὐ γὰρ ἀγγέλοις ὑπέταξεν

Now it was not to angels that God subjected

Verse 16:   οὐ γὰρ δήπου ἀγγέλων ἐπιλαμβάνεται

For surely it is not angels that He helps

In addition, Cockerill notes a frame for the entire first section of the letter (1:1-2:18) through the alliterative use of π in 1:1, where five words begin with π—Πολυμερῶς, πολυτρόπως, πάλαι, πατράσιν, προφήταις—and 2:18, where three such words appear—πέπονθεν, πειρασθείς, πειραζομένοις (Cockerill 2001:152). These devises signal the integrity of this block of material and set it off from the author's subsequent reflections on the high priestly character of the Son (3:1-5:9). It will be helpful to look at the unit in sufficient detail to set up the exegesis of 2:17-18 in Section 5.3.3.

The unit comprises two pericopae. The first, verses 5-9, continues the author's reflections begun in verses 1-4 on the supremacy of the Son vis-à-vis angelic beings but changes genre, from exhortation to a homiletical midrash on Psalm 8:4-6 (Lane 1991:43). This block reinterprets the psalm in Christological terms, demonstrating how Christ—as the prototypical new man and on behalf of humans—has fulfilled the psalm's prediction of human dominance over creation. The author concedes we do not see πάντα ὑποτεταγμένα ("everything in subjection") to humanity at the present time. However, we do see Jesus, temporarily made lower than the angels yet now crowned with δόξῃ καὶ τιμῇ ("glory and honour"). Christ's exaltation followed on the heels of His humiliation, culminating in τὸ πάθημα τοῦ θανάτου ("the suffering of death"), an event required in order to παντὸς γεύσηται θανάτου ("taste death for everyone").

The author's Christological reinterpretation of the psalm advances his pastoral goal of assuaging his auditor's dissonance due to the renewed persecution facing them by resituating the Passion narrative within a larger eschatological

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framework. Christ's death, far from being an ignominious defeat at the hands of sinful men, was a critical element in the outworking of God's redemptive plan. The Son—the effulgence of the divine glory and imprint of God's very nature (1:3)—was willing to do something utterly shocking and decidedly un-Godlike: He became lower than the angels He created (DeYoung 2006:44). And because He was—in His incarnate state—willing to endure suffering and death, He was exalted to a place of glory and honour.

The second pericope, verses 10-17, builds on the author's previous reflections (v. 9) relative to the relationship between Jesus and suffering. His aim is to demonstrate why it was entirely "fitting" for God to make the Son τελειῶσαι ("perfect") through suffering. This is a critically important theme. The frequent use of τελειόω is one of the distinguishing marks of this epistle. Of the twenty-three occurrences of the verb in the New Testament, nine appear in Hebrews (2:10; 5:9; 7:19, 28; 9:9; 10:1, 14; 11:40; 12:23) (Ellingworth 1993:161-163). In what respect may it be said that Jesus was made perfect through His sufferings? Ellingworth helpfully distinguishes the six ways τελειόω is used in each of these verses (telic, cultic, ethical, maturing, completing and dying), concluding that its meaning in 2:10 incorporates telic, cultic and ethical dimensions, teaching that Christ was equipped for His ministry as high priest in order to atone for the people's sins and open the way for them to approach God in true worship (Ellingworth 1993:163). Cockerill speaks for the majority scholarly view by defining Christ's "perfection" in vocational terms (Cockerill 2012:138, 140, 150; cf. Bruce 1972:43-44; Peterson 1982:73; Lane 1991:57-58; DeSilva 2000:121; DeYoung 2006:46-47; cf. McCruden 2002; Simisi 2012). Bruce distills the meaning simply: the perfect Son of God became the perfect Savior (Bruce 1972:43).

Because of His willingness to taste death for us, Christ is referred to as the ἀρχηγὸν ("founder", "captain" or "pioneer") of human salvation, going before

believers through death into glory (v. 10). In verse 11a, the author makes the identification of Christ with humanity explicit by avowing they "all are of one" (ἐξ ἑνὸς πάντες; "all have one source"). Arguing that Christ is not "ashamed" to refer to humans as brothers (v. 11b), he then quotes three verses that support the fraternity thus implied: Psalm 22:22, Psalm 18:2 (or Isaiah 8:17 or 12:2) and Isaiah 8:18 (vv. 12-13), before returning to his main point of the Son's solidarity with the human race. He asserts in verse 14 that, because the children have "flesh and blood", he partook of the same so that, through death, he might destroy the devil, thereby releasing humans from their lifelong enslavement to their fear of death (v. 15). The author makes a brief excursus clarifying that it is the "offspring of Abraham", not angels, that are the objects of His assistance (v. 16), before, once again, returning to his main point. What he writes next is the subject of a more detailed analysis, below.

5.3.3 Analysis of Hebrews 2:17-18

The analysis thus far has examined the pertinent background information (author, date, historical context, audience and purpose) and literary context (structure and outline, genre) for the epistle to the Hebrews. It has also explored the historical context and structure of the literary unit, Hebrews 2:10-18. It now remains to analyse the composition of the final two verses of the unit, verses 17-18. First, the Greek text (UBS 4th rev. ed.) is presented. Three accompanying English translations (ESV, NASB and NIV) are provided, followed by an analysis of the key words and phrases. Finally, a synthesis of the author's intent is given together with a concluding discussion of the text's contribution to the larger (im)passibility discussion.

5.3.3.1 Greek text and comparative English translations

(1) UBS Greek New Testament (4th rev. ed.)

[17] ὅθεν ὤφειλε κατὰ πάντα τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ὁμοιωθῆναι, ἵνα ἐλεήμων γένηται καὶ πιστὸς ἀρχιερεὺς τὰ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, εἰς τὸ ἱλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ λαοῦ. [18] ἐν ᾧ γὰρ πέπονθεν αὐτὸς πειρασθείς, δύναται τοῖς πειραζομένοις βοηθῆσαι.

(2) English Standard Version (ESV)

[17] Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. [18] For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

(3) New American Standard Bible (NASB)

[17] Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. [18] For since He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.

(4) New International Version (NIV)

[17] For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. [18] Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

5.3.3.2 Composition (key words and phrases)

ὅθεν ὤφειλε κατὰ πάντα τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς ὁμοιωθῆναι,

The ὅθεν ("therefore" or "hence") signals to his auditors that the author is going to draw an inference from the point he has just made. In verses 14-16, He has argued that, because τὰ παιδία ("the children") share αἵματος καὶ σαρκός "flesh and blood", it was necessary for the Son—the eternal radiance of God's glory and precise expression of His nature, upholding the cosmos by the word of His power—to undergo a kind of "change" so that He, too, could experience life in a material body in space-time for the purpose of setting the human family free from their collective fear of, and enslavement to, death (DeYoung 2006:44). Now, in verse 17, the author clarifies that Christ had to be made human in every way so that He might become a high priest who can truly identify with—and provide effective help to—the people. The inferential particle ὅθεν is used six times in Hebrews but never in Paul's writings (Lenski 1966:92; Lane 1991:64). Essentially, its use here completes the argument the author began in verse 10 regarding the "fittingness" or appropriateness of Christ's incarnation and suffering (v. 10).

Christ ὤφειλεν ("had to") ὁμοιωθῆναι ("be made like") His brothers. No other means would suit the purpose. God determined to vocationally "train" His Son to be a high priest who could completely identify with the sufferings and weaknesses of humanity and present the final sacrifice to atone for their sins (cf. Lane 1991:57-58; Cockerill 2012:138, 140, 150). This is the way it had to be done. The κατὰ πάντα ("in every respect") occupies the emphatic position in the clause and expresses the extensiveness of Christ's solidarity with the people. It was not a partial semi-docetic resemblance to humanity. It involved a full and complete "taking on" of all that it meant to be human (Attridge 1989:94). Comprehended within the scope of the "in every respect" is the fact of incarnate

existence (v. 14) together with the sufferings concomitant with such an enfleshed existence (v. 10).

The "brothers" (ἀδελφοῖς) harkens back to verse 11a, where Jesus is said to share with the human family "one source" (lit., "out of one": ἐξ ἑνὸς) with the human family and verse 11b, where he willingly refers to us as his "brothers". He is οὐκ ἐπαισχύνεται ("not ashamed") to claim humanity's familial link to Himself. This denotes Christ's closest possible identification with humanity.

ἐλεήμων γένηται καὶ πιστὸς ἀρχιερεὺς τὰ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν,

This purpose clause (the first of two: ἵνα … here, and, in 17c, εἰς …) makes explicit the logic behind Christ's incarnation and death: to become a high priest characterised by two important qualities—that is, mercy and faithfulness. The two qualities are discussed later in the sermon. That Christ is "merciful" (ἐλεήμων) is examined in 4:14-16, where the Son is described as being sympathetically available to them, ready to show mercy and give χάριν εὕρωμεν εἰς εὔκαιρον βοήθειαν ("grace to help in time of need"). The theme is taken up again in 7:25, where Christ, the high priest, πάντοτε ζῶν εἰς τὸ ἐντυγχάνειν ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ("always lives to make intercession for them"). These assertions serve an important pastoral function, assuring his hearers that the one who represents them before the Father in a priestly capacity is not unfeeling but marked by the most intimate understanding and compassion, due to His first-hand acquaintance with suffering and temptation (Lane 1991:114-115).

That Christ is "faithful" (πιστὸς) is developed in the next section of the epistle (3:1-6), where the author favourably compares the faithfulness of Jesus as a son ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ ("over God's house") to that of Moses, who was faithful as a servant ἐν ὅλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ ("in all God's house"). Christ showed Himself

faithful by enduring until the end all the temptations and sufferings common to humanity, yet without sin (cf. He 4:15). This fact, again, has immense pastoral value. Because Christ remained steadfast throughout His persecution and testings, He is able to be of encouragement and assistance to those vexed by the same trials. The point is this: Christ can be trusted, having demonstrated— *par excellence*—His trustworthiness (Bruce 1972:52). The description of Christ as a "faithful" priest might well have called to mind for the community 1 Samuel 2:35, in which God promises to one day "raise up a faithful priest…and build for him a faithful house" (Attridge 1989:95; Lane 1991:65). In fact, the author's emphasis in the next six verses on "faithfulness", a "house", and on God being the "builder" makes this connection quite likely (cf. deSilva 2000:120).

The ἀρχιερεὺς ("high priest") motif, introduced here and unique to the book of Hebrews, is central to the author's argument (Ellingworth 1993:183-188). The author continues the theme in 4:14-5:10 and 6:20-7:28, where Christ's priesthood "in the order of Melchizedek" is explored, and in 9:11-10:18, where Christ's priestly sacrifice is explicated (Attridge 1989:95; Ellingworth 1993:183-186). Hughes notes that Christ could not have represented humanity before God, offering Himself as an acceptable sacrifice, apart from becoming a fellow man, for "representation requires identification" (Hughes 1979:120), a point confirmed by the text (cf. He 5:1).

The τὰ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, in which the accusative is adverbial, may indicate that Christ's high priestly ministry, whilst on behalf of the people, is primarily directed to God, again highlighting Christ's faithfulness as an example the hearers are admonished to emulate. For as the Son learned obedience through the things that He suffered (5:8), so the people are to persevere in their trials—not giving up—but remaining steadfast in their confession of faith (Ellingworth 1993:188). The clause may also reflect the influence of the LXX, as τὰ πρὸς τὸν Θεόν is a

stock phrase in the Penteteuch (e.g., Ex 4:16; 18:19) meaning, "with respect to God" (Attridge 1989:96; Lane 1991:65; cf. Cockerill 2012:149).

εἰς τὸ ἱλάσκεσθαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ λαοῦ.

As this second purpose clause makes clear, the principal reason for Christ's assumption of the high priesthood was to make "propitiation", "expiation" or "atonement" (ἱλάσκεσθαι) for the sins of "the people" (τοῦ λαοῦ). Whether ἱλάσκεσθαι should be read as "expiation" emphasising the removal of sin (e.g., Delitzsche 1952:145-150; Lenski 1966:93-96; Attridge 1989:96; Ellingworth 1993:188-189; Thompson 2008:68) or as "propitiation" emphasising the placating of divine wrath (e.g., Hughes 1979:121-123; Morris 1981:30; Lane 1991:66) or as both (e.g., Koester 2001:241; Mitchell 2007:77; Cockerill 2012:151), is a matter of considerable debate. The question hangs on whether the verb is taken to be transitive with τὰς ἁμαρτίας τοῦ λαοῦas as its direct object, or as intransitive with this clause understood to be an accusative of respect ("to make propitiation with reference to the sins of the people") (Hughes 1979:121; Attridge 1989:96). Whilst God's wrath and judgement are recurrent background themes in the letter (e.g., 2:1-3; 3:16-19; 4:11-13; 10:26-31; 12:25-29), the fact that the dominant idea in high priestly atonement was the removal of the people's sin (cf. He 1:3; 9:11-14; 10:23-28)—not the placating of God's anger—makes "expiation" a better choice.

ἐν ᾧ γὰρ πέπονθεν αὐτὸς πειρασθείς, δύναται τοῖς πειραζομένοις βοηθῆσαι.

Verse 18 completes the argument of the pericope establishing the Son's solidarity with the human family and His consequent qualification for the high priesthood. In His high priestly office, Christ is qualified to "help those who are

being tempted" (τοῖς πειραζομένοις βοηθῆσαι) precisely because He Himself "has suffered when tempted" (πέπονθεν αὐτὸς πειρασθείς).

The incarnation exposed the Son to the all the irritations, difficulties and hardships common to human existence in addition to the persecutions associated with the message He heralded and to the peculiar trials related to His role as Savior (cf. Attridge 1989:96). He became acquainted first-hand with the pain of rejection, loneliness, acute physical suffering and abject misery (e.g., Mt 26:38-40, 67-68; 27:27-50; par.). Yet Jesus endured these trials steadfastly, crying out to God with loud cries and tears (He 5:7-8), not turning away from the purpose to which the Father called Him. His agonising ordeal in the garden of Gethsemane, resulting in His accepting the cup of suffering from the Father (Mt 26:39, 42; par.) and His "suffering of death" (He 2:9) constituted the final act of filial obedience in a life dedicated to fulfilling the Father's will (cf. Attridge 1989:96). This narrative of resolute faithfulness in the midst of persecution and pain provides the author of Hebrews with an immensely rich resource for funding the hope of his readers (cf. 4:14-15; 5:2, 7-8). Because the Son endured suffering and did not falter, He is the quintescential model for them to follow, a source of solace in their pain and a powerful patron to help them through their temptations.

The "help" this high priest offers underscores this thought. Βοηθέω ("run to the cry") comprehends a few related ideas: to help, to succor, to bring aid (Thayers 1889:104; Moulton and Milligan 1960: 113; Büchsel 1964:628). In the immediate context, Delitzsch likes "succor", whilst Hughes sees a combination of forgiveness of past defeats coupled with His power to overcome present temptations (Hughes 1979:124). Morris and deSilva prefer a kind of sympathetic responsiveness (Morris 1981:30; deSilva 2000:120-121). As deSilva notes, having gone further in His own testing and hardship than His "brothers", this high priest stands ready to provide whatever resources they might require to resist

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their particular temptation (deSilva 2000:121). All of these are contextually possible.

The historical context favours interpreting πειρασθείς as "tested" rather than the more generic "tempted", although the trials referred to here can certainly include the latter (cf. Atttridege 1989:96; Ellingworth 1993:191; Koester 2001:241-242; Cockerill 2012:151; cf. Sesseman 1968:23-36). Translating it as "tested" emphasises the unique religious significance of the trials borne and connects the testings of his current audience with those of the faithful Old Testament saints whose test-proven faith was richly rewarded (e.g., He 11:17). These are not just hardships, they are divine "tests" that provide opportunities to demonstrate fidelity, courage and faith under pressure (cf. De 8:2-3; 1 Ch 28:17; Ps 66:10; Je 17:10).

The author will later make the argument that God treats all Christians as sons whom He disciplines, reproves and chastises out of love (12:5, 6). Such discipline is momentarily "painful" (12:11) yet is intended "for our good" and necessary to our growth in holiness (12:10). Such suffering is an essential part of God's "training" programme (12:11). Because this is the case—so the author argues—his hearers should avoid becoming "weary" and "fainthearted" but, instead, fix their eyes on Jesus, "the founder and perfecter of [their] faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (12:2). Bruce reflects on what a rich source of strength this must have been for the hearers, knowing that they had a champion and intercessor in the very presence of God—One who victoriously resisted greater testings in His lifetime and has subsequently assumed His place of glory and honour (Bruce 1972:53).

5.3.3.3 Synthesis of authorial intent

As noted in Section 5.3.1, the purpose of this text is pastoral: it is a word of exhortation addressed to a community of believers experiencing disaffection and discouragement (Attridge 1989:21; Lane 1991:lxi; cf. Ellingham 1993:78-80). Written by a skilled rhetorician and pastoral theologian, the entire work seeks to persuade the disheartened believers to hold firm to the faith and faithfully endure the trials they are currently undergoing and likely to face in the future. To do so, the author employs an array of rhetorical strategies—warnings, historical examples, Scripture, encouragements, comparisons, shaming, etc.—as he weaves together didactic and paraenetic elements into a complex homily.

The paraenesis of Hebrews may usefully be summarised under two headings: negative and positive. Attridge notes the presence of two hortatory subjunctives in the paraenetic transition of 4:14-16: "let us hold fast" and "let us approach". These, he argues, epitomise the negative and positive aspects of the letter's exhortation (Attridge 1989:121; cf. Ellingworth 1993:78-80). Negatively, there is a conservative emphasis within the discourse. The author urges his listeners to "not slip away" (2:1), "hold on" (4:14; 10:23) and demonstrate "endurance" (10:36; 12:2, 7). Like "let us hold fast", these essentially urge a maintenance of the confessional and praxeological status quo. Positively, the author exhorts his auditors to take steps to cement their continued commitments: "strive to enter" (4:11), "go on to maturity" (6:1), "run the race" (12:1) and "go forth" (13:13). Like "let us approach", these evince a dynamic quality, urging additional action on the community (Attridge 1989:21-22). Together, these exhortations are calculated to passionately and persuasively challenge, educate, provoke, cajole and encourage the community to maintain their Christian confession against every temptation to renege on their commitments (Lane 1997:453).

The didactic element of Hebrews serves its paraentic function (Lane 1997:453). This observation is not intended to denigrate the imaginative scope or creative theological resourcefulness of its author but to underscore the pastoral nature of the letter's argumentative aims (Attridge 1989:21). The Christology of the letter is especially noteworthy. In the text under consideration, there are two particularly suggestive titles applied to the Son: "founder" (v. 10) and "high priest" (v. 17). First, Jesus is portrayed as the "founder" or "pioneer" of our salvation—the One who goes before the people into the heavenly sanctuary (9:11-15) through suffering and death (2:9, 10) and into glory (v. 9). His earthly life serves as an inspiring model to imitate and inspire courage. And His present heavenly session assures believers of His constant availability to make intercession on their behalf and render sympathetic assistance in time of need (4:15-16; 7:25). Second, Jesus is the Christian's high priest, who was "fully equipped" for His office by means of the sufferings He endured (Lane 1991:57-58). The eternal, transcendent Son (1:3) did the unimaginable: making Himself "lower than the angels", He entered creaturely space-time existence and "partook" of human flesh, making Himself passible for a time so that He might "learn obedience" and be made "perfect" as a sympathetic high priest (2:9-10; 5:8). Merciful and faithful (v. 17), He now represents us before the Father, interceding on our behalf and attending to our needs in sympathetic solidarity (4:14-16). Together, these titles present a compelling figure: a compassionate, trustworthy Savior who—having resisted sin, defeated death and destroyed the enemy (2:14; 4:15)—has pioneered what can only be characterised as a "great salvation" (2:3).

In summary, the author's rhetorical intent in 2:17-18 is to present a Christology of such luminous beauty and visceral purchase as to arrest his hearers' attention and compel their continued obedience to their Christian calling. Through the dextrous employment of his considerable homiletical acumen, the author makes a powerful case for the people to endure their current and anticipated hardships by focusing on God's faithful, obedient Son, made their brother and high priest.

Having taken on human flesh and suffered hardships similar to their own without disaffecting, He is sympathetically inclined and fully equipped to aid them.

5.3.4 Contribution of passage to the (im)passibility discussion

Baukham notes the tendency in Anglo-American passibilist reflection to construe the event of the cross as revelatory of God's essential nature (e.g., Bushnell 1866; Dismore 1906; Rashdall 1919; Young 1977), whereas the tendency among theologians following in the *theologia crucis* tradition (e.g., Kitamori 1946; Moltmann 1974; Ngien 1995) is to view the cross as the decisive event of trinitarian passibility (Bauckham 1984:11). However, an analysis of this passage admits of neither possibility. Hebrews teaches that Jesus' suffering was not revelatory but eschatological. It was not an instance of an already existing suffering within the Godhead but, rather, a necessary act in the unfolding of God's redemptive plan, insofar as the experience of suffering vocationally perfected the Son for his merciful high priestly role of identifying with humanity and atoning for sins "once and for all" (10:1-18). The logic of Hebrews thus runs counter to passibilist reasoning.

Rather than disclosing the suffering of God, Christ's sufferings in Hebrews help underscore the radical disparity between the divine life and our own. In Jesus, God the Son had to be made "lower than the angels" in order to experience suffering. The inference is that Christ did not suffer prior to His humiliation and has not suffered since His being "crowned with glory and honour". His suffering was, like His sacrifice, a once-and-for-all event, perfectly suited to accomplish God's eschatological aims. In other words, the argument of Hebrews assumes divine impassibility. Precisely how the eternal, impassible God was able to experience the effects of suffering in Christ is not made explicit in the text. Surely Ellingworth (1993:180) is correct in observing that Hebrews 2:17 contains

material for a two-natures Christology—a doctrine that, like the doctrine of the Trinity, would require a few more centuries for the Church to formulate dogmatically. The resulting Chalcedonian definition offers a coherent, plausible explanation for how Christ could truly suffer as a man without visiting suffering upon the divine nature.

Hebrews 2:5-18 makes a crucial contribution to the (im)passibility colloquy. Ellingworth calls 2:17 a "nerve centre" of the letter (Ellingworth 1993:179), and indeed the whole unit sets forth the most radical of proposals, scandalous in its implications, one that posed insurmountable difficulties to its original hearers, but that—through the over-familiarity that results from repeated exposure—is underappreciated by contemporary believers. It is at the core of an explicitly Christian answer to the problem of suffering: in an act of outrageous solidarity, God, out of love, sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to suffer with and die for suffering humanity as a man, so that, in Christ, it can truly be said the Impassible was made passible.

To assert with passibilists that God feels human pain *qua* God is not nearly as radical as the Christian assertion that God made Himself one of us and experienced our pain *as man*. The passibilist solution is arguably sub-Christian, for it ignores the logic of the incarnation and attenuates the magnitude the God-creation divide and the stupefying originality of the divine answer to human need. This passage bears witness to the genius of God's redemptive programme, whereby the Son assumed a body for the express purpose of living a fully human existence in solidarity with humanity in this broken, pain-filled world. His whole incarnate life was touched by suffering, and He learned obedience through it, taking His pain to the Father with loud cries and tears. Although tempted to sin, He resisted, persevering in humility and obedience at every moment of his life to the end. In so enduring, he pioneered the way each human is to live. And, through His sufferings, He became a sympathetic high priest, capable of

identifying with human suffering and weakness, since He himself experienced these things first-hand. Thus, the passibilist desire for a God who fully identifies with human suffering is fully met in Jesus, the God-man, who in His incarnate life experienced the kinds of suffering humans endure. This fact obviates the need for a God who suffers *in se*, for He has chosen to suffer in a way that is more "fitting" (2:10): as a man.

5.4   A theological assessment of passibilist existential claims

Having analysed two Biblical texts that set the Scriptural parameters for understanding God's ontological transcendence, His way of relating to the world and His chosen means of identifying with human suffering, it is now possible to critically evaluate the more cogent of the passibilist existential claims outlined in Sections 2.6.1 and 4.3. Using these two texts as benchmarks in conjunction with the twin essential conservative evangelical theological commitments delineated in Section 3.4—the transcendence of God and the relationality of God—the five species of argument—devotional, ethical, psychological, apologetic and missional—are now examined in the following sections.

5.4.1   Devotional claims

As previously noted (Sections 2.6.1 and 4.3.1), passibilists insist their accounts present a more accessible, approachable and loving God, making it easier for Christians to relate meaningfully to Him. This makes passibilist construals more devotially advantageous. Further, passibilists insist that the ability to suffer renders God's love more intelligible and God easier to worship. This doxological factor further enhances passibilism's devotional merits. This section examines these claims.

Moltmann, House and Carson have variously argued that a God incapable of suffering is incapable of love (e.g., Moltmann 1974b:17; House 1980:412; Carson 2000:59, 60), insisting that genuine love requires the capacity to share another's pain. This is clearly the case in human relationships, in which a person incapable of forming empathic connections with another is judged to be emotionally deficient. Since love necessarily involves empathic suffering, reason passibilists, a God who loves must be capable of suffering. And since the New Testament closely identifies the divine nature with love (1 Jn 4:8, 16), God must be passible. Understanding Him to be so makes it easier to conceive of Him as loving, which, in turn, facilitates a relationship with Him (e.g., Moltmann 1974b:17; House 1980:412, 414, 415; Bauckham 1984:10, 12; McWilliams 1985:186; Woltersdorff 1987:90; Taliaferro 1989:222; Clark 1992:§3.3; §5.1; Sarot 1996:234, 235, 236; Sia 1996:§7; Ngien 1997:§2; Ware 1998:63; Carson 2000:59, 60; 2003:186, 190).

Three corollary arguments rely on similar reasoning. First, a passible God is easier to think of as personal since, in human experience, individuals judged to be normal possess the ability to share another's pain (House 1980:412, 414; Bauckham 1984:10; Eibach 1990:66-67; Clark 1992:§3.3; §5.1; Sia 1996:§7; Ware 1998:63; cf. Williams 1964:190-192). Second, a passible God is easier to imagine as good, since, in human experience, good persons are invariably troubled by evil (Taliaferro 1989:220; Clark 1992:§4.8; §5.1). Third, a passible God makes better sense of Scripture's teaching that humanity is made in God's image: since humans routinely suffer, it is reasonable to suppose that the One whose image we bear also suffers (Clark 1992:§4.6; cf. Wolterstorff 1987:83).

The problem with each of the arguments outlined above is that they speak univocally of God and creaturely experience, assuming that what is true of human existence applies equally to God. Yet the logic of the first benchmark text,

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Acts 17:24-28, assumes precisely the opposite: because of God's ontological discontinuity with His creation, His experience of reality—including such things as love and creational suffering—must be fundamentally different than humanity's. To predicate suffering of Him because it is endemic to human experience is, therefore, methodologically flawed, as is the attempt to explain His love as inclusive of suffering because the same is true of human varieties of love. No passibilist has advanced a convincing argument to explain why, for example, the eternal intra-Trinitarian love must of necessity involve suffering or why it is not love because it does not.

The historical conservative evangelical emphasis on God's transcendence likewise militates against such facile arguments "from below". Projecting creational categories of experience on the divine being confuses the Creator-creature distinction (cf. Barth 1996:41). It also violates the principle of analogy that—whilst affirming some similitude between objects—simultaneously maintains their dissimilarity, a particularly pertinent consideration when one of the objects is, as in this case, ontologically distinct, unquantifiable and unknowable apart from His self-disclosure.

Further, the doctrine of the Fall renders passibilist univocity all the more untenable, for human existence in the current eschatological stage is not "normal" but, instead, a distorted version of both our aboriginal and final states. The discontinuity between divine and human realms is compounded by human and angelic rebellion and its results. So, not only it there a metaphysical divine-human divide due to creaturely finitude, there is also an existential chasm due to creaturely sin and its resulting distortions. Because God possesses an existence independent of both our space-time restrictions and our sin-infected experience, the attribution of suffering to Him is methodologically problematic.

These objections notwithstanding, passibilists argue their view has a doxological advantage over impassibilist accounts: a God who voluntarily participates in creaturely suffering is more attractive, lovable and worthy of worship than one who does not (Macquarrie 1975:114; Fiddes 1988:146, 267; 2000:172-173; cf. Kitamori 1965:44-45). Again, an appeal is made to human experience: individuals tend to form deeper attachments with those who choose to suffer with them than with those who do not. Therefore, a passible God engenders a greater affection than one who is impassible.

There are two weaknesses in this argument. The first is that it makes the same methodological error described above: the illicit category-conflating attribution of human-to-human experiences to the human-divine relationship. One simply cannot assume that what might be true of human relations is equally true of one's relationship with God since the relational dynamics characterising the two are significantly different. The one is a symmetrical relationship between equals—both finite, both morally flawed and existentially needy. The other is an asymmetrical relationship between unequals—one finite, flawed and needy, the other infinite, perfect and self-sufficient. To treat these very different relations as essentially the same is, therefore, inappropriate.

The second weakness is that the argument collapses the variegated motivation for divine worship into a single doxological category—that is, gratitude for His empathetic identification with human neediness. It falsely assumes that all humans are motivated to worship a God in possession of this attribute, when, in fact, some find the idea of an emotionally vulnerable God repellant and doxologically off-putting (e.g., Creel 1986:123-124, 125-126, 129, 135, 142; Cook 1990:70, 77, 86; Hart 2002:190-191; DeYoung 2010:§6). The assumption is fatally subjective and fails to account for the complex array of variables that comprise a Biblical motivation for worship such as reverent fear, fascinated awe, celebrative praise and profound gratitude for the multiplex range of divine

attributes—from such transcendent qualities as God's aseity, holiness, majesty and omnipotence to His more proximate attributes of love, mercy, sympathy and the like.

Passibilist devotional arguments are unconvincing. And, for their part, impassibilists raise a number of points in support of a non-suffering God. An impassible God, for example, can never be overwhelmed by pain, rendering Him unavailable to help during times of need (Creel 1986:125, 141, 154; Helm 2007:§3; Gavrilyuk 2009:141, 145, 146-147). Instead, God's love for us remains constant, unchanging, not liable to changes of emotional state (Johnson 2001:§1). Because God is not diminished by suffering, He is always available to us (Johnson 2001:§4; Emery 2009:71-72; Helm 2005:§3, §5; 2007:102; Gavrilyuk 2009:140-141; DeYoung 2010:§6; Lister 2013:251; cf. Anselm 1976:58-59; Von Hügel 1926:191, 197-198). Further, because God does not suffer, Christians need not wonder whether, in relieving human suffering, God acts out of self-interest by relieving His own. Impassibility means that God can demonstrate disinterested benevolence and unselfish compassion toward His creatures, entirely free of self-interest (Dodds 1991:332-333; Weinandy 2000:160; 2001:40; Hart 2002:192, 195; Gavrilyuk 2009:140-141).

Impassibilists argue the foregoing considerations are doxologically advantageous, in that the God they portray elicits human awe and reverence in ways a suffering deity cannot. The passibile God, on the other hand, by radically reinterpreting his transcendent ontological "otherness", reduces God to someone humans can identify and sympathise with but cannot fear or worship (Creel 1986:123-124, 125-126, 129, 135, 142; Cook 1990:70, 77, 86; Weinandy 2000:146; 20011:39, 41; Hart 2002:190-191; Heaney 2007:237; DeYoung 2010:§6).

5.4.2 Psychological claims

The most compelling psychological argument made by passibilists is that a co-suffering God provides greater consolation to human sufferers, because the knowledge that God shares human pain makes people feel less lonely and better understood (Moltmann 1974b:16-17; Hick 1979:80-82; Young 1979:102-103; Surin 1983:241, 246; Fretheim 1984:124, 126; Wolterstorff 1987:88; Fiddes 1988:31, 32; Taliaferro 1989:222; Sarot 1996:231, 232-233; Sia 1996:§7; Louw 2003:394, 395; Bush 2008:782, 783; O'Brien 2008:§6; cf. Whitehead 1929:532; Taylor 1998:118-124). The argument is not without merit, as most people have been comforted, at times, by the knowledge that there are others who shared their pain, especially when those others were close at hand to minister words of encouragement and personal presence.

However, there are two considerations that qualify this benefit. The first is the fact that this is not universally the case—there are instances of human suffering when the knowledge that someone shares one's pain exacerbates rather than allays one's suffering. This can happen, for example, when a victim of abuse learns that her sister was victimised by the same perpetrator, compounding her own psychological trauma with tortured feelings of empathy for her sister. Her net sense of loss is thereby increased, not decreased, by the knowledge another shares her suffering. Second, granting for a moment the beneficial effects of commiseration, can it be convincingly argued that this benefit exceeds other forms of solidarity? Commiseration is but one expression of solidarity. There are others, such as companionship, words of encouragement, practical assistance, relief and more. Impassibilists often point out that what individuals most need in their suffering is not commiseration but real relief from their distress (Creel 1986:154-155, 156-157; Bray 1999:§3; Helm 2005:§2; Heaney 2007:174; Adam 2012:354-374; Lister 2013:248). Arguably, a God unhampered by His own suffering is in a better position to provide such relief than One who is potentially

distracted by pain. And so, whilst the knowledge that God suffers with humans may confer psychological benefits on one undergoing pain, it is doubtful that the benefits thus derived exceed those benefits implied in impassibilist contruals.

The two benchmark texts—Acts 17:22-31 and Hebrews 2:5-18—are valuable resources at this point. The first passage assures all humans of God's most intimate presence in all of life's circumstances, including times of suffering—He is "near" to each of us, for "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Ac 17:27). This is a rich source of comfort. Significantly, Paul does not here (nor does the New Testament anywhere) tell us that God, as God, commiserates with human sufferers—an important point for those wishing to espouse a theology rooted in the Biblical witness. Yet the Bible often affirms God's close proximity to, and care for, those in pain (e.g., Ps 34:18; Mt 10:29-31; 1 Pe 5:6-7). The second benchmark text, Hebrews 2:5-18, assures us there is a Christologically qualified sense in which it may be affirmed God commiserates with us. Jesus was made "lower than the angels" to undergo suffering, the experience of which qualified Him to be a merciful and faithful high priest who could fully sympathise with fallen humanity (vv. 9-10, 18). Thus, whilst God does not co-suffer with us *qua* God, He did, in Christ, suffer *qua* man, which is better, for it assures us His suffering is truly akin to human suffering and not some *tertium quid* (Dodds 1991:334; DeYoung 2006:49, 50; 2010:§7; Heaney 2007:174, 175, 178). The orthodox doctrine that God, in the person of Christ, suffered—per a Chalcedonian two-nature Christology—eliminates the need for a God who suffers *en se*.

A final question worth raising in this connection is whether or not a passibilist account provides a solid basis for hope in a future free from pain. Lee and Fiddes insist that divine passibility and eschatological renewal are mutually compatible, and that we can, therefore, be sanguine about the prospects of one day living in a universe without suffering (Lee 1974:86-87; Fiddes 1988:31, 32; cf. Williams 1969:193-194). But it is difficult to reconcile the two propositions, for if God has

taken suffering into His own eternal being, on what basis may we suppose there will come a time when suffering will no longer be a part of God? Are we to understand the eschatological renewal to create a new state of affairs *in God*? This is obviously problematic. Passibilists want it both ways: the consolation of a God who suffers with us in the present *and* the assurance of One who does not in the future. This is tenuous at best, especially for those like Grover who apotheosise suffering by insisting that God, who never changes, suffers eternally (Hudson 1996:§4; House and Grover 2009:124-128; cf. Stott 1986:335). If this claim is taken at face-value, then Christians can never be assured that there will be a time when suffering is not part of God's—and, by extension, their—existence.

More psychologically reassuring is the impassibilist denial of divine involvement in suffering. By refusing to assign ontological weight to suffering, it is treated as a privation of God's *shalom*, a privation to be remedied entirely and permanently in the eschaton (e.g., Re 21:1-4; cf. Is 25:8). The notion of a non-suffering God offers a superior future hope, therefore, than passibilist accounts in which the divine life is, in part, determined by suffering, for it provides a metaphysical grounding for eschatological optimism. As a result, Christians can rest assured that suffering really will be finally eradicated since it is not necessary to God's Being. Such a view extols Christ's work of salvation as the decisive event in routing the powers of darkness: having "destroyed the devil's work" (1 Jn 3:8) and "disarmed the rulers and authorities" (Cl 2:15) during His first coming, He will return to consummate His redemptive programme, putting His enemies under His feet (1 Co 15:25) and restoring the divine *shalom* in a repristinated cosmos (cf. Muller 1983:39-40; Creel 1986:132; Goetz 1986:§5; Cook 1990:86, 88; Anders 1997:§4; Weinandy 2000:155-158, cf. 214; 2000:39; Hart 2002:191, 202-203, 205, 206; Gavrilyuk 2009:141, 145, 146-147; Marshall 2009:247, 258, 297-298; Leahy 2010:§5; Lister 2013:248).

5.4.3 Ethical claims

Passibilists frequently make the charge that belief in an impassible God increases the likelihood Christians will succumb to apathy regarding the sufferings of others, for a God who transcends suffering provides less motivation for compassionate action than One personally and directly affected by suffering. On the other hand, a co-suffering God incentivises remedial action, since one's love for God will cause a Christian to want to mitigate God's suffering by eliminating its causes—that is, the various expressions of human suffering together with their root causes (Moltmann 1974b:8, 9; Solle 1975:43, 74, 127; Bauckham 1984:12; McWilliams 1985:189; Migliori 1985:120, 121, 122-123, 126, 131; Ngien 1997:§2; Ellis 2005:172; Louw 2003:395; Long 2006:147). So, passibilist accounts encourage believers to protest the causes of human suffering for the purpose of relieving God of His pain (Sölle 1975:134; Migliori 1985:120, 121, 124, 126, 131; Wolterstorff 1987:91; Fiddes 1988:88, 90; 2000:161; Sia 1996:§5, §8; Louw 2003:395; Ellis 2005:172; Cone 2008:701, 709, 711). Ngien further argues that passibilism discourages sin, for if we believe that human sin occasions pain in God, we will be motivated to discontinue those behaviours that grieve Him (Ngien 1997:§2; cf. Pool 2009:15, 196-197).

Whilst Creel finds such arguments unpersuasive (186:154-155), they should not be dismissed too quickly. It is true that the knowledge that one's actions hurt another person can have a cautionary effect on one's behaviour. Sociopaths notwithstanding, most normal, reasonably enlightened persons do not wish to harm someone who has loved them consistently and well. So, believing God— the supremely loving One—to suffer as a result of one's sin and the world's sufferings can be a powerful incentive for one to work to relieve human suffering and abstain from personal behaviours that grieve God.

However, it is important not to overstate the case. The desire to act in ways that please God is an important component of a Biblical ethic, but it is not the only component. There are other Biblical motivations for ethical behaviour: altruism, social stability, obedience to God's commands, fear of repercussions, love for humanity, desire to be treated well in return and more. Ngien is clearly guilty of reductionism when He assets that if God is "unmoved by what we do" (a gross mischaracterisation of impassibilism), there is no reason for doing "one thing rather than the other" (Ngien 1997:§2). There are, in fact, multiple reasons for doing the right thing, not the least of which is Christ's command that we love one another as He has loved us (Jn 13:34; 15:12). As the first benchmark text, Acts 17:22-34, makes clear, Jesus Christ will one day judge the world in righteousness (v. 31), and He himself taught in His Olivet discourse that a primary criterion for this judgement will be the demonstrable ways that we have loved one another (Mt 25:31-46). Further, the Bible nowhere suggests that what motivated Christ's incarnation and atonement was His desire to relieve the Father's sufferings resulting from human suffering. Rather, what the benchmark text, Hebrews 2:5-18, teaches is that Jesus willingly took on human flesh and suffered out of solidarity with humanity (vv.10-14a, 18), and He died to destroy the enemy and expiate the sins of the people (vv. 14b-17).

Finally, there is an ethical argument raised by Creel and Hart worth considering: the propriety of a healthy Christian *apatheia*. To the extent that believers are able, they should imitate God's impassibility as a model for Christian behavior: He transcends the flux of changing circumstances, remaining true to who He is and unchanging in fulfilling His promises. As Christians seek to follow Him, He teaches them to overcome their passions and ignore those things that might distract them. And He works within us to become persons whose love for others is truly *agapic*—that is, marked by benevolence and an unselfish desire to see them blessed and prospering in God's *shalom* (cf. Hart 2002:193; Creel 1986:157-158). The fact that modern ethical approaches no longer retain

apatheia as a constitutive feature is indicative of how far contemporary—and even contemporary Christian—norms have diverged from the Biblical ethos.

5.4.4 Apologetic claims

Ngien, Fiddes and Pool have variously argued that their passibilist accounts are more apologetically compelling than impassibilist contruals, because a God who chooses to share human suffering is more existentially satisfying than a God who cannot suffer (Ngien 1997:§4; Fiddes 2000:178; Pool 2009:9). On this view, a God who participates in human sorrows demonstrates the affection, understanding and relational warmth for which humans hunger. Such a God is far more attractive than the distant, impassive deity ostensibly described in the impassibilist literature (e.g., Ngien 1997). Thus, it is maintained, passibilism is required for a convincing theodicy: in light of the presence and pervasive scope of evil in today's world, only a co-suffering God can answer the needs of humans in the grip of real suffering (Moltmann 1974b:10; Sölle 1975:134, 149; Surin 1983:246, 247; Bauckham 1984:11-12; Fiddes 2000:164, 168; cf. Jonas 1987:3, 4, 6).

It is true that, at least in the West, existential factors loom large in contemporary theological discourse. Whether this should be so, and whether the Church should feel compelled to accommodate these sensibilities to the degree that it has, are altogether different questions (Calvin, *Inst.* 1.17.1; 1.18.3; cf. George 1988:209-210). What is clear, however, is that any judicious proclamation of the Gospel in the early twenty-first century will take into account the dominant idiom, avoid language that unnecessarily inflames resistance to the message and employ vocabulary and conceptual categories that faithfully embody the Biblical message in the contemporary vernacular. The question, then, is this: Must contemporary

God-talk resort to passibilist presuppositions to remain relevant? Moltmann thought so (Moltmann 1974:7, 204). The present author disagrees.

Whilst reflecting an admittedly different *Sitz im Leben*, the Apostle Paul, in his Areopagita (Acts 17:22-34), provided a useful model to follow. Addressed to a pluralistic, polytheistic culture, in some ways reminiscent of modern western academia (cf. Williams 1999:210-211), Paul's address struck a balance in emphasising God's transcendent and proximate qualities. God, Paul asserted, was the Creator of the cosmos, Lord of all, source of life and sovereign determiner of human affairs (vv. 24-26). Possessing an existence independent of creaturely categories, He is not "served by human hands" nor is He in need of anything that we might provide Him (v. 25). His unique ontology endows Him with staggeringly impressive metaphysical credentials. Yet, Paul explained, this autarchic, self-determining Being is not distant or remote, but near to each person, for "in Him we live and move and have our being" (vv. 27-28) and are even regarded as "His offspring" (v. 28). So, whilst the true God is frighteningly "other", He is also exquisitely intimate.

The contemporary (im)passibility colloquy would benefit from a fresh infusion of Pauline apologetics. Rather than accommodate a craving for a softer, gentler deity, Christians must return to the God Paul preached, the One whose nature and character are outlined in the Biblical witness—the awe-inspiring, fear-inducing high and exalted One who inhabits eternity, the "consuming fire" and provident Creator who "marked off the heavens with a span" and "brings princes to nothing" after the counsel of His indomitable will (Is 40:12, 23; 57:15; Ep 1:11; He 13:29). Contra Whitehead, this is not a God to whom humans may pay "metaphysical compliments" (Whitehead 1967:223), for, as Tillich observed (1951:235), creaturely superlatives are mere diminutives when applied to the One unbound by space-time categories. Terrifyingly "other", this immeasurably vast, inscrutably wise God, in defiance of all norms of logic, makes sinful humans

the objects of His fierce affection, enters space-time in the person of His Son, suffers as a man and makes atonement for sins, reconciling humanity to Himself. As CS Lewis notes in *The problem of pain*: it is incomprehensible that creatures such as we should "have a value so prodigious in their Creator's eyes" (Lewis 1947:35). In Paul's polemic, the twin core conservative evangelical theological motifs of God's transcendence and relatedness are maintained in delicate tension. Contemporary God-talk should strive to do the same.

Impassibilists argue that what sufferers need most is help, not commiseration—a strong rescuer, not a fellow sufferer. The most significant datum in the story of salvation is that God, in Christ, crushed the powers of darkness and will one day destroy them entirely. This narrative is far more engaging than that of a co-suffering God (Castelo 2009:142-145; Leahy 2010:§5; Lister 2013:248). And, by giving assurance that evil and suffering are only temporary—foreign to God's will and external to His life—it is the basis of a more satisfying theodicy (Goetz 1986:§5; Simoni 1997:346; Hart 2002:192; Gavrilyuk 2009:141, 145, 146-147; cf. Wolterstorff 1987:80, 90).

5.4.5 Missional claims

Sarot argues that passibilism incentivises evangelism, reasoning that—by believing God grieves over the fallen state of sinners and yearns for their love and reconciliation—Christians would engage in more robust efforts to lead others to Christ and relieve God of His grief (Sarot 1996:236). This might be true of course: some individuals might find the portrayal of a heart-sick, love-hungry God sufficiently motivating to participate more enthusiastically in missions and personal evangelism. Others, however, would find such a God pitiable and repugnant and be less inclined to proclaim Him to others. Whilst it is true that the Old Testament sometimes depicts Yahweh as "victimised" along these lines—

Yahweh as an estranged husband, plaintive father or spurned creator—it is equally true that the Old Testament more often portrays Him in non-victimised yet equally patically-rich ways—Yahweh as an insulted sovereign, warrior-avenger and scornful accuser. Significantly, one fails to discern any kind of plaintive element in Paul's Areopagus address. The God represented in Acts 17 does not plead, cajole or invite human response to Him: He "commands" (παραγγέλλει) that all people repent, threatening judgement (vv. 30-31).

Weinandy argues just the opposite of Sarot. He believes impassibility incentivises evangelism because it teaches that God's consolation in suffering is found exclusively in Christ, reserved for those who make a profession of faith in Him and become part of His Church. He fears that, when they offer divine comfort to all people regardless of their faith, passibilists actually weaken evangelistic zeal (Weinandy 2000:173; 2001:41; cf. Cavadini 2001:42). Arguably, the New Testament record supports Weinandy's conclusion rather than Sarot's.

5.4.6 Application for contemporary praxis

What does the foregoing analysis reveal? The assessment of the more coherent passibilist existential proposals under five species of argument—devotional, ethical, psychological, apologetic and missional—yields two important lessons, each of which addresses deficiencies in passibilist theological constructs and is suggestive of more Biblically faithful and pastorally resourceful formulations. First, it is essential that contemporary theological discourse return to a balanced view of the divine transcendence-relatedness dialectic. Passibilists routinely enfeeble the transcendent pole of this polarity, reducing the ineffable, ontologically "Other" to one being among others in the ontic order, quantitatively supereminent, yet qualitatively indistinct (cf. Hart 2002:190). This etiolates the Creator-creature distinction, subjecting God to contingent factors like suffering,

that characterise life in a space-time continuum radically disrupted by sin and its effects. But God, as Creator, exists independent of the created realm and is not subject to its effects in a determinative sense. Impassibility is a necessary correlate of transcendence, for the divine Being does not suffer because He infinitely transcends the order in which suffering and non-suffering have connotative meanings. He who lives "above the heavens" and "looks far down on the heavens and the earth" (Ps 113:6) transcends every creaturely category, including spatial and temporal limitations and all predications of "becoming".

Yet the arguments examined above demonstrate a persistent pattern of attributing to God a form of relatedness that makes Him determined by His creation—that is, human suffering causes divine suffering. On this view, the divine Being is made something different than it was before, with God involved in the same process of "becoming" as His creatures. From the earliest days, however, the Church has consistently maintained that God is perfect being, distinct from His creatures and fully actualised in His perfections. This remained the dominant orthodox view throughout the middle ages, the Reformation and into the late modern period. It has only been in the last hundred years or so that the Tradition has been seriously challenged.

Conservative evangelical passibilists—both hard and soft—should know better. Given evangelicalism's historic respect for the Biblical testimony and classic-theistic tradition, the novel reinterpretations proposed by non-evangelical passibilists should have been indentified and resisted early on by appealing to Scripture and the Tradition. Instead, many conservative evangelical scholars were co-opted by passibilist presuppositions, and a united resistance was not organised until the open theist debates of 2000-2001 rocked the evangelical world, having demonstrated the kind of wholesale theological revisionism that is the natural product of passibilist presuppositions. If conservative evangelicals are to have a future distinct from revisionist subtraditions, they must reassert in the

academy, pulpit and pew a Biblically balanced understanding of God's transcendence and relatedness, informed by such passages as the first benchmark text examined above, Acts 17:22-34. The next chapter suggests ways to do this.

Second, it is imperative that contemporary theological discourse return to a proper emphasis on the unique and definitive role played by the Lord Jesus in discussions of how God relates to human suffering. Passibilist arguments fail to adequately account for this, attributing suffering directly to God *in se*, thus undermining inadvertently—yet inescapably—the logic of the incarnation. As seen above, this tendency is particularly evident in the passibilist arguments surrounding issues of an apologetic and a missional nature.

This is where the second benchmark text (He 2:5-18) serves as a needed corrective. As this text makes clear, the divine Son took on human flesh for the purpose of experiencing suffering in solidarity with human beings and making atonement for their sins. His suffering "perfected" Him in His role as "founder" and "high priest" (He 2:9-10, 17-18), making it possible for Him to fully "sympathise" with human weaknesses and render believers the "help" needed to persevere in their Christian witness (4:15-16). Prior to His incarnation, Christ was not qualified to be a "merciful and faithful" high priest (2:17), for He had not endured the sufferings His people were experiencing (5:7-9). He had to be made, for a time, "lower than the angels" (2:9) to accomplish this. By partaking of their "flesh and blood" (v. 14), He became their "brother" (v.11), chosen by God to now represent them as their compassionate high priest (5:1), atoning for their sins by means of His own blood (2:17; 7:27) and living to make intercession for them continually before God's throne (7:25).

In view of Christ's unique salvific role, to allege, as most passibilists do, that God feels the pain of every human, is to undermine the logic of redemption and

render Christ's incarnation superfluous. If God already could "feel" human suffering first-hand, what need was there for the Son to become lower than the angels and be perfected through suffering in His mediatorial role? If, as evangelicals like Hudson (1996) and Grover (2009) assert, God has always suffered, then the sufferings of Christ (aside, perhaps, from those consequent upon His death) were gratuitous and unnecessary.

Passages like Hebrews 2, however, require that Christians recognise the extraordinary uniqueness and efficacy of Christ's incarnation and atonement. The New Testament is united in celebrating the multifaceted nature of His ministry on behalf of humanity. His life, death, resurrection, ascension and present session resulted in a dazzling array of salvific effects: the inauguration of His kingdom on earth, the establishment of His Church, the defeat of Satan and the powers of darkness, the atonement of human sin, the reconciliation of humanity to God, the empowerment of believers and the promise of a renewed heaven and earth in the eschaton. Christ set into motion the divine plan to eventually renew the entire cosmos, an event to be actualised following His return to earth. Meanwhile, in this present age, He lives to make intercession for His people, offering sympathy and practical help to all Christians who appeal to the "throne of grace" (He 4:14-16; 7:25). In short, Christ's work was decisive, definitive, original and irreplaceable (cf. He 9:26; 10:10-14).

Conservative evangelicals have always held to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in human salvation. It is the distinctive element in the Christian message, for only in Christ is salvation found (John 14:6; Ac 4:12). Thus, when leading evangelicals attribute suffering directly to God, apart from Christ, they deny their own heritage, neglecting a long tradition that recognises the distinctive and vital role played by Christ in His mediatorial work. The way ahead is to return to the common witness of God's Word and the Church's witness—that is, in the person of the Son the transcendent, impassible God suffered as a man.

In summary, it is necessary to retrieve two vitally important elements in contemporary theological discourse: the proper balance of the divine transcendence-relatedness binary and a robustly Christological conception of human salvation, including the amelioration and eventual elimination of human suffering. Conservative evangelicals must lead the way in demonstrating how a return to Scripture and the Tradition provides a richer, more existentially satisfying account of human redemption. At the scholarly level, more work needs to be done in exploring the rich resources available within the Bible and orthodox dogma. At the popular level, pastors and church members must be instructed in the theological and existential deficiencies inherent in passibilist accounts, the beauty and coherence of classical-theism and Chalcedonian Christology and the existentially nourishing answers provided in the orthodox impassibilist literature. Along these lines, Chapter 6 presents a modest proposal for moving from the present situation to a preferred future.

5.5   Chapter summary and relevance to the overall research agenda

This chapter is central to the overall research agenda insofar as it establishes the Biblical and theological norms by which passibilist arguments may be analysed. Consistent with the LIM model of practical theological research, the chapter has suggested ways to move from the current situation (described in Chapters 2-4) to a more amenable state of affairs. It has done so by addressing the fourth subsidiary question identified in Section 1.2: What are the key Biblical teachings and theological commitments required to appropriately evaluate passibilist teachings? This chapter answers this question in the following way.

First, the chapter analysed two Biblical passages central to an accurate assessment of (im)passibilist proposals: Acts 17:24-28 and Hebrews 2:17-18.

The first text outlines how the Apostle Paul, in his famous speech to the Areopagus, represented the Biblical understanding of God's relatedness to His creation, maintaining a balance between God's transcendence of space-time categories and God's intimate involvement in space-time affairs. It was shown that holding both truths in tension is indispensable to a balanced, Biblical conceptualisation of God (Section 5.2; cf. 1.7.4; 3.4.1; 4.3.1; 4.1). The second text, Hebrews 2:17-18, sets forth a distinct Christological answer to the question of how God relates to human suffering. It was shown that the text describes how, in Christ, God authentically experienced suffering as a man in solidarity with the human race, yet without implicating the divine nature in suffering, via a Chalcedonian two-natures Christology (Section 5.3).

In both cases, the passages were analysed by considering: (1) their backgrounds, including authorship, date of composition, historical context, audience and purpose, (2) their literary contexts, including the books' outlines, genre, as well as the historical setting and structure of the texts' literary units, (3) the composition and authorial intent of the works and (4) the contribution of the passages to the wider (im)passibility discussion. It was shown that both texts contribute significantly to the colloquy and offer helpful resources in moving from the present state of affairs to a preferred future.

Second, in Section 5.4, the chapter critically engaged five species of passibilist existential argument commonly featured in the contemporary literature. This examination employed the two benchmark Biblical texts examined in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 in conjunction with the twin conservative evangelical theological commitments examined in Section 3.4—divine transcendence and relationality. It was shown that passibilist existential proposals do not adequately take into account the Biblical teaching concerning God's transcendence-relatedness and Christ's unique role in identifying with and redeeming human suffering. The next

chapter presents a proposal for countering passibilist inroads and returning to a more Biblical and historically orthodox position on God's relationship to suffering.

CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY WITHIN A CONSERVATIVE EVANGELICAL CONTEXT

6.1 Chapter introduction

The point of practical theology is not merely to reflect on theological concepts but to interpret and apply those concepts to concrete ministry situations in an effort to effect a positive change for the glory of God and the good of the world (cf. Maddox 1990; Cowan 2000). As such, the subdiscipline of practical theology relies on critical-analytical methods to raise questions about existing practices and then make recommendations for changing those practices to help transform the current situation into a more salutary one (Maddox 1990:51; Ballard 1995:117). This chapter marks the final stage in the three-stage LIM practical theological model. Having analysed the current situation (Chapters 2-4) and depicted a preferred scenario (Chapter 5), it now remains to propose, in practical terms, how to move from the present reality to the desired future (Cowan 2000; Smith 2008:205-06). The chapter seeks to answer the fifth subsidiary research question: What are the pastoral implications of passibilist teachings within a conservative evangelical setting?

Research in the field of practical theology begins with problems confronting the Church and makes recommendations on the basis of careful critical-analytical reflection on those problems (Smith 2008:204). As seen in previous chapters, the shift from impassibilist to passibilist construals in late modernity, especially since

1974, has occasioned considerable confusion and dissention in the conservative evangelical community. In the academy, a large number of scholars, otherwise loyal to the Great Tradition, have been co-opted by the passibilist argument that, to speak intelligibly of God in the contemporary context, one must propound the view that God suffers *qua* God in solidarity with a suffering world (e.g., Ngien 1997; McGrath 2009:25). Not only does this position threaten the inner logic of the inherited theistic tradition, but it signals an abdication of conservative evangelical theological commitments concerning God's transcendence and relatedness to the world as well as an abandonment of the Biblical rationale on which these doctrines are grounded. Other scholars find no reason to substantially revise the tradition, believing it to contain adequate resources within its historic formulations to provide satisfactory answers to contemporary audiences (e.g., Bray 1978; Helm 1990; Culver 1998). Still other scholars occupy mediating positions somewhere between these two poles (e.g., Cole 2011; Lister 2013; Bird 2013a). The result is that the state of scholarly opinion is fractured and—whilst the situation remains dynamic (see Section 4.4.1)—there is at present no indication of a *rapproachment* on the horizon. Rather, consensus on this issue appears elusive.

The confusion and fractiousness of the academy is mirrored in the pew, where parishioners are left to wonder about where God stands in relation to their personal pain and tragedy. This perplexity is exacerbated by the large number of popular evangelical pastors, writers and other influencers who espouse passibilism. Their evangelical heritage has taught them to trust in an almighty, all-knowing, transcendent Lord who reigns in unapproachable light and sovereign freedom, unthreatened by the intrigues of men and ephemeral happenstances playing out in this small corner of the universe. And their personal Bible reading confirms this understanding (e.g., Ps 2:4-6; Is 40:12-28; Ac 17:24-32). Yet from the pulpit, on Christian radio and in popular religious literature, they hear of a very different God: One who is so affected by the sin of humanity that His heart

breaks, longing to be made one again with His wayward creation, evidently powerless to extricate Himself from such lamentable circumstances (e.g., Foster 1992:1). Not surprisingly, rank-and-file believers are confused, some precipitously so. Like the original audience of the letter to the Hebrews, some have become disaffected and discouraged to the point of abandoning the faith.

These are the concerns that motivate the present work. To successfully address these problems requires pastoral sensitivity joined with sound Biblical scholarship and a respect for the inherited wisdom and consensually legitimated authority of traditional interpretations of the Scriptural account. This chapter seeks to strike such a balance and is organised as follows. Section 6.2 offers practical recommendations aimed at addressing the more serious issues within the conservative evangelical academy. These recommendations include providing definitional clarity (6.2.1), reasserting core evangelical convictions (6.2.2) and promoting the existential benefits of a carefully articulated divine impassibility (6.2.3). Section 6.3 then turns to consider a pair of recommendations intended to improve the situation among rank-and-file conservative evangelical believers: teaching a Biblically balanced divine impassibilism (6.3.1) as well as a theology of God's providential care (6.3.2). The author believes that implementing these recommendations on both scholarly and non-scholarly levels can help alleviate the negative effects of passibilist teachings within the subtradition and promote a more Biblically sound interpretation of the interplay between God's "otherness" and "nearness".

Two caveats are in order. First, no single study can propose a comprehensive set of solutions to the myriad issues that make up complex problems, and the present author entertains no illusion of doing so in this study. Rather, the project intends, in line with all practical theological approaches, to advance specific proposals to address a limited range of problems that warrant our collective attention (cf. Smith 2008:210). It is hoped that some of what is offered here can

be of immediate help to the Church, implemented to good effect for Her benefit. Other parts of the chapter are more suggestive, providing material for future scholars to develop and future practitioners to implement. Second, as Smith makes clear, most projects in practical theology do not include the actual implementation and evaluation of suggested interventions but must content themselves with making recommendations that represent feasible and faithful responses to existing needs (Smith 2008:210; cf. 207; Cowan 2000). This project is no different: it seeks to delineate our current obligations in view of the challenges confronting the conservative evangelical community without providing a follow-up analysis to ascertain the transformative impact of its recommendations. That task will be left to future researches.

6.2   Practical recommendations: the evangelical academy

As previously noted, a number of conservative evangelical scholars have adopted passibilist models of understanding the God-world dialectic. This includes accepting certain notions about the Patristic consensus (e.g., an extreme definition of impassibility, the Hellenisation of the Biblical witness and a failure to understand God's creative relationship to the world) and espousing a passiblilist framing of the issue, in which "impassibilility" is understood to be coextensive with "impassivity" and the "communication of idioms" is seen as the reciprocal predication of properties between Christ's divine and human natures. The result is a denial of the historic orthodox tradition, a diminution of God's aseity and transcendence, a mischaracterisation of the relationship between Christ's two natures and an undervaluing of Jesus' historically located solidarity and suffering on behalf on humanity. Improving the present reality requires a multi-pronged approach, ultilising a variety of means—journal articles, monographs, symposia, convention presentations, historical analyses, faculty

workshops, and more—to reverse passibilist inroads into the academy and provide a more Biblically informed alternative.

6.2.1 Provide definitional clarity

The first recommendation for improving the situation at the scholarly level is to find areas of agreement regarding commonly used terms. One of the complicating factors of the contemporary colloquy is the ambiguity, even equivocity, surrounding the use of certain words and phrases. Creel (1986) was one of the first to point this out, recommending four distinct ways of talking about divine impassibility (nature, will, knowledge and feeling). Sarot (1990) similarly decried the conflation of meanings via idiosyncratic definitions and enjoined a critical discrimination between such important terms as impassibility, theopaschitism and patripassianism. Helm (1990) urged the coining of an entirely new term, "theomotions", to express divine affect in contradistinction to human varieties. And Scrutton (2005) suggested that differentiating "passions" from "affections", *a la* Augustine and Aquinas, would move the conversation forward. All of these proposals have merit. And whilst there is little hope of getting scholars to agree on common definitions for all the terminology used in the debate, perhaps there is at least the possibility of agreement on the central term: impassibility.

This project has adopted the intentionally spare definition: "Impassibility is the teaching that God is incapable of suffering within the divine nature" (Section 1.6.2), and the author recommends it, or something very like it, as a useful way to focus the debate. Although there are other important considerations surrounding the issue of divine *apatheia*—contingency versus non-contingency, internal verses external influences, voluntary versus constrained action, the nature of divine sovereignty, etc. (Creel 1986; Cross 1990; Davies 1983; Packer

1988)—the heart of the matter is simply this: Does God experience suffering in ways analogous to how created beings are known to suffer (Sarot 1990:368; 1992:29-30; Lister 2013:149-150)?

Two points of clarification are needed here. First, it is assumed, rather than stated, that the suffering in mind in the present discussion is what humans know to be emotional, relational or psychological—rather than physical—pain. Of all the colloquy's contributors, only Sarot (1992) has put forward a serious proposal that God *qua God* has a "body" capable of registering pain. Second, the phrase "within the divine nature" leaves open the possibility that God may indeed suffer, but in a way that does not implicate His nature *per se*. This is, of course, the historic Christian position: that the Son, in whom "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Cl 2:9), took on flesh and became "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is 53:3). The Church fathers laboured to give expression to this remarkable claim during the first four centuries of the Church, rejecting Nestorian and Eutychian models before settling on the Chalcedonian solution, which affirmed both the impassible deity and passible manhood of Christ, hypostatically joined in a single subject or person (Williams 2009; Plested 2009; Holcomb 2014:41-62). This understanding allowed for the fathers—and all who follow them—to affirm, without equivocation, that in Christ "the Impassible…suffered" (Bettenson 1999:52). It has often been noted that Chalcedon was not so much a definition as it was a set of boundaries (e.g., Holcomb 2014:58), more proscriptive than prescriptive, comprising the alphabetical foundation for the Christological grammar of late antiquity (cf. Crisp 2013:26-41).

Similarly, the predication of impassibility to God does not state positively what God is. Rather, by way of *apophasis*, it affirms what God is not. Impassibility ("not feeling", from the Latin *impassibilitas* and the Greek *apatheia*; alpha privative plus *pathos,* "passion, emotion, feeling") affirms that, whatever else is true of

God, He does not suffer as do humans and other beings known to the ancients. Precisely how it *is* that God is *apathetic*, or *why*, or *by what means*, are questions left unanswered. The fathers were not put off by mystery but were content to reason within the conceptual space defined by God's self-disclosure (cf. Weinandy 2000:30-33; Wilken 2003:19). In attributing impassibility to God, the fathers were therefore saying that the Christian God: (1) is not subject to sinful passions (e.g., lust, greed, gluttony, fear, irrational acts, etc.), (2) is not like the passion-driven Olympians and other pagan gods, (3) is not overwhelmed by any emotions, (4) is not subject to spasmodic emotional states, (5) is not "reactive" but, instead, acts with forethought based on perfect knowledge and (6) is never a victim of creaturely choices.

These represent the primary foci of patristic attributions of impassibility to God (Prestige 1956:7; Helm 1990:125-129; Weinandy 2000:79, 111; Gavrilyuk 2006; Castelo 2009:40-58; Lister 2013:64-106). As Gavrilyuk (2006) points out, impassibility functioned as an apophatic qualifier on the divine emotions for the fathers, not a denial of God's emotional life. That God has an affective life is clear from the Biblical witness, and the majority of the fathers acknowledged the fact (cf. Lister 2013:95-106). The question, instead, was this: How was God's affective life to be understood in relation to the whole array of divine predicates found in Holy Scripture? The fathers settled on the doctrine of impassibility as the most faithful way of accounting for the panoply of Biblical data. For example, by predicating *apatheia* of God, the fathers sought to honour such salient Biblical truths as God's essential incomprehensibility, inaccessibility and indescribability (e.g., Is 40:12-28; Ro 11:33; 1 Tm 6:16), God's immutability of purpose, nature, wisdom, goodness and counsel (e.g., Nu 23:19; Ma 3:6; He 6:17-18; Ja 1:17) and God's accommodation of Himself to human limitations via His self-disclosure, often resulting in anthropomorphic emotional language in the Biblical text (e.g., Je 4:19; 9:10; 48:30-32; Ho 11:8; Am 5:1-3).

From the Biblical record, the fathers also inferred certain secondary truths, which, whilst lacking direct Scriptural support, are consistent with the revealed primary truths. For example, God is a fully actualised "perfect" Being and, thus, is not subject to the process of "becoming" as is the case with creatures. God also experiences perfect peace and joy and is imperturbable in His bliss (*ataraxia*), and God's love is a pure gift-love—a benevolence that seeks the good of the other without needing a loving response—and, thus, God is not personally wounded by human ingratitude and sins. These inferences, too, are best accounted for by means of the impassibility axiom (cf. Bray 1993; Weinandy 2000; Hart 2002; Keating and White 2009).

What the fathers did not mean by *apatheia* was that God was apathetic, a semantic conflation often made illicitly in passibilist polemics (e.g., Pinnock 1994:103, 119). The claim betrays inexcusable ignorance—neither the fathers nor their heirs thought of God as being indifferent, unfeeling, unmerciful, uncaring or lacking in compassion. Nor was God thought to be distant or remote, immobile or impassive, incapable of affection or otherwise unable to relate meaningfully to the world. Until late modernity, *apatheia* was consensually understood in the Tradition to be a carefully qualified apophatic term. It was not until relatively recently that certain scholars, mistrustful of the Tradition, mistook *apatheia* to be synonymous with apathy (Prestige 1956:7; Bray 1999; Weinandy 2000:83-112; Gavrilyuk 2006:21-171; Lister 2013:41-106; cf. Placher 1996:1; Johnson and Huffman 2002:27).

Perhaps the time has come to find a better word, one less open to misunderstanding (cf. Helm 2007:104). Given the strength of contemporary existential sensibilities and the myriad negative connotations accreted, like barnacles on a ship's hull, to the word "impassibility", it would be a worthwhile scholarly endeavor to find a suitable replacement term. Vanhoozer speaks of "endurance" (Vanhoozer 2008:457); Lister of "invulnerability" (Lister 2013:150,

242); and Sarot of "immutability with regard to one's feelings" (Sarot 1990:368). Each of these has merit. However, until such time as a replacement is found the author recommends that divine impassibility refer simply to the incapacity of God to suffer (cf. Oh 1999:13).

Agreeing on terminology would go a long way toward eliminating some of the definitional confusion endemic to the debate. Another recommended clarifying step is to acknowledge the points of agreement between the two camps. The author has yet to find in the literature a detailed analysis of the points of contact between passibilist and impassibilist traditions. Yet these are significant, and making them explicit can help distinguish which assertions are still being contested from those that enjoy some level of agreement. This is not the place for a detailed analysis, but the author offers the following four points of accord in an effort to begin the conversation.

First, both passibilists and impassibilists agree that the Biblical God is, in significant respects, transcendent to, and ontologically distinct from, creation— including human beings. He is a *sui generis*. As such He is not reducible to creaturely categories but can only be understood, via His voluntary self-disclosure, through the use of analogical language. Balancing out this truth, however, is the fact that the God portrayed in Scripture is wonderfully immanent with respect to His created order (e.g., Ps 139:1-16; Ac 17:27-28; Cl 1:17; He 1:3). He is thus "near to all" (Ac 17:27), marvelously relational (e.g., Pss 10, 18, 23, 34) and incomparably provident and sympathetic (Ps 104:24-30; Mt 5:45; 6:25-32; Ac 14:15-17). God's relationality assumes an added dimension for those who are related to Him covenentally (Vanhoozer 2010:66-69, 412-416).

Second, both camps acknowledge that God can be legitimately described as passible in a certain respect. Impassibilists restrict the predication Christologically, averring that it is only in the medium of Christ's humanity that the

divine Being experienced suffering. Passibilists wish to affirm a more generalised divine suffering, attributing passion to God *in se*. Both positions, however, affirm that God understands suffering firsthand. At the same time, passibilists and impassibilists share the desire to limit God's suffering in some way. Hard impassibilists do so by restricting divine suffering to the experiences of the Son in human history—or, in some cases, also to the current enfleshed life of the Son—(cf. Weinandy 2000). Passibilists and some soft impassibilists tend to limit God's suffering quantitatively, explaining that, whilst God suffers, His suffering can never overwhelm nor disable Him; rather, there is in God a certain factor of invulnerability that limits the extent to which suffering affects Him. But on both accounts, God is thought to be impassible to a degree.

Third, both positions teach, negatively, that God is not removed from what happens in this world, nor is He indifferent to human suffering. The common caricature of impassibilism as teaching an aloof, uncaring deity (e.g., Moltmann 1974:274; Pinnock 1994:102-103) is an unfortunate and ludicrously maladroit disingenuity—a fictive strawman that obfuscates the real issues and hampers constructive dialogue. No contemporary Christian impassibilist espouses such a god. Both passibilists and impassibilists teach, instead, that God's ontological transcendence neither demands nor results in moral indifference. Positively, both camps teach that God is compassionate and loving toward His creation and willingly shares in creation's travails insofar as it is possible for an ontologically distinct deity to enter into human suffering. Whilst the degree to which God shares human suffering—and the mechanism by which He does so—differs between hard and soft passibilist and impassibilist accounts, all agree that the Biblical God identifies intimately with human sorrow and pain.

Fourth, both sides of the debate teach that Christ's death and resurrection were eschatologically decisive in vanquishing the power of death and suffering and thus represent at least part of the divine answer to the knotty problem of evil and

suffering (cf. Lambrecht 1989; Michiels 1989; Selling 1989; Van Bavel 1989a, 1989b; Geivett 2002). The second person of the Holy Trinity has "borne our griefs and carried our sorrows", having been "numbered with the transgressors" (Is 53:4a, 12b; cf. 3-12). Through His vicarious death and triumphant resurrection, the Son "disarmed the rulers and authorities" (Cl 2:15), destroying the one "who has the power of death" (He 2:14b). But the work is not yet complete; bad things still happen in our current eschatological "meantime". Both passibilists and impassibilists teach that the final eradication of evil and suffering awaits the eschaton, at which point all of Christ's enemies will be "under His feet"—including death—and the "new heaven and new earth" will be acutalised (1 Co 15:25-26; Re 21:1).

These four points of agreement are not insignificant. True, important disagreements remain. But, whilst the boundaries of those disagreements continue to be contested, it is good to keep in mind the substantial common ground held jointly by the two sides. Doing so will, when coupled with a charity borne of humility and shared theological commitments, allow the colloquy to proceed toward greater mutual understanding—and perhaps even accord—without degenerating into rancorous intramural turf-wars.

6.2.2 Reassert evangelical convictions

The second recommendation for improving the situation in the conservative evangelical academy is to reassert those core doctrines that have been central to evangelicalism. Two, in particular, are at the heart of the (im)passibility discussion. These twin foci—God's transcendence and relationality—are examined in detail in Sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2, respectively. The author will spare the reader the tedium of repetition in the present chapter, but will, instead,

present some specific action-items below related to these two points. First, though, a word about the Tradition is in order.

6.2.2.1 Continuity with the tradition

As shown in Section 3.3.1.1, the Protestant Reformation was the formal genesis of evangelicalism (cf. McGrath 1995:19-21; Bloesch 2008:17; Hansen 2011:12-13). Luther, grieved by the corruption of the Church within late medieval Catholicism, set out to expose these corruptions and return the Church to the faith and practices of the apostles and Church fathers, delivering it from its dreaded "Babylonian captivity". Other Reformers—Zwingli, Calvin, Melanchthon, Knox, et al.—similarly longed to see a repristinated Church in line with God's Word and the consensual Tradition of early Christianity (cf. George 1988:316). The Protestant Reformation, then, was not an effort to do theology ahistorically— that is, independent of the inherited Tradition—but to return the Church to a faithful interpretation of the Tradition (George 1988; Gonzales 2010b:19-35; Woodbridge and James 2013:109-115; McDermott 2014b:56). The Reformation rallying cry of *sola scriptura* was a call to measure ecclesiastical doctrine and practice against the final standard of God's written Word. It was not intended to subvert the Tradition's important interpretive function. To the contrary, the Reformers honoured the pre-medieval Tradition (e.g., the creeds, counciliar decisions, liturgical elements, catechetical devices and other conceptual resources) as an extension of the Apostolic witness (George 1988; McDermott 2014b:56-57). From the outset, then, evangelicalism was embued with a hearty respect for the ecclesiastical tradition prior to its medieval innovations.

Given these historical considerations, then, it is disturbing to note the ease with which certain evangelical theologians dismiss this rich source of consensual teaching. When, for example, Michael Bird suggests that God chooses to suffer

(*in se*) on behalf of humanity (Bird 2013a:130-131), contrary to the carefully formulated Chalcedonian symbol, it exemplifies a hermeneutic that would have sounded strange to a Zwingli or a Calvin, to their eighteenth century heirs— Edwards, Whitefield or Wesley—or to still later evangelical scholars like Alexander, Warfield or Hodge (cf. George 1088:79-83; Holmes 2002:58-59; Crisp 2013). Even Luther, whilst wishing to speak dramatically of God's real suffering in Christ was respectful of the two-natures logic (George 1988:82; Pool 2009:15; cf. Ngien 2004). Bird's carelessness is unfortunate; yet, as was seen in Chapter 2, he is not alone—a number of conservative evangelical theologians are guilty of the same error.

There are two great dangers to dismissing the Tradition. The first is hubris, as a disrespect for the centuries-long development of dogmatic reflection betrays an extraordinary arrogance ill-suited to the theological task. As Helm (2008) points out, contemplating the mystery of the divine Being requires extreme modesty, for God transcends us in every respect, and we should be careful to check every new proposal against the inherited wisdom of the Church. Ahistoricism fails on this account. It reasons, in effect, that those giants of the faith who diligently wrestled with the meaning and implications of the Gospel during the Church's early years have nothing worthwhile to teach us—that moderns can "do" theology without recourse to their painstaking work of interpretation (cf. Webber 1978; 2000; Cutsinger 1997; Holcomb 2014:9-10; cf. Wilken 2003; Oden 2006:9-14; Crisp 2013:19-41). Stephen Holmes argues against the folly of such an approach, suggesting that the doctrines of creation and the communion of saints both require we honour the Tradition, the former by respecting humanity's discrete historical locatedness as an unavoidable—and good—aspect of creaturely existence and the latter by respecting the irreducibly corporate, chronological and trans-cultural dimensions of theological reflection (Holmes 2002:5-36; cf. Colson and Neuhaus 1995). Doing theology demands the deepest humility. One way the theologian evinces this humility is to recant a "just me-and-

God" approach to reading Scripture and, instead, listen carefully and prayerfully to the long line of Christian thinkers who have preceded him or her (McDermott 2014b:54).

The second danger is heresy (McGrath 2009:231-234; Quash 2009:1-12; Ward 2009:131-141). Neglecting the Tradition opens the proverbial door to repeat the errors of the past. The Tradition encapsulates the Church's collective wisdom—the result of a long process of sharpening, honing, pruning and testing—in which God's Spirit was at work in and through God's worshiping, baptizing and confessing community (Williams 1999:207). To neglect so great a resource is as perilous as it is foolish.

None of this is to suggest the Tradition is infallible. Barth's *Ecclesia semper reformanda est* is a necessary preventative to a mindless institutionalism and cold confessionalism. The "splendid" and "terrifying" task of doing theology is to be undertaken, not with a blind acquiescence to past formulations of the faith, but, "rooted in the community of yesterday", a critically loyal posture toward the Tradition (Barth 1992:42-43, 85). If we are to resist doing theology ahistorically, the burden of proof must rest with those who challenge consensual understandings. David Cook correctly points out that the adequacy of past presuppositions is always open to debate. But any new proposal must satisfy two criteria: (1) the need for a change of thinking is overwhelmingly apparent and (2) the new proposal is demonstrably superior to the historic one, providing better answers to the problems it answers without creating new problems of its own (Cook 1990:72). Passibilist proposals fail to meet either criteria.

For these reasons, it is essential that conservative evangelical scholars recommit themselves to mining the deep, rich veins of the consensual Tradition for the invaluable theological resources contained there. Not doing so is prideful and hazardous and runs the risk of eventuating in precisely the kind of imminent

revisionist catastrophe warned against by McDermott (2013; 2014b), in which evangelicalism becomes indistinguishable from liberal Protestantism.

6.2.2.2 Divine transcendence

Conservative evangelical theologians must insist that the traditional emphasis on God's transcendence be maintained. The evangelical "Battle for God" over open theistic proposals at the beginning of this century highlighted the danger of adopting modern notions of divine relatedness, resulting in a precipitous depreciation of God's transcendent dimensions. This is nothing new, of course. Whilst open theism offers the latest twist, the tendency to reduce God to manageable terms has long been a danger within evangelicalism given the high value it assigns to a personal relationship with God and the divine relational capacities this implies. In the middle of the twentieth century, long before open theism appeared, the Welsh evangelical leader Martyn Lloyd-Jones inveighed against the anemic popular theology of his day, and the American pastor and author AW Tozer lamented that the view of God then current in the Church was utterly beneath the dignity of the most high God, constituting a moral scandal (Lloyd-Jones 1980; Murray 1982; Tozer 1961:10).

Section 3.1.1 describes how the doctrine of divine transcendence includes a cluster of considerations that accent God's metaphysical discontinuity with created things—His unique, *sui generis* ontological status; the yawning Creator-creature chasm; and, because of these, the need for analogical language in theological discourse. Conservative evangelical scholars must reflect on the Biblical basis and practical implications of each of these and return to a proper acknowledgement of God's fundamental "otherness". Nearly twenty-five years ago, Paul Helm suggested a way to do this, and the present author recommends it as a helpful approach to the current generation of scholars.

In his essay "The impossibility of impassibility", Helm (1990) noted that Scripture contains two very different data sets concerning God. One depicts God as possessing human-like traits—spatial and temporal locatedness, anatomical parts and a complex and variable emotional life—whilst the other represents God has having qualities incompatible with being human—eternality, omnipresence, immutability, disembodiedness, and the like. The question is: How is one to construct a doctrine of God from the Bible given these dramatically different pictures? Which of these sets should take priority over the other in interpreting Scripture's meaning? There are, of course, two basic choices.

One is to assign logical priority to the anthropomorphic passages, taking as literal those texts that speak of God's physical body, His location in heaven and His changing emotions. On this view, the data contained in the second set depicting God's super-human traits (ubiquity, omniscience, unchangeableness, etc.) are hyperbolic and non-literal—that is, rhetorical devices not meant to convey propositionally-precise information about the divine nature but using the language of exaggeration to communicate certain truths the Biblical authors wish us to know (cf. Gericke 2012).

The second choice is to regard the Biblical statements about God's eternality, immutability, infinite knowledge, etc. to be logically prior to the other data set. These statements are meant to convey accurate information about what God is like, often by means of apophatic language—for example, that God is *im* (not)-mutable and *in*-finite. On this account, the language of the first data set is *ad hominem* and not intended to be taken in a strictly literal way (Helm 1990:129).

Helm avers these are the only two choices. To "pick and choose" is not reasonable. To assert, for example, that references to God's body are *ad hominem* whilst references to His changing passions are not and should take

priority is inconsistent. In fact, such a tactic runs into logical problems very quickly. How can God be immutable yet subject to the mutability that the onset of passions entails (Helm 1990:128-129)? The only way around this dilemma is to redefine the doctrine of immutability to mean "moral constancy", "faithfulness to His promises", or the like. This, of course, is exactly the approach taken by open theists and other passibilists (e.g., Sanders 1988:21-22). A similar approach is used to reinterpret the other classical attributes so that, for example, God's eternality becomes "everlastingness" and God's sovereignty becomes His mutual interdependence with creatures in creating a shared future (e.g., Pinnock 1994:103-104). But this leads inevitably into the *culs de sac* of definitional ambiguity and theological revisionism.

It appears clear that the only acceptable alternative is to assign logical priority to those passages of Scripture that make explicit metaphysical predications of God over those that speak metaphorically of Him. This does not render the metaphorical passages unimportant. It simply provides conceptual guidelines for how those texts are to be correctly interpreted. The metaphors in Scripture are ito be heeded for they teach, analogically, important truths about God—He is as compassionate as a father, as faithful as a shepherd, and as menacing as a warrior. But there are also important respects in which God is unlike each of these human analogies. This is even more true of the non-anthopomorphic Biblical metaphors, whether animate (e.g., God is a lion, bear, moth, etc.) or inanimate (e.g., God is a rock, shield, consuming fire, etc.). The very nature of metaphorical language is such that the tenor is never exhaustively conveyed by the vehicle (Soskice 1992; Paul 2006:507-510; Muis 2010).

The relevance of this point to the (im)passibility colloquy should be obvious. Passibilists wish to affirm that God feels human pain acutely, grieves over human sins and longs for human companionship, in part to assuage His unrequited love (e.g., Fretheim 1984; Foster 1992:1). Doing so, they claim, takes seriously the

language of those pathically-potent tropes that depict God as emotionally wounded like an estranged husband (e.g., Is 50:1; 54:5-8; Je 2:1-3, 5; 3:1, 7-8; 5:7; Ez 6:9; 16:1-63; 23:1-49; Ho 2:14; Ze 12:10), unappreciated father (e.g., Is 1:2; Je 3:19; 31:20; Ho 11:1-12; Lk 15:11-32) or aggrieved Creator (e.g., Ge 6:6; Jg 2:18; 1 Sa 15:35; 2 Sa 24:16; 1 Ch 21:15; Ps 106:45; Is 43:22-24; 48:18; Je 18:8; 48:31, 36; Ez 33:11; Jl 2:13; Am 7:3, 6; Jo 3:10). In each of these texts, God's passion is internalised to the point of acute pain, and—according to passibilists—they are to be taken literally.

However, passibilists are less inclined to demand the same degree of univocity of those equally ubiquitous, *pathos*-laden texts that represent God as externalising His passion in jealous rage, wrath and revenge. Why this double standard? As seen above, the Bible sometimes portrays God as a pitiable victim of human sin. But, more often, it portrays God as a wrathful judge of human sin, appearing as an offended Sovereign (e.g., Is 1:10-17; 43:11; 44:6, 8; 45:5,18, 21, 23-25; 46:9; 48:9-11; Je 5:9, 29; Ez 20:3, 35, 39; 36:20-23; 39:7, 23-24, 27; Ma 1:6-8, 11-14; 2:17-3:1), jealous avenger (e.g., Ex 20:4-5; De 4:24; 32:39-42; Ps 78:49-50; Is 14:26-27; 30:30; 34:2-17; 41:25; 47:3; Je 13:14, 26; 15:2-14; 46:10; 48:10, 26; 51:6, 11, 36, 56; Ez 21:17; 31; 23:25; 24:13-14; 25:14, 17; 39:25; Ho 2:10; Am 3:2-6; Na 1:1-14; Ma 2:3) or mocking accuser (e.g., De 32:37-38; Pr 3:34; Is 41:21-24; 47:12; 50:11; 57:12-13; Je 2:24, 28; 3:20; 4:22; 5:8; 13:10; 46:11, 15; Ez 28:9; 31:2; 32:1-8, 19; Ho 2:2, 5; 13:9-11; Am 4:4-5; Na 3:5). In these and other texts, God's rage is sometimes portrayed in the most graphic ways (e.g., De 32:16-22; Je 32:37; 2 Th 1:8-9; Re 14:11).

The last of these species of tropes—that of mocking accuser—proves particularly problematic for passibilists. Insisting that all of these metaphors be taken at "face-value" (Olrich 1982:52; cf. Pollard 1955:360; Clark 1992:186), what are passibilists to make of those texts portraying God as laughing at people (Ps 2:4); hating, loathing and despising them (Ps 2:4; 5:5; 95:10; Na 3:6); throwing "filth" at

them (Na 3:6); lifting their skirts to expose their shame (Na 3:5); and derisively referring to them as whores (Ho 2:2,5), horny camels (Je 2:23), donkeys (Je 2:24), stupid children (Je 4:22), lusty stallions (Je 5:8), treacherous wives (Je 3:20) and soiled underwear (Je 13:10)? In the Song of Moses, God anticipates a day when the Israelites will betray Him, and He responds with a jealous anger that "burns to the depths of Sheol" (De 32:22), giving them over to their enemies (v. 30b). In their "day of calamity" (v. 35b), does God console them? No, He taunts them, saying, "Where are their gods?" (v. 37), "let them rise up and help you!" (v. 38). This mocking refrain litters the latter chapters of Isaiah (e.g., 41:21-24; 47:12; 50:11; 57:12-13). Similar derisions are found elsewhere in the prophetic corpus (e.g., Je 2:28; 46:11, 15; Ez 28:9; 31:2; 32:1-8, 19; Ho 13:9-11; Am 4:4-5). Sometimes, even divine lamentations have a mocking quality, pronouncing feigned grief over a nation still in its prime, before certain judgement has befallen it (e.g., Ez 31:1ff; 32:1ff.). As Proverbs asserts, "Towards the scorners He is scornful" (3:34). As a rule, passibilists do not accord these images the same degree of literality as those depicting God's "woundedness".

There is still another class of trope found in the Old Testament material, rarely discussed in the passibilist literature. These are the pathically low images, portraying God's response to human sin in comparatively dispassionate terms. At times, God plays a neutral observer, narrating the people's stories with a kind of detached journalistic objectivity (e.g., Je 48:1-11; Is 47:10-11). More often, He is represented as an accommodating benefactor (e.g., Is 42:14; 43:1,5; 44:3,8; 55:1ff.; 65:1-7), reasoned adjudicator (e.g., Is 1:2-3, 5-8, 18-20; 5:3-4; 41:21-29; 43:8-13, 26; 44:9-20, 22; 45:21; 55:2; 57:11-12; Je 2:2-3, 4, 11-19; 5:7, 25, 28-29; 7:19; 11:15; 18:13; 22:4-5; Ez 36:20-32; Ho 14:8, 9; Ro 9:19-24) or bemused potentate (e.g., Ps 2:1-6; 37:12-13; 59:8; Pr 1:24-27). Often these images are interspersed with pathically high images (e.g., Je 48). The point here is this: the Biblical material attributing *pathos* to God is complex and varied, both in the range of emotions attributed to Him—from internalised feelings of hurt to

externalised expressions of wrath and vengeance—and in the intensity of feeling portrayed—from low to high.

The problem with most passibilist accounts is not that they take seriously the Biblical literature portraying divine *pathos*. The problem is that they do not take it seriously enough. They selectively cite only a portion of the pathically suggestive texts. They cull the material, minimising or ignoring those passages that portray God in ways that offend contemporary emotional sensibilities whilst retaining only those that support their vision of a tender hearted and wounded yet loving Companion. This hermeneutical slight-of-hand perhaps succeeds in creating a picture of God that suits contemporary tastes, but it fails to measure up to acceptable standards of exegesis. If one insists that the pathically rich texts be taken literally, then the whole kaleidoscope of Biblical tropes must be taken into account, with their wide array of significations. This includes not only the anthropomorphic tropes, discussed above, but the non-anthropomorphic material as well—that is, God is a lion tearing its prey, a lurking leopard, a moth, a worm, a storm, dry rot, a devouring fire, rain, etc. (La 3:11; Ho 5:12-15; 13:7-8; Is 31:4; 38:13; Je 23:19; Ho 5:12; De 4:23-24; 9:3; Ez 22:20-22; Ho 6:3). To represent one subspecies of metaphors as all-inclusive is misleading and does not do justice to the multifaceted Biblical record (cf. Brettler 1998).

Passibilists also fail on another front. They insist that scholarship take these suffering metaphors at face-value and feel their full pathic force (e.g., Olrich 1982:52; cf. Pollard 1955:360; Clark 1992:186), yet they themselves do not do so. They are quick to qualify their attribution of passibility to God by insisting that God is never overwhelmed by His suffering, when, in fact, certain texts certainly read as if He were (e.g., Ge 6:6-7; Ps 78:40-41; Je 4:19; Ho 11:8). They wish to have it both ways: a God who suffers literally and painfully, yet only to the extent that their (manifestly subjective) sensibilities will allow. Passibilists commit the

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very exegetical manoeuvre they accuse impassibilists of making—minimising the full force of the anthropopathic material to support their larger theological aims.

What should be obvious at this point is that all the metaphorical material in Scripture serves a rhetorical function—to persuade auditors (and readers) to change their behavior and attitudes. They are intended to expose the heinousness of sin, prompt repentance and bring about a change of orientation toward God, from willful rebellion to obedient and trusting submission. They rely on specific metaphorical vehicles and other literary and rhetorical devices to drive home their intended messages. They are often embodied in diverse oracles of judgement and salvation (Westermann 1967; Arnold 1995; et al.). These passages were not intended to make literal, ontologically precise statements about God and should not be accorded logical priority over those texts that make unambiguous metaphysical predications of Him.

For example, God is unmistakably portrayed in Scripture as transcendent of space-time categories due to His unique ontology and role as Creator (e.g., Is 40:12, 22, 26; 44:24; Je 23:23-24). He is depicted as the source and fullness of all being and sustainer of all that exists (e.g., Ge 1:1-31; Jn 1:1-4; 5:26; Ac 17:28; Cl 1:17; 1 Tm 6:13; He 1:3). Inscrutable in wisdom (e.g., Jb 38-41; Is 40:13-14, 18, 25, 28; 55:8-9; Ro 11:33-34) and unapproachable in His glory (e.g., Ex 33:20; 1 Tm 6:16; He 12:28), God is simply incomparable to anything on earth or in the heavens (e.g., Ex 15:11; De 4:35, 39; 33:26; Ps 86:8; 89:6-8; 113:4-5; Is 40:18, 25; 42:8; 21; 43:11; 44:6-8, 24; 45:5, 18-21; 46:5, 9; Je 10:6-7; 1 Co 2:11, 16; 1 Tm 1:17; 6:15-16). He is holy (e.g., Ps 22:3; Is 6:3; 43:15; 57:15; 1 Pe 1:16; Re 4:8), all-powerful (e.g., Jb 42:2; Is 40:28; Je 32:17; Mt 19:26; Re 19:6) and perfect in knowledge (e.g., Ps 139:1-16; Is 40:26; 46:10; Mt 6:8; 10:30). And He does not change (e.g., Nu 23:29; 1 Sa 15:29; Ps 102:24-27; Is 41:4; Ma 3:6; 2 Tm 2:13; He 1:10-12; Ja 1:16).

Moreover, God is sovereign over the affairs of the world (e.g., Ex 33:19; De 32:39-41; Ps 115:3; Pr 16:33; Is 14:24, 26-27; 29.16; 40:23; 41:2, 4, 25-26; 45:7, 18; 46:10-11; 64:8; Je 18:7-8; La 3:38; Da 2:20-23; 4:2-3, 34-35; Am 3:6; Ac 17:26; Ro 9:15-18; 11:19-24; Ep 1:11; Re 4:11). His creation does not add to His life, nor does He depend on it in any way (e.g., Jb 35:7; 41:11; Ac 17:24-25; Ro 11:35-36) for He Himself providentially cares for it (e.g., Ps 104:27-30; 145:9, 15; Mt 10:29). These are some of the innumerable aspects of God's nature—a nature that infinitely transcends both creaturely reality and human comprehension. Had Whitehead believed his Bible, he would have refrained from thinking we could pay such a Being "metaphysical compliments" but would, instead, have lamented our collective inability to accord Him the homage He is due.

God's transcendence, so conspicuous in the Biblical record, was also uniformly taught by the orthodox Church fathers, medieval scholastics and Reformers (George 1988; Bray 1993; Placher 1996; Grant 1999:470-475; Kärkkäinen 2004: 60-107; Holmes 2006; Kelley 2007:83-137; 223-279). It therefore is an essential part of the conservative evangelical theological heritage. Limiting God's transcendence out of a desire to render Him more intelligible or attractive to a contemporary audience is self-evidently unacceptable. And an integral part of the tight package of predicates constitutive of the divine transcendence is His impassibility. As Wolterstorff has observed, once you "pull on the thread of impassibility", the whole ball of classically-articulated divine attributes begins to unravel, including God's aseity, immutability and eternality (Wolterstorff 1999). Revisionist evangelicals like Pinnock celebrate the unraveling as a much-needed overhaul of classical theistic understandings of transcendence (Pinnock 1994:107; 2001:77). But for more circumspect scholars like Vanhoozer, impassibility serves as a great "diagnostic test" for every approach purporting to be Biblical and truly Christian (Vanhoozer 2002:87; 2010:388), urging caution on those who would dismiss it as unimportant. The present author submits the

conservative evangelical academy could do with more scholars cut from Vanhoozer's cloth.

6.2.2.3   Divine relationality

Section 3.4.2 showed that the divine transcendence must be held in tension with God's relational nature. This is not because the two are conceptual opposites. They are not. As was seen, God's creational relatedness is grounded in His ontological transcendence (cf. Barth 1996:42-46). The reason God is able to be so incomparably proximate to His creatures is because He transcends those barriers that limit creature-to-creature relationships: space, time, matter, partial knowledge of particulars and other restrictions imposed by creaturely finitude. This same section also discussed how, in the glorious dynamism of His triune mystery, the divine Being is inherently relational, and how the three Persons have chosen to interact with the creation in genuinely dialogical ways, preeminently by means of covenant partnerships. Thus, the divine relationality is the aboriginal reality that predates and pervades all of creation. This understanding of God's relatedness assures Christians that, although He is the Infinitely Other, He is also the Incomparably Near (Is 57:15; cf. Boesch 1995).

It is true that certain impassibilists have not done an adequate job in the past in balancing the transcendent, impassible dimensions of God's nature with His relational dimensions. Passibilist schoars certainly believe this to be the case (e.g., Stott 1986:330; Bloesch 1995:101; Ngien 1997:§1). Anselm's famous statement that God is compassionate insofar as He "saves the wretched" yet not compassionate in terms of sharing their wretchedness (*Proslogion* 8) is often cited in this connection (e.g., Kelly 1992:§4.8; §5.1). Some impassibilist scholars are of a similar opinion that their conceptual forebearers went afoul (Armstrong 2001:11; Lister 2013:64-106). Lister, for example, singles out Justin Martyr and

Clement of Alexandria as holding extreme impassibilist views that precluded God's genuine interaction with the world (Lister 2013:95-100). The current author believes Lister's assessment is overstated—that denials of emotivity to God do not equate to denials of involvement in earthly affairs but merely qualify the degree to which the divine Being is affected by said involvement.

Having said that, there is one contemporary scholar who, in this author's opinion, advanced an argument early in the discussion that tipped the balance too far in the transcendence direction. This was Richard Creel who referred to God's alleged ambivalence regarding whether humans choose Him or not, asserting that what matters to God is not *what* we choose but only *that* we choose (Creel 1986: 125). However, as was seen in Section 2.6.2.2, Creel later amended his position to portray God in more relational terms (Creel 1997:326-327). In the non-academic literature, Dinesh D'Souza's claim that "God doesn't feel anything" is similarly extreme (D'Souza 2012:212). But on the whole, passibilists have made too much of alleged impassibilist imbalances. The majority of passibilists object to any account of the divine Being that does not ascribe to God the full range of human emotions including commiseration. Accordingly, any impassibilist rendering of God will necessarily prove unsatisfactory. In this author's opinion, the colloquy would be well served if passibilists dropped their rhetoric comparing impassibilist portrayals to Aristotle's unmoved mover. Not a single impassibilist promotes Aristotle's god. Absurd stereotyping—rather than bolstering one's arguments—inevitably has the opposite effect, serving to highlight their weaknesses and the failure to understand an opponent's position.

Important to the discussion of God's relationality is the difference between God *in se* and God *pro nobis*—God-in-Himself and God-for-us. This gets to the heart of the disagreement between passibilists and impassibilists. Passibilists insist that God-in-Himself is conditioned or determined by His interactions with His creation—that is, that He is changed in certain real ways by what His creatures

do. When they rebel, repent, pray and suffer, these actions affect the very nature of God because He has made Himself vulnerable to external inducement by creating a race of beings possessing self-determining freedom. The degree to which God is felt to be externally conditioned varies from one scholar to the next—depending on one's theological grid—with mild revisionists at one end of the spectrum, open theists toward the middle and process theists at the other end. But passibilists are united in insisting that, as a result of His dialogical interactions with humans, God is changed in certain important respects. Some passibilists wish to limit these changes to God's will and emotions; others avow they apply equally to His nature or essence. But all agree that He changes. That is why passibilists (and some soft impassibilists; cf. Ware 1986:431-446; Lister 2013:242, 253) insist that the doctrine of immutability stands in need of revision. Most passibilist scholars avow prayer would be a meaningless exercise were it not for the fact that it has the capacity (indeed, the function) to change God's will (e.g., Basinger 1994:156-162).

Impassibilists on the other hand, maintain that God *qua* God is not personally changed by His interactions with the world. This does not mean that He is uncaring or removed from His creation. Far from it: in both spatial and relational terms, He is nearer to each object than the object is to itself. It merely means that His transcendence of the creaturely ontic order precludes His being determined by the things that take place within it. Being of a fundamentally different order of being, He is invulnerable to the inherent limitations and effects of the space-time universe for He transcends them. He cares deeply about what happens in this world. He maintains a perfect knowledge of our circumstances, is present to us in our pain, and His compassionate, gracious nature predisposes Him to act to bring about our salvation, healing and happiness (e.g., Is 30:18; Mt 5:43-48; Ac 14:17; 17:26-28). But creaturely actions do not change Him. They are of the utmost concern to Him, but they do not determine Him, transforming Him from whom He presently is into something different. As a God fully in-act, He has no

unrealised potential in Him awaiting the right set of circumstances to actualise and make Him into something more that what He now is. Rather, the truth attributed to Christ applies to the triune God: He is "the same yesterday and today and for ever" (He 13:8). This is God *in se*—what eastern theologians have long referred to as God's essence, in contrast to God's energies, to be discussed next (cf. Ware 1997:67-68; 1998:21-23; Lossky 1997:67-90; Clendenin 2005:61-70).

God *pro nobis*, on the other hand, acting within the medium of creaturely existence, will of necessity appear to us quite different from the way God just described in His *in se* "unapproachable light" (1 Tm 6:6). Fallen and finite humans cannot know God in His essence, for none "can see" Him and live (e.g., Ex 33:20, 23; 1 Tm 6:16). However, this luminous, ineffable Other has made Himself partially known within our spatiotemporal reality by revealing glimpses of Himself throughout redemptive history, through theophanies of every sort— dreams, visions, angelic visitations, prophetic messages, acoustical phenomena, etc.—and pre-eminently in the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom His fullness "dwells bodily" (Cl 2:9; cf. He 1:1-3). Refracted through the lens of space-time, the inscrutable, Uncreated Light—whilst not entirely transparent—becomes translucent. Working within creaturely reality, the Creator participates in space, time—even matter—accommodating Himself to creaturely limitations, language and conceptualisations (Talbot 2002; Johnson 2002).

So, when God discloses Himself within salvation history, He appears in the familiar garb of finite limits. For example, the Biblical narrative often depicts God as seemingly confined to the temporal chain of creaturely causality. He acts in a certain way at t_1, based on an existing set of circumstances, "reacts" at t_2 based upon changed conditions and "repents" of prior actions at t_3 in response to still new circumstances (e.g., Ge 6:1-8; 1 Sa 9:1-16:1). In a similar way, God appears to be bound by spatial constraints. He sits in heaven (e.g., Ps 82:1), looking

down on the earth (De 26:15; Ps 102:19) and venturing down occasionally to see what is going on (Ge 8:21; 11:5, 7). He "turns" to save the needy (Ps 80:14) and diligently "searches" for wholehearted devotees (2 Ch 16:9) or suitable real estate for Israel (Ez 20:6). He sometimes "hides" Himself (Is 45:15). Other times He makes Himself known (Ps 10:1). He is "near" to some (Ps 34:18) and "far" from others (Pr 15:29). Anticipating Israel's settling in the land, Yahweh avowed He would restrict His "habitation" to a single locality (De 12:5). In all these ways, Scripture represents God as spatially limited.

The Bible also, at times, represents God as having limited knowledge. After Israel worshipped the golden calf, Yahweh apparently required time to think over His response (Ex 33:5). Sometimes He is depicted as though He does not know how people will react (e.g., Ez 12:3). At other times, He is shocked by the course of events (e.g., Je 2:5; 3:19). He regrets some of His decisions (e.g., Ge 6:6; 1 Sa 15:35), changes His mind (e.g., Ex 33:3, 14; Is 38:1-8; Jo 3:4, 10) and is mistaken, at times, in His judgement (e.g., Je 3:7, 9). Further, he apparently forgets some things, only to later remember them (e.g., Ge 30:22; Ex 2:24). And—evidently not being privy to human thoughts—He must test humans to discover what is in their hearts (Ge 18:21; De 8:2; 13:3).

Similarly, the Bible portrays God as acting in some very human-like ways. God takes walks (Ge 3:8; Le 26:12) and whistles (Is 5:26; Ze 10:8), lies down and must be cajoled to rise (Ps 9:19), sleeps like a drunk and must be awakened (Ps 35:23; 78:65). He rests (Ge 2:2) and sometimes requires coaxing to take action (Ps 79:5; 80:2b; 82:8). He hears (Ex 2:24) and smells (Ge 8:21). He wooed, wed, bathed, dressed and bedecked a young Israel with jewels (Ho 2:14; Je 2:1-3; Ez 16:8-14). And He uses a number of tools to do His work: sword (De 32:42), arrows (Ps 21:12), shield, spear, javelin (Ps 35:2-3), shepherd's staff and rod (Ps 23:4) and foaming cup of judgement (Ps 75:8). Further, God experiences the gamut of human emotions, from painful regret (1 Sa 15:11, 35), to hatred (Ps 5:4-

6), fear (De 32:26-27), doubt (Ho 11:8), weariness (Is 1:10), rage (Is 30:30), affliction (Is 63:9), anguish (Je 4:19), jealousy (De 6:15), joy (Zp 3:17), loss (Je 12:7), vengeance (De 32:35), yearning (Je 31:20), and inconsolable grief (Ge 6:6; Je 48:30-36). God is even represented as having anatomical features like our own, including a face (Ex 33:20), eyes (He 4:13), eyelids (Ps 11:4), ears (Ps 55:1), mouth (De 8:3), lips (Jb 11:5), tongue (Is 30:27), back (Ex 33:23), bosom (Ps 74:11), arms (Ex 15:16), and feet (Ex 24:10). And on it goes. The Bible regularly employs anthropomorphic language to describe God's actions in salvation history. And it is not surprising. For how else might it make God intelligible to creatures limited to four dimensions and thus incapable of understanding God's hyper-dimensional essence?

But are these representations of God to be taken literally? Yes and no. Yes, they are to be understood as teaching something literally true about the Biblical God. And no, the literary and rhetorical teaching devices must be allowed to perform the functions for which they were intended and not be read in a woodenly literal way. Biblical *representations* are transposed into theological *conceptualisations* only after *all* the Biblical data are accounted for, including both the metaphorical material—consisting of both anthropomorphic and sub-anthropomorphic descriptions (e.g., God is a hen, rock, shield, horn of salvation, etc.)—and the explicit predications of metaphysical attributes (e.g., God does not change, fills heaven and earth, knows all things, etc.). These two data sets, together with the divine names (e.g., "I Am", "the God who sees", "the Lord is my healer", etc.) and divine actions (e.g., sending the flood, judging Uzzah, forgiving David, restoring Manasseh), comprise the source material for constructing a conceptualisation of God that accounts for the entirety of the Biblical material.

Were we to take the above cited anthropomorphic material at face-value, the result would be a time-bound, spatially constrained, emotionally unstable and anatomically proportioned god, more like Thor or Apollos than Yahweh. We

would find it impossible to reconcile this god with the unambiguous metaphysical predications in Scripture, for these depict God as the precise opposite of what these images suggest. Moreover, our crassly literal hermeneutic would do violence to the very logic of metaphorical language. Most greviously, however, it would constitute an idolatrous misconceptualisation of the worst sort—a Feurerbachian projection undeserving of our serious consideration and manifestly unworthy of the Most High (cf. Jones 2001; Wilson 2001a; Castelo 2009:109). In short, it would represent, following Vanhoozer, a bankrupt mythologisation of Scripture (Vanhoozer 2010). By demanding univocal predication of select anthropomorphisms, passibilists play on the edge of this precipice. Open theists have already taken a step over. After the debacle of the "Battle for God" in 2000-2001, conservative evangelicals—one would think—should be especially wary of modern attempts to revise the traditional orthodox interpretations of the anthropomorphic passages.

The language used in describing God in the texts cited above is self-evidently not ontological but phenomenological—that is, it expresses not how God *is*, but how God *appears* from our vastly limited human perspective. It is by employing creaturely categories such as space, time, materiality, causality, and more that the Bible explains to us what it is like for a Being who transcends created reality to make Himself present to us within the created order, acting on our behalf. As Calvin insisted, it is an example of God condescending to speak our native tongue so we can understand certain truths about Him (George 1988:192-193). So, the immutable, impassible and fully-actualised God appears changeable, mistaken at points, volitionally swayed and emotionally fitful as He interacts dialogically with rational creatures, both humans and angelic.

Does this render the anthropomorphic passages meaningless? Not at all. They reveal important truths about how God relates to His creation—He is as impartial as a judge, tender as a bridegroom, provident as a father and as caring as a

shepherd. These images do not exhaust the truth about Him, of course, for the incomprehensible God must not be thought to be circumscribed by these or any images. Nor do these analogies assume precisely the same meanings they obtain when used with reference to human beings. But they do serve as powerful vehicles for communicating to us important and precious truths about God's relatedness to the world. A Biblically sound doctrine of divine relationality will teach that God, whilst choosing to voluntarily make revelatory use of creaturely images and relational categories, supersedes them (cf. Rae 2006; Torrance 2006). "Am I a God at hand," asks Yahweh, "and not a God far away?" (Je 23:23). The answer, of course, is no. Whilst "at hand", He is fundamentally Other.

In summary, the way God-in-Himself has been understood in the orthodox Tradition is as follows. God's unique ontology assures His aseity, autarchy and undetermined fullness of being. He enjoys an existence independent of the formal features of our universe—space, time, matter, energy, physical constants and the like—precisely because He created them, existed before them and in no respect depends on them for His sustenance and happiness. The triune God is self-existing and self-sufficient, resplendent in glory and super-abounding in love and perfectly actualised in the fullness of His Being. Furthermore, it is out of the sheer plentitude of His Being that all other beings exist and continue in existence (cf. Jn 1:1-4; Ac 17:24-28; Cl 1:17; He 1:1-3). And because God is love, He is loving and good toward all He has made, exercising a benevolent providence over all, making Himself known through general and special forms of revelation, and "reconciling the world to Himself in Christ" (2 Co 5:19 NIV). Conservative evangelical scholars must be uncompromising on these points. Only in this way can they avoid the pitfalls of overemphasising one pole of the transcendence-relatedness continuum at the expense of the other.

6.2.3 Promote the existential benefits of impassibilism

A third and final recommendation to improve the present reality at the scholarly level within conservative evangelicalism is to promote the existential benefits of a carefully articulated impassibility—one that is faithful to the Biblical material and respectful of the divine transcendence-relatedness continuum. Those existential arguments commonly occurring in the literature were outlined in Section 2.6.1, organised under five headings: that is, devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional. The five sections below follow this same format and elabourate on one or two of the most compelling of the arguments outlined in Chapter 2. It is the present author's thesis that promoting these arguments will help mitigate passibilist inroads and articulate a more Biblical model for understanding God's relationship to human suffering.

6.2.3.1 Devotional benefits

A triad of devotional arguments supports the existential viability of an impassibilist account of God. First, belief in a God invulnerable to suffering provides assurance that God will never be emotionally besieged and therefore unavailable to help us when we are most needy. This affirms that God's love for us remains stable, inalterable, and not subject to changes of emotional states (Johnson 2001:§1). It assuages fear that His love and care might vary over time, due to changing external circumstances or internal fluctuations. To the contrary, on an impassibilist view, God is always fully in control of the divine life, invulnerable to external determination and, thus, always in a position to meet human needs (Creel 1986:125, 141, 154; Helm 2007:§3; Gavrilyuk 2009:141, 145, 146-147). And because God is such a plentitude of joy, peace and super-abounding affection, the Christian can be confident of having immediate and intimate access to those blessings in Christ, even during times of great affliction

(Johnson 2001:§4; Emery 2009:71-72; Helm 2005:§3, §5; 2007:102; Gavrilyuk 2009:140-141; DeYoung 2010:§6; Lister 2013:251; cf. Anselm 1976:58-59; Von Hügel 1926:191, 197-198).

Second, belief in divine impassibility assures Christians that God loves them unselfishly rather than for personal, selfish reasons. Since God is not subject to creaturely suffering, He cannot be thought to be acting on His own behalf when He intervenes to relieve human pain. This, in turn, ensures that His loving concern is a pure benevolence, divested of any personal agenda—a gratuitous outpouring of beneficence intended for the sole purpose of securing the welfare of the objects of His care (Dodds 1991:332-333; Weinandy 2000:160; 2001:40; Hart 2002:192, 195; Gavrilyuk 2009:140-141).

Third, a God undetermined by creaturely conditions evinces the kind of transcendent "otherness" that inspires awe, reverence and fear—all necessary constituents of Biblical worship. A God who by nature is immune to creaturely sufferings but who nonetheless devises a way to enter space-time and suffer *as* a man *for* men is worthy both of our most astonished reverence and adoring gratitude. A God who suffers *qua* God as a matter of course, on the other hand, whilst capable of providing a kind of sympathetic companionship to afflicted humans, does little more than that. He is, in Whitehead's words, our "fellow-sufferer who understands" but is also manifestly lacking those metaphysically distinct properties Whitehead thought unnecessary but that are, in fact, essential to the divine transcendence and foundational to Christian worship (Whitehead 1929:532; 1967:223). Passibilism vitiates the divine transcendence sufficiently to threaten the very basis of real worship (Creel 1986:123-124, 125-126, 129, 135, 142; Cook 1990:70, 77, 86; Weinandy 2000:146; 20011:39, 41; Hart 2002:190-191; Heaney 2007:237; DeYoung 2010:§6).

6.2.3.2 Psychological benefits

Psychologically, passibilism offers the credible argument that some comfort is to be derived from the fact that another person shares our sorrows (cf. Moltmann 1974b:16-17; Hick 1979:80-82; Young 1979:102-103; Surin 1983:241, 246; Fretheim 1984:124, 126; Wolterstorff 1987:88; Fiddes 1988:31, 32; Taliaferro 1989:222; Sarot 1996:231, 232-233; Sia 1996:§7; Louw 2003:394, 395; Bush 2008:782, 783; O'Brien 2008:§6; cf. Whitehead 1929:532; Taylor 1998:118-124). However, two considerations should be borne in mind.

First, the Bible never makes this argument—that is, it never suggests that God's co-suffering is the source, or ought to be the source, of human comfort. This is a significant omission. If God indeed suffers *qua* God out of solidarity with humanity, then (assuming the Biblical authors were apprised of that fact) one should expect to find instances in Scripture, especially the Psalms, where this is celebrated. Yet there are none. The only exception is consistent with the Tradition—an astonished meditation on the encouragement and strength to be derived from the fact that the Son made Himself "lower than the angels" to suffer as a man and become our sympathetic high priest (He 2:9, 18; 4:14-16; cf. Is 53). This carefully qualified Christological predication of suffering to God, later explained in the Chalcedonian symbol, provides enormous existential benefits whilst retaining the proper tension between God's transcendent and relational dimensions.

Second, whatever psychological benefit might be derived from a co-suffering deity is arguably offset by other factors. For example, it has been convincingly argued that what human sufferers most need is not sympathetic commiseration but relief from their distress, and a God unencumbered with His own pain is in a better position to provide such relief (Creel 1986:154-155, 156-157; Bray 1999:§3; Helm 2005:§2; Heaney 2007:174; Adam 2012:354-374; Lister

2013:248; cf. Martens and Millay 2011). If God really suffers to the degree certain passibilists allege—wounded, broken-hearted, aching for our companionship, grieving our loss and weeping over human sins (e.g., Wolterstorff 1987:91; Foster 1992:1)—then it requires prodigious imaginative muscle to envision a scenario whereby God can tend to His own hurts yet remain available to help humans with theirs. Tellingly, Psalm 68:5 refers to Yahweh, not as a "co-sufferer of the fatherless and widow" but as a "Father of the fatherless and protector of widows". Consolation in the form of commiseration serves a purpose but is eclipsed exponentially by the comfort derived from practical assistance and material relief.

Impassibilism simply offers superior benefits psychologically than passibilist accounts. This is particularly true with regard to the future. On what basis may a passibilist be confident that the universe, and God Himself, will ever be free from suffering? For if God has internalised suffering to such a degree that it has touched His very nature, what room do we have for hope that there will come a time when it no longer is a part thereof? This problem is compounded by those scholars who insist that God's suffering is eternal and part of the divine self (cf. Wolterstorff 1987; Hudson 1996; House and Grover 2009:128, 134). On impassibilist accounts, suffering never becomes constitutive of God but is seen as fundamentally alien—a parasitic privation of good, a corruption and cancer to be eradicated. Christ's decisive victory on the cross was the beginning. His renewal of all things will complete the job. But because they lack ontological substance, suffering and evil have no place in the new heavens and earth, and Christians can be fully assured that the present will one day give way to the future, and God really will "wipe every tear" from human eyes (Is 25:8; Re 21:4).

6.2.3.3 Ethical benefits

Apatheia served a dual function within patristic theology. As has been seen, the doctrine qualified the divine emotions, so that God's affective experiences (whatever they might entail) were distinguished from those exhibited by humans and pagan gods (Gavrilyuk 2006). But it also served a second role—to provide Christians a benchmark in responding to the vicissitudes of human existence. *Apatheia* was an ethical ideal, a way of relating to the world with deliberate calm and equanimity, not as an end in itself, but as an expression of a heart set on "things above" where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Cl 3:1-2). The fathers thus promoted it as something to which Christians should aspire (cf. Pomplun 2009:187-188). To the degree they proved successful, they could learn to be "content in every situation" like Paul and experience God's peace "which surpasses all understanding" even in the midst of great personal suffering, including martyrdom (Ph 4:7, 13).

The author concedes this is a tough sell in today's passion-intoxicated Christian world, where "radical" is the new byword, "awesome" the term *de jure* for everything from God to the latest viral video, and text messaging requires copious emojis and exclamation points to evidence a suitable level of emotional engagement (cf. Hill 2014:32; Horton 2014). Conservative evangelicalism has bought into the venerable heresy that "authenticity" means emotional exhibitionism, an impulse at least as old as the cult of Dionysus. Reserve is *passé*. In today's world of extreme sports, the *apatheia* ideal is roughly analogous to a cricket match.

Yet we should not so readily dismiss the collective wisdom of the fathers. *Apatheia* possesses useful resources for living a life of faithful discipleship to the One who "set His face" toward Jerusalem to accomplish the Father's will (Lk 9:51). *Apatheia* motivates Christians to subdue their passions and subordinate all

earthly interests to God's higher agenda (Garvey 1989). In the process, believers learn to love others with a pure, unselfish *agape* (Hart 2002:193; Creel 1986:157-158). The author has a close friend, a pastor, whose wife decided she no longer wanted to remain married to him after thirty-two years. Initially distraught to the point of suicide, my friend rebounded by God's grace, significantly conquered his very legitimate desires for companionship and affection and learned to love her, despite repeated provocations, with an *agape* as beautiful as it is unearthly. They divorced, but he continues to exhibit a consistent benevolence toward her, not because she deserves it or he wants to win her back, but because he has learned, in the midst of heartache, a kind of impassibility in relating to her. Acquiring a level of *apatheia* preserved both his sanity and his Christian witness.

6.2.3.4 Apologetic benefits

Passibilists credit their view with presenting a more humane God to a jaded world, enhancing the Gospel's apologetic appeal (Bauckham 1987). On a popular level, Dorothy Sayers argued along these lines in her *Letters to a diminished church*, when she avowed that, having made the world as it is, God at least had the courage "to take His own medicine" and play by the rules by dying with Christ on the cross (Sayers 2004:2, 5). The idea is a commonplace in the passibilist literature: although we cannot explain why evil and suffering exist, we have the comfort of knowing that God has played fair and suffered alongside us. But surely, this is a meager comfort.

Far more intoxicating, to the author's mind, is the astonishing news that there lives, in a realm beyond our own, a God impervious to the evil and suffering that mar human existence—a God of luminous beauty and perfect innocence, who, against all odds, chose to live and die as a man, whilst yet retaining His undiminished substance. On this account, suffering carries no ontological weight

and never dims His brilliance. It is a temporary aggravation, external to the life of God, and it will come to a decisive end in the eschaton. This is a message of hope. It goes beyond a hand-holding theodicy and places the emphasis where it needs to be: on the final demise of suffering and evil in a restored, repristinated cosmos (Goetz 1986:§5; Simoni 1997:346; Hart 2002:192; Gavrilyuk 2009:141, 145, 146-147; cf. Wolterstorff 1987:80, 90; Castelo 2009:142-145; Leahy 2010:§5; Lister 2013:248).

6.2.3.5 Missional benefits

Impassibilism, by restricting God's suffering to the person of Christ, similarly restricts the benefits of consolation to those who are joined to Christ through His Spirit. This serves to incentivise evangelistic and missionary work, for Christians want others to partake of these blessings, and they are found only in Christ. Passibilism has a tendency to depreciate the unique role of Christ. On their view, God suffers *qua* God for all. The consolatory benefits of His suffering are, therefore, available to all, regardless of whether one is joined to Christ. Thus, in addition to the devotional, psychological, ethical and apologetic benefits described above, impassibilism offers a missional benefit by spurring its adherents on to work more zealously to tell others the astonishing news of God's grace in Christ (Weinandy 2000:173; 2001:41; cf. Cavadini 2001:42).

6.3 Practical recommendations: the evangelical pew

Evangelical parishioners generally do not have an informed theology of divine suffering, so they often revert to one of two extremes. On the one hand, they assume that God does not care about their plight, having accepted a caricature of Him which renders Him indifferent, eviscerating trust in the Lord's covenantal

responsiveness. On the other, they assume that God co-suffers with them, a position which problematizes the divine ontology, inadvertently denigrates the empathic dimensions of Christ's unique suffering and death and subtly undermines eschatological hope in a future without suffering. Both extremes can lead to deleterious effects on the faith of individual Christians.

Propounding this problem is the fact that many evangelical pastors, speakers, authors and other opinion-shapers have not reflected sufficiently on the (im)passibility issue to develop a Biblically informed, theologically nuanced understanding of God's relationship to human suffering. The result is a regular stream of sermons, books, podcasts and other media that espouse such passibilist notions as God's woundedness and sorrow over human sin and His broken-hearted longing for human fellowship (e.g., Lucado 1986; Foster 1992; Hybels 1997; Warren 2002; Chan 2006). Even popular pastors and writers with formal theological training like Sam Storms are guilty of this when he suggests: (1) the Bible represents God as having emotions, (2) impassibility teaches God cannot have emotions, and, therefore (3) impassibility is clearly wrong (Storms 2000: 294). This commonplace syllogism fails on two counts. First, the initial premise neither distinguishes between Biblical *representations* and theological *conceptualisations* nor demonstrates why anthropopathisms should be interpreted literally when other species of anthropomorphic language are taken figuratively. Second, the second premise incorrectly assumes that all forms of impassibility preclude divine emotions when, in fact, most versions do not.

Teaching a Biblically qualified impassibility in conservative evangelical colleges and seminaries, as suggested in Section 6.2, would unquestionably help improve the lamentable lack of clarity in the pew, since parishioners tend to believe what their pastors and other respected leaders have taught them. Another important part of the solution, however, is to patiently teach laypersons, in a variety of venues, both a Biblically qualified impassibilism and a nuanced understanding of

God's relatedness to the world. Doing so will assist rank-and-file believers to grow in their fund of dogmatic knowledge, increasing their discernment so they can better discriminate between truth and error (cf. He 5:14). The next two sections explore in more detail the conceptual content of these two proposals.

6.3.1   Teach parishioners divine impassibilism

First, rank-and-file believers need to be taught divine impassibility as part of the historically legitimated grammar of God. In sermons, spiritual formation classes, discipleship groups, small group meetings and one-on-one mentoring venues evangelical pastors must continually reinforce what Scripture teaches about God's transcendence and relatedness, as interpreted by the mainstream Christian Tradition. Thus, God's aseity, autarchy, eternality, omnipotence, compassion, love and other perfections should be taught from the Biblical text (e.g., Ex 34:6-7; Ps 23, 103, 139; Is 40-45; Ac 17:24-31, etc.) and the writings of the early fathers, the creeds, councils and later representatives of the Tradition, including the Reformers and their heirs, down to the present day.

Included in this teaching should be an explanation of divine impassibility, its rhetorical function as apophatic qualifier and its existential benefits for individual believers. A careful exposition of passages like Psalm 113, Isaiah 40:10-12 and 66:1-2 and the benchmark text, Acts 17:24-28, would equip parishioners to appreciate firsthand the delicate way Scripture balances God's transcendent "otherness" and immanent "nearness". This would help them internalise the practical benefits of the doctrine. For example, it would inspire confidence that God is always "there" for them, never determined by creaturely events, never emotionally overwhelmed, but consistently faithful to His unchanging nature and promises and available to them in times of need. Over the past two years, the author has been teaching these truths in multiple venues—from the pulpit, in

church staff meetings and in small groups and one-on-one—resulting in a noticeably greater appreciation of God's transcendent dimensions among staff and parishioners, an increased fear of the Lord in the church's language and behaviour and a better understanding of God's compassionate regard and unfailing availability to save.

Whilst teaching divine impassibility to laypersons, two things in particular should be emphasised to ensure it is a Biblical impassibility and not some extreme variant being taught. The first is that God possesses a rich, variegated affective life. Christians must not think of the divine Being as incapable of affect. Instead, they must understand Him to be a plentitude of exuberant love, effusive joy, abundant peace and caring concern. The difference between how He experiences these affections and the way humans do is attributable to His timeless infinitude and His immunity to the ravages of the Fall. Thus, God's affective life is not changeful, unstable, distorted or overwrought, as is so often the case with fallen creatures. Instead, God's affections are part of who He is in the fullness of His Being, perfectly concordant with His will and nature (e.g., Weinandy 2000; Hart 2003; Vanhoozer 2010). Given the vast disparity between divine and human affective expressions, it is best not to use terms like "feelings" or "emotions" to describe the divine affect, since—in human experience—these things are transitory, often irrational, disproportioned and occasioned by external stimuli and bodily sensations. "Affections" is a more suitable term with an established historical pedigree (e.g., Augustine, Aquinas, Edwards, et al.) and without the connotative baggage associated with alternative descriptors. Here, it bears repeating that we cannot know exactly how God's affective life operates, so epistemic modesty requires that we be reticent to pontificate on matters God has not clearly revealed (cf. De 29:29). The fact the Lord warned us that we will give an account for "every careless word" we speak (Mt 12:36) should chasten all human God-talk. The bottom line is this: humans cannot know precisely how the divine Being experiences affect, but God's ontological uniqueness—grounded in

the Creator-creature distinction—requires that we not make univocal predications of human emotionality of God. He undoubtedly possesses an incomprehensibly rich, abundant affective life. Impassibility merely qualifies how humans understand that life to be distinct from their own emotional experiences.

Second, the doctrine of impassibility holds that there is a legitimate way to speak of God suffering on behalf of humanity without resorting to theopaschite models. Namely, God truly suffered *as a man* in Christ. Scriptural passages like the benchmark text, Hebrews 2:17-18, clearly explain how Christ—fully God (1:3) yet fully man (2:14)—suffered to atone for human sins and become qualified as our sympathetic high priest (2:17; 4:15). This nuanced, Christologically qualified attribution of suffering to God was carefully preserved by the Tradition in the Chalcedonian symbol. Cyril's understanding of the *communicatio idiomatum* explained how the suffering that the human Jesus experienced exposed God to human suffering in the single hypostasis by means of the union of natures without implicating the divine nature itself in suffering (cf. Torrance 1995:184-186; Wilson 2001b:156; Gondreau 2009:244-245; Marshall 2009:283, 296-298). Chalcedon ensured each nature retained its integrity, for their union was described as "unconfused" (*asunkutos*). Hence, Cyril's paradoxical statement that "the Impassible…suffered" is a faithful recapitulation of the Biblical tradition.

Chalcedonian Christology therefore provides an existentially satisfying, Biblically sound and historically legitimated rejoinder to unfounded passibilist accusations that impassibilism teaches an uninvolved, distant Deity (e.g., Pinnock 1994:102; Hasker 1994:130; cf. Johnson and Huffman 2002:27). In actuality, impassibilism has traditionally taught that God suffers, not *in se*, but in the historically particularised Christ event, underscoring the Christological focus of the Gospel and the Christological locus of divine comfort and human hope. Only in Christ do we find the answer to the problem of evil and the conundrum of human suffering. In Him, God suffered in the medium of His humanity and, thus, understands

human pain "from the inside". This sets the Christian message apart from every other account and infuses it with a sense of incomprehensible wonder leading to inexpressible gratitude.

6.3.2 Teach parishioners divine providential care

Second, laypersons need to be taught a nuanced theology of God's providential care. Using all of the communication venues available to them—newsletters, blogs, church websites, Facebook pages, Sunday school lessons, sermons, testimony times, and more—pastors should continually underscore the multiplex wonder of God's meticulous care for His creation, particularly His covenant people. Doing so will fortify the faith of parishioners, enhancing their appreciation of God's goodness and giving them a conceptual apparatus for contextualising the difficult things that transpire in their lives. This, in turn, can help them grow "better" rather than bitter in response to life's challenges (cf. Dulles 2009:334).

Classically, the doctrine of divine providence teaches that God cares for His creation by means of His: (1) preservation—sustaining "in being" all things (Jb 34:14-15; Ps 36:6; 104:29; Ac 17:28; Cl 1:17; He 1:3), (2) concurrence—cooperating with subordinate powers so all creatures can fulfill the purposes for which they have been designed (Jb 37:6-13; Ps 104:4; 148:8; Ac 17:26) and (3) governance—superintending all that occurs, including the actions of self-determining agents, toward the eventual outworking of His eternal purposes (Ps 103:19; Da 4:35; Ro 8:28-30; 1 Co 15:27; Ep 1:11) (Grudem 1995:332; Oden 2006:281-82). Precisely how God exercises His providence vis-à-vis human and angelic free agency is a matter of sustained scholarly debate (e.g., Feinberg 1986; Geisler 1986; Reichenbach 1986; Pinnock 1986; Sproul 1995; Tiessen 2000; Talbot 2006; Piper 2006; Jowers 2011; Boyd 2011; Craig 2011b; Helseth 2011; Highfield 2011). But the fact that God superintends His creation is

uncontested. As concerns impassibility within the larger framework of God's relatedness to the world, there are three points that particularly need to be emphasised: (1) God's understanding of human sufferers, (2) God's sympathy for human sufferers and (3) God's compassion for human sufferers. These are discussed in the following sections.

6.3.2.1 God's understanding of human sufferers

Conservative evangelical laypersons need to know that God truly understands human suffering generally and their sufferings particularly. In fact, God knows the individual thoughts, fears, needs, hopes and painful circumstances of individual humans better than they know them theirselves. This is true in at least three ways. First, God understands human sufferers by means of His omniscience as God. Scripture paints a splendid, polychromatic portrait of God's comprehensive knowledge, a "knowing" that includes the names of each star (Is 40:26), the hairs on every head (Mt 110:30) and the thoughts in each brain (Ps 139:2-4). Contra open theist avowals, the Biblical God knows the end from the beginning (e.g., Is 46:10). He knows believers from the womb, understands their many weaknesses and anticipates their deepest needs before those needs are formed into words (e.g., Je 1:4; Ps 103:8-14; 139:13-16; Mt 6:8). Because God's knowing (*yada*) entails an infallible comprehension of their entire being and full range of circumstances, Christians can have absolute confidence that God perfectly understands what they are going through at any point in time (cf. Mt 6:6-8).

Second, God understands human sufferers by means of His experience of suffering—as a human—in Christ. In the person of the Son, the Impassible took suffering and death into His own experience, as texts like Hebrews 2 argue. In Isaiah 53:3, our Lord was described as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief". Why? Because "He was despised and rejected by men"—because, in

other words, He experienced precisely the kinds of human cruelty, betrayal, ridicule and forsakenness that can make life in a fallen world so difficult. Add to these sufferings the loneliness, hunger, physical pain and grief that Jesus endured, and it is clear that God "gets" us, each one of us, for in Emmanuel He became one of us. And we need not worry that God will ever forget what it is like to suffer as a human, for the One who still bears scars is in the presence of the Father, interceding on our behalf (Ro 8:34; He 7:25).

Third, God understands human sufferers by means of His knowing the mind of the Spirit. Timothy Wiarda (2013) underscores the Pauline teaching that God's Spirit intercedes for Christians with "groanings too deep for words", translating our inarticulate groanings into petitions (Ro 8:26-27; cf. Ro 5:5; 8:9-11; 15-16; 2 Cl 1:22; Ga 4:6). Because God knows the mind of the Spirit—and the Spirit, the mind of God (1 Co 2:10-11)—Christians can take immense comfort in knowing their deepest felt needs are being accurately conveyed to the Father continually.

6.3.2.2 God's sympathy for human sufferers

Not only does God understand human sufferers but He has sympathy for them. Not in a commiserative way—as in the case of empathetic co-suffering—but in the sense that He truly cares about them (Vanhoozer 2010:434-441; cf. Davies 2011:18). As He said to Moses, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry…I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them…" (Ex 3:7-8a). Whilst under no obligation to extend mercy to anyone (e.g., Ex 33:19), God is predisposed to "be gracious" and "show mercy" (e.g., Is 30:18), for compassion, graciousness, longsuffering, love and forgiveness are constituent elements of His "goodness" and conspicuous features of His "name" (Ex 33:19; 34:5-7; cf. Nu 14:18; 2 Ch 30:9; Ne 9:17; Ps 86:15, etc.). Sometimes, as the history of Israel illustrates, He withholds His

sympathy for disciplinary reasons (Ho 13:14; cf. Je 13:14; La 3:43; Ez 5:11; 7:4; 8:18; Ho 1:6ff; Ze 1:12-16; 11:6ff.). He still does so today (e.g., 1 Co 11:27-32; Re 2:1-3:22). But even on such occasions, believers can be confident that God is acting like a father, chastening and reproving us "for our good, that we may share His holiness" (He 12:5-11). God's sympathy was most fully expressed, of course, in the person of the Son. Our great high priest can fully "sympathise with our weaknesses" because He participated in our sufferings (He 4:15). Such knowledge allows us to boldly approach "the throne of grace", knowing that God's "mercy" and "grace" will "help in time of need" (He 4:16).

So, in response to the common human cry, "Lord, don't you care?" the Bible answers with ringing affirmation: "Yes"! In fact, it is because "He cares" that we are exhorted to "cast" all our anxieties on Him (1 Pe 5:7). The cross demonstrates just how much he cares, for it is "whilst we were still sinners" that Christ died for us (Ro 5:8; 1 Jn 3:1). Capitalising on this fact, Paul uses a greater-to-lesser argument to assure the Roman believers that, whatever their unique challenges, the One who did not spare His Son but willingly "gave Him up for us all" is for them, cares about their needs and will provide them with all they require (Ro 8:31-32).

6.3.2.3   God's compassion on human sufferers

God understands human sufferers and has sympathy for them. Most importantly, however, He has compassion on them (Reynolds 2013). Vanhoozer defines compassion as, "the goodness God directs to suffering others" (Vanhoozer 2010:434). It goes beyond pity or commiseration, coupling love and concern with definitive action. As Scripture makes clear, God's compassion is a Trinitarian event. The Apostle Paul referred to the Father as the "Father of compassion" (2 Co 1:3-4). Jesus promised in the upper room to send the Holy Spirit after His

departure—another "Comforter" (*parakletos:* helper, advocate, comforter)—implying that He, Jesus, was the first "Comforter" (Jn 14:16). That Jesus Himself was full of compassion is attested by the number of times the Gospel writers note the way it motivated His healing, life-giving actions during His earthly ministry (e.g., Mt 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; Mk 1:41; 6:34; Lk 7:13; Jn 11:33, 38). So, each member of the Trinity is marked by compassion. But how does the triune God demonstrate His compassion? He does it through His sympathetic solidarity, remedial intervention and eschatological renewal. These are briefly examined below.

6.3.2.3.1   Through sympathetic solidarity

God's sympathetic solidarity with human sufferers says, in effect, "I'm here for you". The refrain echoes down the corridors of salvation-history. He is, the psalmist states, "near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (Ps 34:18). God assured Judah that, when they passed through "the waters" and "the fire", He would be with them (Is 43:2). But it was not until what poet Scott Cairns calls the "appalling condescension" of Emmanuel that God's sympathetic solidarity was put on full display (Cairns 2010:108; cf. Reynolds 2013:11). Made "lower than the angels" for a time, the Son partook of "flesh and blood", becoming like humans "in every respect" (He 2:9, 14; 4:15). In so doing, the Son became, in Vanhoozer's words, "corporeal discourse"—the reification of the invisible God's sympathetic solidarity with a suffering humanity (Vanhoozer 2010:435).

6.3.2.3.2   Through remedial intervention

Solidarity is wonderful yet is, in itself, incomplete. What human sufferers most need is relief in the form of practical assistance. God's compassion often offers

such relief. Through remedial intervention, God says to us, "I will help you". Passibilists boast that their account is more psychologically satisfying because it offers sufferers a "fellow Sufferer". Yet, to this author's knowledge, there is not a single instance in Scripture where one of God's people asks God to feel his or her pain. Instead, what is found repeatedly are instances of God's people crying out for help, asking Him to alter their circumstances such that they are relieved of the affliction they are experiencing. Whether in the Exodus account (Ex 3:1-12), later historical narratives (Jg 2:18), Psalter (Ps 141:1-2) or prophetic material (Jo 2:1-2), the central thrust of petitionary prayer remains the same: God we need you, so help us!

Even that classic text of divine-human solidarity cited above, Hebrews 2, makes clear that the Son did not come merely to "be" with people but to answer their real needs in concrete ways. He came "to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (v. 17). Similarly, the point of the various Gospel references to Christ's compassion was not to prove what a nice person He was but to demonstrate what a strong Savior He is. By casting out demons, raising the dead and exercising authority over disease and natural powers, the Son was meeting real human needs whilst giving evidence that He had inaugurated His kingdom on the earth with the power and authority given to Him by the Father (Mt 28:18-20; Lk 7:22; 11:20). Such a powerful Rescuer is able to "save to the uttermost" all who "draw near to God through Him" (He 7:25).

Christ is still building His Church and extending His kingdom, and He continues to provide relief to His people today in the form of miracles, signs and wonders (Boyd 1997, 2002b; Grudem 2000; Mount 2012). However, given the proliferation of Word of Faith teachings and other distorting "gospels", it is important to add this proviso: He does so at His discretion, not ours (e.g., 1 Co 12:11). God is under no obligation to respond to our prayers in ways we deem appropriate. That He frequently does so is a tribute to His astonishing mercy. But He is not bound

by human canons of correctness, still less by some "law of faith" or other compulsory causality. He is the sovereign, unencumbered Lord of creation who will not be manipulated by humans (Morris 2012).

Yet there are occasions when God seems eerily silent in the presence of acute human need. This observation is, of course, a distinguishing characteristic of so-called post-holocaust theologies or, more properly, anthropodicies (cf. Mackie 1955; Moltmann 1974b:10; Sölle 1975:134, 149; Rowe 1979, 1984; Surin 1983:246, 247; Bauckham 1984:11-12; Jonas 1987:3, 4, 6; Adams and Sutherland 1989; De Schrijver 1989; Fiddes 2000:164, 168; Phillips 2001; Roth 2001; Dougherty 2011). And in a recent article, Phillip Jenkins cites God's apparent inaction in the face of Christian persecution at various spots around the globe—five major waves of repression in China since the ninth century, the fierce eradication of Japan's Catholic community in the seventeenth, the brutal genocide of two million believers within the Ottoman Empire in the early twentieth, and, closer to home, the calculated subjugation and extermination of Chaldean, Assyrian and Syrian Orthodox Christians by ISIS in today's Iraq (Jenkins 2014:41). In the "already, but not yet" of God's inaugurated kingdom timeline, we occupy an awkward eschatological parenthetical space in which both good and evil, victory and defeat run on parallel tracks, during what Cairns aptly calls "this, our puzzling meantime" (Cairns 2010:24). This observation does not call into question God's compassion, but merely qualifies its understanding as operating within the divine economy.

6.3.2.3.3 Through eschatological renewal

The current state of affairs will not last forever. This age will come to an end. Jesus will return and—questions about His possible millennial interregnum notwithstanding—shall usher in a "new heaven and new earth, where

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righteousness dwells" (2 Pe 3:13 NIV). God's sympathetic solidarity asserts, "I am with you". His remedial intervention says, "I will help you". And His eschatological promise of renewal affirms, "I will one day fix things for good". Because Christ has overcome the world, Christians can "take heart" and experience "peace" even in a world still wracked by pain and "tribulation" (Jn 16:33). This is because God is trustworthy and keeps His promises. In response to the martyrs' cries "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long?" comes His sure, if vague, response: "Soon!" (Re 6:10; 22:7). It is enough. Christians of every age have banked their hope on the goodness and utter trustworthiness of God, allowing them to affirm with TS Eliot ("Little Gidding" V):

> "And all shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well
> When the tongues of flame are in-folded
> Into the crowned knot of fire
> And the fire and the rose are one" (Eliot 1991:209).

6.4   Chapter summary and relevance to the overall research agenda

This chapter is critically relevant to the project's overall aim as it outlines a constructive proposal for addressing the problems occasioned by passibilist teachings within conservative evangelicalism at both scholarly and non-scholarly levels. As an exercise in the subdiscipline of practical theology, the project seeks to help change the current state of affairs into a more amenable one. In accordance with the LIM model for doing transformative theology, it addresses the central question: What can be done? In answer to this question, the chapter outlines a remedial proposal calling for two strategic foci: one directed at institutions of higher learning and the other at churches.

Section 6.1 reviewed the current situation: the conservative evangelical academy is fractured over the question of divine (im)passibility. Since the publication of Moltmann's landmark 1974 work, there has been a growing passibilist consensus within the theological guild, including members of the conservative evangelical community. Some of these have adopted passibilist arguments outright (e.g., Pinnock 1979; Stott 1986; House and Grover 2009), whilst others have advocated soft passibilist (Erickson 1985; Grudem 1994; Carson 2000) or soft impassibilist variants (Ware 1986; Cole 2011; Lister 2014). Still another group has retained the axiom as historically informed by Chalcedonian Christology and a Cyrillian *communicatio idiomatum*, predicating the sufferings of the man Jesus to the shared hypostatic subject (e.g., Bray 1978; Culver 1998; Smith 2012). The debates surrounding open theism within the evangelical camp, especially, brought the importance of these issues to the fore, hardened the battle lines and exposed the divided nature of the conservative wing of the Church.

At the same time, passibilist proposals have proliferated through numerous popular conservative evangelical pastors and authors, whose works reference God's broken heart, grief and pain, typically in response to human rebellion (e.g., Foster 1992:1; Chan 2006). It is not surprising then that rank-and-file believers are confused about just what to believe regarding God's relationship to human suffering. Some, adopting immanent models, believe God to suffer alongside His creation. Others wonder whether passibilist caricatures of a distant, uncaring deity might be true, subverting their faith. Still others, following the Great Tradition, invoke a transcendent-yet-compassionately-related God, undetermined by His spatiotemporal interactions yet supremely present and caring.

In summary then, the confusion within the academy and echoed in the pulpit and pew calls for change at both scholarly and non-scholarly levels. Section 6.2 outlined a set of recommendations at the scholarly level. Through journal articles, symposia, convention papers and monographs, it is recommended that

conservative evangelical scholars do three important things. First, seek definitional clarity on the key terms in the debate, especially the lead term "impassibility". The author proposes a succinct definition that accommodates a Christologically constrained form of divine suffering: "the teaching that God is incapable of suffering within the divine nature", whilst leaving open the possibility that it is time to employ another word not so easily confused. Second, it is recommended that scholars reassert two key evangelical convictions—divine transcendence and divine relationality. It is further recommended these twin commitments be interpreted along the lines that the consensual Tradition has understood them, preserving God's ontological discontinuity whilst affirming His relational proximity. Third, it is recommended that scholars promote the considerable existential benefits of a Biblically sound, historically informed theology of impassibility in five areas: devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional. These steps, if taken, will bring current evangelical God-world models more into line with the inherited Tradition and promote a balanced view of God's transcendent and relational dimensions.

Section 6.3 outlined recommendations to improve the situation at the lay level. It is recommended conservative evangelicals make use of all available church venues—pulpit, newsletters, Sunday school, small groups, and more—to thoroughly teach parishioners two things. First, a balanced understanding of God's impassible relationship to the world, one that avoids the extremes of hyper-transcendence on the one hand and hyper-immanence on the other. Second, a carefully articulated theology of divine providence. It is recommended that this teaching explain the Biblical basis and pastoral implications of God's understanding of human sufferers, His sympathy for human sufferers and His compassion on human sufferers. It is further recommended that this teaching delineate how the divine compassion is demonstrated through sympathetic solidarity, remedial intervention and eschatological renewal.

Taking these steps will help ensure that rank-and-file believers do not domesticate God's *sui generis* ontology but experience Him as the supremely present One in the midst of personal trials. Implementing these recommendations can produce a salutary shift, replacing passibilist presuppositions and conclusions with ones drawn from the rich depository of wisdom found in the consensual Tradition.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

7.1 Chapter introduction

This project examined the pastoral implications of passibilist existential claims within the conservative evangelical community. One's understanding of God and His manner of relating to the world is critically important to one's spiritual life. As AW Tozer observed, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us" (Tozer 1961:9). This being the case, it is necessary that our view of God correspond as nearly as possible to an orthodox interpretation of the Biblical material. The working hypothesis of this research was that passibilist existential claims are unsustainable Biblically and theologically and that a carefully qualified impassibilist account of God best answers the core theological commitments of the conservative evangelical academy, as well as meets the existential needs of rank-and-file Christians. The thrust of this study, then, was to engage a Biblical and theological analysis of key passibilist existential arguments and consider the pastoral implications of those arguments within the demographic context of conservative evangelicalism.

7.2 Summary of research

The dissertation was governed by the primary research question: What are the key pastoral implications, as understood from a conservative evangelical

perspective, of contemporary passibilist accounts of God's relationship to suffering? The LIM research model was employed to answer the question. This model has three structural features: (1) interpreting the world as it is (situation analysis), (2) interpreting the world as it should be (preferred scenario) and (3) interpreting our contemporary obligations (recommended changes) to improve the situation (Cowan 2000; Smith 2008:206). These three structural elements comprise the rhetorical architecture for the project, moving the research from description to prescription—that is, from analysis to recommended action.

The first component, or situational analysis (Chapter 2), reviewed the relevant contemporary scholarship on the topic of divine (im)passibility. The literature included a variety of media—printed books, ebooks, blogs, journal articles, theses, dissertations, essays, audio and video recordings, etc.—from a number of confessional perspectives—conservative evangelical, revisionist evangelical, Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed, Methodist, etc.—representing different degrees of passibilist and impassibilist persuasion. A synthesis of the review was offered, in which a typology of argumentation, general trends and observations and conservative evangelical responses (scholarly and non-scholarly) were discussed, together with gaps in the literature and the contribution of the current project to the wider discussion.

Chapter 3 provided a contextual analysis for the research, locating the project within the ecclesial setting of conservative evangelicalism. The term "conservative evangelical", as used in this study, was first defined. Next, a brief overview of the history and contemporary landscape of conservative evangelicalism was provided, noting its leading figures, influences, beliefs and its relation to the larger Christian community. The analysis then turned to two core theological commitments that ought to guide evangelical reflection on the existential dimensions of (im)passibilism—divine transcendence and divine relationality. As these are trademark evangelical themes, they must both be

upheld in any genuinely self-professed conservative evangelical analysis of (im)passibilist interpretive schemes.

Chapter 4 provided an analysis of the historical development and contemporary context of passibilism. The analysis noted three developmental phases of the colloquy: 1974-1986, 1986-2000 and 2001-2014. The leading existential arguments—devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional—were outlined. And the response of conservative evangelicals to passibilist claims was examined at both scholarly and popular levels. A four-part taxonomy was proposed for classifying scholarly positions—hard impassibilist, soft impassibilist, soft passibilist and hard passibilist. It was shown that conservative evangelical responses developed in two stages (1974-2000 and 2001-2014), and that the adoption of three key passibilist claims became widespread within conservative evangelical scholarship early in the colloquy, filtering down to popular pastors, writers and to laypersons generally.

At this point, the project turned to develop the second of its three structural features: an interpretation of the preferred scenario (Chapter 5). Having assessed the current situation, the research now focused on painting a picture of the future by means of two steps. First, a Biblical analysis of two benchmark Biblical texts, Acts 17:24-28 and Hebrews 2:17-18. Second, a critical examination of the five species of passibilist existential claims by employing the two benchmark texts in concert with the two core theological commitments delineated in Chapter 3. This analysis exposed the weaknesses of passibilist claims and examined the implications for contemporary praxis.

Chapter 6 marked the final turn in the project: from preferred scenario to present obligations, the third structural component of the LIM approach. The chapter asked the question: How can the current situation be favourably changed? Answering this question involved two sets of recommendations. The first set

addressed the problems plaguing the conservative evangelical academy. Recommendations were made to clear up the definitional fog surrounding the leading term in the debate, "impassibility", reassert historical evangelical convictions in two areas—divine transcendence and divine relationality—and promote the existential benefits of a biblically qualified impassibility. The second set of recommendations was directed at helping solve the problems affecting conservative evangelical laypersons. Two recommendations were suggested: to carefully teach God's impassibility and teach God's exquisite, multivalent providence over the world, consisting of His comprehensive knowledge of human needs, His sympathetic solidarity with sufferers and His rich compassion for those in pain.

Chapter 7 concludes the study. In this chapter, a summary of research findings is offered following a brief introduction. Two recommendations for further research are suggested and the contribution of the current project to the field of practical theology is discussed. The chapter ends with a few concluding remarks.

7.3   Recommendations for further study

This study was delimited in five ways: (1) existential scope, (2) contemporary focus, (3) Biblical witness, (4) ecclesial context and (5) practical approach, as described in Section 1.5. Each confined the range of the research to a narrow set of considerations, consistent with the goals of any academic study (Smith 2008:141). During the course of the research, however, a number of fascinating questions were raised that might profitably be explored by future scholars. The following two issues, in particular, are recommended for further study.

First, how might cross-disciplinary approaches inform certain existential facets of the debate? The fields of psychology and sociology, for example, offer promising

resources for advancing the discussion in areas like the ethical, apologetic and devotional advantages of one model over another. There is a significant and growing literature in the areas of "God concept" and "God image" that offer quantitative and qualitative tools (e.g., the God Image Inventory, God Image Scales, God concept mapping approach) that might prove useful in measuring the existential viability of competing models of God-world interactions (e.g., Rizzuto 1979; Pargament and Hahn 1986; Lawrence 1997; Pargament 1997; Kunkel, Cook, Meshel, Daughtry and Hauenstein 1999; Hill and Hall 2002; Hoffman, Grimes and Mitchell 2004; Frose and Bader 2007). It is one thing to surmise that "most people" would find a co-suffering God more psychologically appealing than an impassible one; it is another to be able to cite quantitative research substantiating the claim (cf. Sarot 1995). Whilst theological discourse must always defer to sound Biblical exegesis—undertaken with respect for how the Church has historically interpreted the Biblical texts—the discussion would nonetheless profit from other scientific voices, particularly as it touches on pastoral theological concerns. Some scholars have attempted to wed insights from the theological and psychological disciplines, but there is yet considerable room for exploration (cf. Dearing 1985; Henning 1986; Depoortere 1989; Traets 1989; Cavenagh 1992; Sarot 1995; Lawrence 1997; Louw 2000, 2003; Pembroke 2006; Heaney 2007; Froese and Bader 2007).

Second, what were the principal causal factors precipitating the conservative evangelical abandonment of the Tradition and adoption of passibilist perspectives following the publication of Moltmann's *The crucified God?* As was seen in Section 4.4.1.5.1, between the years 1974 and 2000, the majority of conservative academics assumed hard or soft passibilist perspectives or at least highly-modified soft impassibilist views. This is odd, given the respect conservatives have historically accorded the Tradition, especially with respect to theology proper, where God's transcendence had enjoyed widespread acceptance. The literature contains many analyses of the leading causal factors

behind the rise of passibilism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: Harnack's *Dogmengeschichte* ("history of dogma") movement and the attendant suspicion of Greek metaphysical notions, the revolution in higher critical Biblical scholarship, the popularity of "process" theological accounts, the rise of protest atheism, the adoption of modern understandings of love as symmetrical relatedness rather than benevolence, changing existential sensibilities— particularly theodical concerns—in the shadow of Auschwitz, the rise of democratic aspirations and corresponding mistrust of absolute models of divine sovereignty, the rediscovery of Luther's *theologia crucis,* with its rejection of metaphysically inclined "theologies of glory" and acceptance of paradoxical models based on the divine self-disclosure in the cross of Christ ("theology of the cross"), etc. (cf. Fretheim 1984:1-33; Fiddes 1988:12-15; 1993:634-635; Weinandy 2000:2-25; McGrath 2003:276-277; Keating and White 2009:1-26; Vanhoozer 2010:392-394; Lister 2013:124-147). None of these analyses, however, has focused on developments within the conservative evangelical community. Such a study would fill a hole in the current literature.

7.4   Contribution of this research to practical theology

The purpose of this study, examining the pastoral implications of the debate surrounding the doctrine of (im)passibility, required evaluating passibilist existential claims, examining how these claims have affected conservative evangelical scholars and non-scholars and making recommendations for addressing the problems resulting from an accommodation of passibilist assumptions. The research confirmed the hypothesis that passibilist teachings have had negative effects on the conservative evangelical community. The project contributes to the existing literature in the following four ways.

First, the study proposes a typology for classifying the varied existential claims made by passibilists and impassibilists in support of their positions. It is hoped that this apparatus will encourage further exploration of the kinds of devotional, psychological, ethical, apologetic and missional arguments that appear in the scholarly literature and that affect rank-and-file Christians. Understanding the range of existential issues surrounding divine (im)passibility is vitally important for pastoral reasons. Having a common classification system can aid in this discussion.

Second, the study critically assesses the more popular passibilist arguments alleging that passibilism provides more satisfying answers to the existential needs of Christians. These claims are assessed by contrasting them with counterclaims made by impassibilist scholars, and both are examined using Biblical benchmarks and key evangelical theological motifs. Because this has not previously been done in a comprehensive or systematic way, the present project holds promise to fill a void and spur future research in this area.

Third, the project makes specific recommendations for addressing the problems associated with conservative evangelicals adopting passibilist assumptions. The literature review revealed no significant efforts along these lines to date. It is hoped that these prescriptions will be of practical value to scholars and non-scholars who identify with this tradition, in order to move from the current state of affairs to a preferred future. It is also hoped that the current research will encourage further investigation into the causes, history and practical ramifications of adopting passibilist construals by conservative evangelical leaders and laypersons.

Fourth, in keeping with its practical theological focus, the study presents a portrait of the divine Being as wondrously relational, One who is intrinsically "love" in the *ad intra* dynamism and beauty of His triune fullness and who

sovereignly and freely chooses to love humans *ad extra* with a benevolence and comprehensiveness unimaginable to finite minds. This God truly understands the human condition "from the inside" in Christ, genuinely cares for our welfare and is wholly accessible to us in our suffering, offering patient understanding, sympathetic solidarity and practical help. Much of the popular literature written to console grieving Christians is based on passibilist assumptions (e.g., Olrich 1982; Stott 1986; Tada and Estes 1997; Taylor 1998; Boyd 2003; Carson 2007; House and Grover 2009). This project can help provide balance to the literary offerings. It is hoped that the implementation of these practical recommendations brings conceptual clarity and personal consolation to Christians who might otherwise question God's love and care for them in their pain.

In these four ways, then, the present work contributes to the literature and opens up new directions for research. A dissertation is designed to add to the fund of current knowledge on a specific theme (Vyhmeister 2001:185). In the opinion of the current author, this study has achieved this aim.

7.5   Conclusion

As a conservative evangelical pastor of twenty-seven years, the researcher has witnessed on multiple occasions the emotional wounding and crisis of faith that can occur when believers are unsure about God's concern for them. And as a professor of theology in a conservative evangelical seminary, he has seen the negative effects of passibilist teaching on students and scholars, particularly in the impoverished view of divine transcendence that results from immanence-weighted construals of the God-world dynamic. Passibilist assumptions are often espoused without regard to the multiplex Biblical witness and majority view of the consensual Tradition. This yields a truncated version of the Scriptural account of God, with a narrow range of anthropomorphic tropes given interpretive

precedence over other Biblical metaphors and over explicit ontological predications, and it deprecates the two millenia long legacy of collective wisdom preserved by the Church. In the opinion of this writer, passibilist proposals have been tried and found wanting. It is time to return to the humility, modesty and sanity of a balanced transcendence-relatedness framework. Implementing the recommendations offered in this proposal will help conservative evangelicals to do so. *Soli Deo gloria*.

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