



5-2010

The Suffering of God? The Divine Love and the Problem of Suffering in Classical and Process-Relational Theisms.

Brent A. R. Hege
Butler University, bhege@butler.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/facsch_papers



Part of the [Religious Thought, Theology and Philosophy of Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

"The Suffering of God? The Divine Love and the Problem of Suffering in Classical and Process- Relational Theisms." 2010 John Templeton Award for Theological Promise Laureates Colloquium. University of Heidelberg, Germany, May 2010.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at Digital Commons @ Butler University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Scholarship and Professional Work - LAS by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Butler University. For more information, please contact digitalscholarship@butler.edu.

The Suffering of God? The Divine Love and the Problem of Suffering in Classical and Process-Relational Theisms*

Brent A. R. Hege
Butler University, Indianapolis USA

Paper presented at the 2010 John Templeton Award for Theological Promise Laureates Colloquium
University of Heidelberg, Germany, 10 May 2010

“Has not God in Jesus Christ become radically open to the life of the world and become vulnerable to human sin and suffering? In the light of the gospel story, God is not impassible, but passionate, suffering love. If God is love, then receptivity, vulnerability, and suffering are not strange to God's being. God is free to love and thus free to experience the suffering of the world.”¹

Not quite twenty-five years ago, theologian Ronald Goetz surveyed the landscape of late twentieth-century theology to find that “the ancient theopaschite heresy that God suffers has, in fact, become the new orthodoxy.”² The shifting commitments and methodological assumptions contributing to this seemingly radical reorientation of Christian thought concerning the doctrine of God are varied and complex, but we might consider a few important questions to discern whether the theopaschite trend in contemporary theology powerfully and faithfully speaks good news in our time, and whether it does so more effectively than the classical doctrine of divine impassibility.

- First, what theological ground has shifted so to allow what was once heresy to become, if not orthodoxy, at least a sort of appealing and perhaps also persuasive heterodoxy?
- Second, what problems or issues is theopaschitism supposed to solve or address?
- Third, how successfully does this doctrine of theopaschitism address the issues it is meant to address? In other words, how viable is it as a means for speaking good news in our time?

*I would like to thank the Rev. Dr. Charles Allen and Mr. Dirk von der Horst for providing helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

¹ Daniel L. Migliore, *The Power of God* (quoted in Richard A. Kauffman, comp., “Suffering God,” *Christianity Today* 51.3 (Mar 2007), 71).

² Ronald Goetz, “The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy,” *The Christian Century* 103.13 (April 16, 1986), 385.

Before proceeding any further, it will be helpful to mention my own basic presuppositions about the nature and task of theology. I locate myself within the constructive school represented by such thinkers as Gordon Kaufman and Sallie McFague, both of whom take the term “constructive” more literally than has traditionally been the case among theologians who implicitly assume that theology’s task is more a matter of “arranging” already-revealed truths from the top down than of “constructing” doctrines from the bottom up. As Kaufman argued in his *Essay on Theological Method*, theology is an exercise in “imaginative construction,” in which theologians use the language and concepts available to them from history and tradition to construct their doctrines.³

Similarly, in *Models of God*,⁴ McFague suggested that theology borrow the language of “models” from science to maintain the provisional and constructive character of all theological doctrines. She also favors the language of “metaphor” to retain a certain negative quality or “not-quite-ness” for her theological claims. As she explains, any metaphor that succeeds in its aim of disclosing deeper layers of meaning and truth will always be partly like and partly unlike that which it is meant to represent. Metaphorical theology, likewise, acknowledges that human language and concepts are only ever partly adequate to express the depths of meaning and truth about which it speaks. As she puts it, a metaphor works when one recognizes that the metaphor is *like* that to which it refers, but this is only possible when one simultaneously recognizes that the metaphor is also *unlike* that to which it refers. Otherwise the metaphor’s power – precisely as metaphor – is lost, and with it the capacity to represent something profound that lies always just beyond our powers of description and comprehension. At the same time, when the metaphor loses its character as metaphor and is presumed to correspond directly and absolutely to the truth it is meant to represent, the metaphor also loses its capacity, as McFague puts it, to speak good news in our time.

As a historical theologian taking my cues from Kaufman and McFague, I apply their insights on the nature of constructive theology not only to those who self-consciously operate with such a theological method, but to all works of theology, even (and perhaps especially) to those works that do not acknowledge the metaphorical (McFague) or imaginative (Kaufman) character of their work. In some respects this is not a particularly novel approach to historical theology, as

³ Gordon D. Kaufman, *An Essay on Theological Method*, 3rd ed., American Academy of Religion Reflection and Theory in the Study of Religion 5 (Atlanta: Scholars, 1995).

⁴ Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological, Nuclear Age* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).

most interpreters of the history of Christian thought have labored to situate past theologies within their myriad contexts.

In at least one particularly important respect, however, this approach is somewhat novel in so far as those theologies are approached with careful attention to their effectiveness in speaking a timely and appropriate word in their own contexts and in ours. To put it a different way, what is at stake here is something akin to Tillich's "method of correlation," in which the questions posed by human existence are answered by theologians with reference to the Christian kerygma.⁵ Historical theology in this mode recognizes that all theology is always *contextual* theology and that the most timely and appropriate testimony to the truth of Christian faith in one time will not for that reason alone also be the most timely and appropriate testimony to that truth *in our time*. It also recognizes the intrinsic limitations of fallible human reason and language and the impossibility of an absolute correspondence of our concepts to the realities they strive to represent. Here I take my cues from such diverse theologians as the historicist Sheila Greeve Davaney, who argues quite persuasively for the pervasive influence of historical context on any and all human endeavors, not the least of which, certainly, is theological reflection,⁶ and David Tracy, who approaches theology as a work of "analogical imagination" that reflects always from a particular location on certain "religious classics" in order to speak a relevant word in a post-modern pluralistic context.⁷

So let us return to our three questions posed at the beginning of this essay. First, what theological ground has shifted so to allow what was once heresy to become, if not orthodoxy, at least a sort of appealing and perhaps persuasive heterodoxy? I take it as an indication that the methodological assumptions of such theologians as mentioned above have so succeeded in redirecting our vision of what theology is and should be that the question of something like theopaschitism, for so long rejected by so many as utterly irreconcilable with the Christian faith, has now become something of a theological commonplace in our own time. At the same time, however, it is important to acknowledge that there has always been an undercurrent of theopaschitism flowing just beneath the surface of the church's theological tradition,

⁵ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1: Reason and Revelation, Being and God (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 8.

⁶ See Sheila Greeve Davaney, *Pragmatic Historicism: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

⁷ See David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998).

occasionally bursting through the boundary separating orthodoxy from heresy to entice us onto that third way of heterodoxy.

What happened to precipitate such a radical reorientation of Christian thought, particularly with respect to the doctrine of God? While there are many complex reasons that could be given for such a reorientation, I will mention only two. First, and perhaps most significantly, the experience of unfathomable violence and cruelty in the twentieth century – particularly its several genocides – threw traditional theology into a crisis. The old and venerable doctrine of God as impassible, immutable, and utterly transcendent appeared to many to cast God into the role of indifferent spectator to the horrors of global wars and holocausts. The familiar answers no longer spoke to the new questions.

Second, and I think intimately related to the first, theology itself underwent significant methodological developments, particularly with respect to this question of correlation and the inescapably historicist and constructive, metaphorical, or analogical character of all theology. The effects of these developments were immediate and far-reaching, as theologians turned their attention to often-neglected or devalued corners of the tradition for fresh insights and alternative images that might better address their contemporary situations.

Increasing numbers of theologians are plumbing the depths of the Christian tradition for markers pointing us toward this third way. Liberation theologians have called into question the unequal distributions of power often given theological sanction, feminist theologians have urged us to an awareness of the dangers of accepting uncritically the language, imagery and structures of patriarchy, theologians of color have unmasked instances of racism in our language and concepts that contribute to the continuing oppression of persons of color, queer theologians have called us to acknowledge patterns of heterosexism in our theological discourse, and the list could go on. These and similar invitations to expand our theological vision serve to remind us of the unavoidably contextual character of our theology and of the impossibility of any purely neutral, value-free construction of Christian doctrines. One especially rich resource for this new approach was (and is) the doctrine of God, which has re-emerged as a topic of a vast and diverse body of scholarship.⁸

⁸ For just a few of the many examples of this scholarship on the doctrine of God, see, e.g., McFague, *Models of God*, Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon, 1993), Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 10th anniversary ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2002), Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian*

Now that the field of possibilities for constructive work on the doctrine of God has widened considerably, a concern for orthodoxy has given way to a comfort with heterodoxy and, in some cases, to a demand for it. With this relaxation of the constraints on theology, previously suspect or ignored aspects of the doctrine of God have been granted their place in the discussion. What many theologians have discovered in the process is an immense reserve of resources – many of them quite ancient – with which better to express and convey the truth of the Christian faith for our time. And this is one of the keys to understanding the reorientation of Christian doctrine, especially the doctrine of God: there are motivations intrinsic to theology itself that demand such reorientations from time to time. In the case of the doctrine of God, the reorientation of how we as human beings understand ourselves, our world, and our experiences are mirrored by a reorientation of how we construct God and how we answer the questions posed in our situations.

To turn to the second question posed above concerning the problems or issues theopaschitism is supposed to answer or address, I think there is a relatively straightforward response. The resurgence of interest in a theopaschite doctrine of God is meant to address the pervasive sense in our situation that only a God who intimately and compassionately experiences what we experience – the good and the bad – is a God worthy of worship and praise. It is meant to address the very real fear in our time that ultimate meaning and value are increasingly difficult to locate in an utterly transcendent, immutable and apathetic God. Classical doctrines of the incarnation and theories of the atonement served this purpose of putting a more “human” face on God as one who, as the Word made flesh, suffered even unto death “for us and for our salvation.” But several recent theological explorations of this topic have raised serious doubts about its relevance and effectiveness in speaking good news to our time, increasing the demand for a radical reorientation of theology if it is to retain its power to address our current situation.⁹

There are certain dangers unleashed by this reorientation, to be sure. For example, recovering the immanent, responsive, compassionate and relational God so prominent in the biblical witness and flowing along as an undercurrent through the history of Christian thought does run the risk of devolving into a sentimental anthropomorphism or an idolatrous identification of our

Doctrine of Sin (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), and Marcella Althaus-Reid, *The Queer God* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁹ For example, many feminist theologians have rejected traditional theories of the atonement as sanctifying violence at best or celebrating “cosmic child abuse” at worst. For a helpful collection of essays on this topic, see Joanne Carlson Brown and Carole R. Bohn, eds., *Christianity, Patriarchy and Abuse: A Feminist Critique* (New York: Pilgrim, 1989).

experiences, hopes and fears with the God who always remains in some very real sense beyond our capacity for representation or understanding. The question, of course, is whether what might be gained from such a reorientation is worth the risks. I would argue that it is.

Theopaschitism, in at least some of its manifestations, serves to decrease the immense distance between God and human beings without necessarily eliminating what Kierkegaard called the “infinite qualitative distinction” between them. Drawing on the rich resources of human experience and language, it proposes a God with whom one desires to relate because this God is capable of and indeed does experience in very real way what we experience without being overwhelmed or overcome. It is perhaps most poignantly a model of ultimate love, which, as Jesus put it in the gospel of John, is the love that is willing to lay down its life for its friends (John 15:13).

It is to this question of love that we must now turn. What kind of love is this? As process-relational theologian Catherine Keller points out, in the tradition of classical theism divine love is typically subordinated to divine power, so that love must be reconciled to power. She suggests a reorientation of this relationship of love to power, a relationship in which divine power is subordinated to divine love, so that power must be reconciled to love. With this at once subtle and audacious reorientation of the relationship between power and love, entirely new and unexplored vistas open before us.

For most of the history of Christian thought (but not necessarily in the earliest expressions of the Christian faith in the biblical texts), power – omnipotence – functioned as the definitive attribute of God. Curiously enough, though, while the Bible never says “God is power” (indeed, one is hard-pressed to find any concept of omnipotence in the biblical literature), we do read that “God is love” (1 John 4:8).¹⁰ Texts expounding the love of God abound in the New Testament, yet very often in the history of Christian thought this love is subordinated or qualified for the sake of safeguarding God’s absolute power. And when God’s love is explored in the classical tradition, very often it is a love that looks very little like anything we would recognize and appreciate as love.

¹⁰ Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008), 94.

In many expressions of classical theism,¹¹ divine love must be reconciled not only to omnipotence but to immutability and impassibility as well. One recent and particularly elegant expression of a classical theist perspective on matters of divine love, power, and the problem of suffering is David Bentley Hart's *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?*¹² In this revision of reflections first published in the *Wall Street Journal* following the Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, Hart reflects on the problem of theodicy and the inadequacy of many traditional responses to the problems of evil and suffering, from both theists and atheists alike. In the process he presents a contemporary classical theism drawing on the resources of patristic thought and the Eastern Orthodox mystical tradition to reaffirm the traditional divine attributes as suitably speaking good news to that particularly tragic situation. Of special interest to me here is Hart's defense of the doctrines of divine perfection and *apatheia*, or impassibility.

Hart offers a rigorous defense of the classical doctrines of divine impassibility and perfection as the only rationally defensible expressions of the truth of the Christian faith. He understands divine perfection to be intimately related, indeed inseparable, from divine impassibility and immutability: any hint of capacity for growth, change, or responsiveness in God is rejected out of hand as incompatible with the divine nature and the meaning of "God." Instead, Hart suggests that divine perfection provides an anchor, an unwavering point of reference, for the tempest-tossed pilgrim to assure her that all will be well when God's victory over the enemies of God has been won. Hart takes evil and suffering seriously in the sense that the drama of salvation is in large part a decisive victory won over evil and suffering. They are not in any sense willed by God or even permitted by God for the "greater good" or necessary for the proper functioning of the cosmic order, as many older theodicies would suggest. Rather, they are enemies, threats of non-being against the goodness, beauty and truth of being. To combat this evil, God becomes a human being, to infuse immortality into mortal existence, to swallow up death by the cross, and so to initiate the ultimate destruction of the forces that seek to destroy what God has made.

Here is a familiar and in many ways quite comforting doctrine of divine will and power, promising the defeat of evil and suffering and the promise of a day when all things shall be made new. However, to defend this doctrine, Hart insists on an image of a God who is utterly unmoved

¹¹ I define classical theism quite broadly as that tradition which emphasizes the divine attributes of omnipotence, omniscience, immutability, impassibility, perfection, and transcendence as these attributes have been defined in orthodox Christianity, often dependent on Platonic or Neo-Platonic concepts.

¹² David Bentley Hart, *The Doors of the Sea: Where Was God in the Tsunami?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

in God's nature by the realities of evil, suffering and death, to which Hart attributes no positive ontological status whatsoever (preferring instead the negative definition of evil as the *privatio boni*, the privation of the good). Hart's construction of God is simply incapable of suffering in any way because suffering implies change and weakness, both of which are antithetical to the notion of divine perfection as Hart understands it, and because taking up suffering and evil into the divine life would in turn, he argues, make these in some sense essential qualities of the divine nature.

Again, there is something comforting in the idea of a God who is not overwhelmed by the trials and tribulations of life, who does not threaten to become unhinged in face of so much unimaginable suffering. At the same time, however, as flawed yet noble human beings it is difficult to relate to an apathetic or impassible God who is incapable of experiencing the depths of our pain and sorrows, or the heights of our joy and triumphs. Popular piety, I would suggest, knows no such God. Furthermore, the biblical witness does not uniformly suggest an apathetic, impassible God. Countless stories can be recounted of God's sorrow, compassion, intimacy, rejoicing, and pleasure in God's relations with God's creatures. And these biblical images of God simply cannot be reconciled with the immutable, impassible, unmoved mover of classical theism.

In response to these and other challenges to classical theism mounted by contemporary theology, Hart expounds a patristic doctrine of divine *apatheia*, somewhat in passing in *The Doors of the Sea* but in fuller detail in an article entitled "No Shadow of Turning: On Divine Impassibility."¹³ Here Hart acknowledges the disrepute into which this doctrine has fallen in contemporary theology, but insists that *apatheia* is a non-negotiable feature of any genuinely Christian doctrine of God precisely because, he argues, only an impassible God can truly be God, the source and ground of all being rather than simply one supreme being among many other finite beings.¹⁴

Simply defined, divine *apatheia* is pure activity, pure self-giving charity, pure *agape*. It is the impassive, imperturbable dynamic ground of all being expressed most clearly in the *perichoresis* of the three persons of the Trinity. It does not react or respond, nor does it require or "need" any finite objects for its activity but graciously engages them in freedom without sacrificing the

¹³ David Bentley Hart, "No Shadow of Turning: On Divine Impassibility," *Pro Ecclesia* 11.2 (2002):184-206.

¹⁴ In a conclusion specifically concerned with Anselm's definition of God as "that than which no greater can be conceived" but which applies with equal aptness to the doctrine of divine *apatheia*, Hart does admit that this is "a standard whose provenance may not exactly be biblical, but [its] logic ultimately is." Hart, "No Shadow of Turning," 190.

divine immutability, which Hart defines somewhat paradoxically as *semper agens* rather than *semper quietus*.¹⁵ To put it another way, *apatheia* is the “abyss” within God’s unalterable plenitude of being into which all human striving, failures and successes, cruelties and triumphs are subsumed and enfolded. This, for Hart, is precisely the point of the incarnation, understood in classical Chalcedonian terms, in which the divine nature is united with the human nature in a kenotic self-emptying without change or diminution, whereby God became human so that human beings might become God. It is only in this sense – in the hypostatic union – that God can in any sense be said to “suffer” (and then only in Christ’s human nature). To suggest anything else is to give up the possibility of redemption. Apathetic, impassible love, he suggests, is the only condition for the possibility of redemption and the only ground of our hope. Without it we have neither God nor salvation; with it we have the promise of the fullness of life.

Hart acknowledges the difficulty of expressing the divine love as *apatheia* and the fashion of modern theologians to assert its obsolescence “with a confidence whose increase is exactly proportionate to understanding’s withdrawal.”¹⁶ And yet the doctrine of *apatheia* he proposes seems to stand little chance of recovery in a time when, as Hart himself admits, we simply do not think of love in this way, nor do we find it possible to reconcile this type of love to the horrors we have experienced in our time. Returning to an earlier theme, it is especially interesting to note that the most recent theologian whom Hart cites with approval is Thomas Aquinas, and then only in passing. The early church fathers borrowed and developed this doctrine of divine *apatheia* to enable them better to speak good news to their time, and they did so brilliantly and effectively. That they did so, however, is itself no guarantee that their word will also be good news for *our* time. And the very fact that *apatheia* has fallen into such disrepute in contemporary theology might very well indicate that it can no longer convey that word to us.

If Hart stands at one end of the theological spectrum of the doctrine of God, at the other end stands the process theologian Catherine Keller. In *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process*, which, like Hart’s book, is intended for a lay audience, Keller addresses many of the issues we have been considering here from the perspective of a process-relational theism. In her eloquent, even at times playful introduction to this version of theism, Keller invites her readers to

¹⁵ It is worth noting here that Hart objects to the collapsed distinction in much recent theology between the immanent and economic Trinity, preferring instead to maintain that sharp distinction. God the immanent Trinity is pure relationality, the three persons eternally indwelling one another with perfect self-sufficiency. This is not to say, however, that the same relationality and reciprocity should apply to God’s activity in the world as economic Trinity.

¹⁶ Hart, “No Shadow of Turning,” 185.

consider many of the questions I've been considering here: What is the nature and task of theology at the beginning of the twenty-first century? To what seemingly incontrovertible truth-claims (what Keller likes to call "shibboleths") has theology continued to cling despite their no longer being particularly relevant or even useful? What resources are there in scripture, experience and tradition that might open up fresh new insights into the mysteries of life and God that have remained hitherto unacknowledged or unexplored?

For our purposes here, two of Keller's approaches will be particularly helpful to explore. First, as I mentioned earlier, she questions the tendency of classical theism to subordinate the divine love to the divine power, suggesting that, for example, such a move has all too easily been co-opted in service of the domination and oppression of the weak by the strong. To paraphrase Mary Daly, if God is power, then power is God. We have seen the results of such an identification, and I suggest that this is one especially urgent motivation to seek new resources for constructing the doctrine of God in our time.

What does Keller offer as a viable alternative to the classical doctrine of divine omnipotence? Perhaps most importantly, she suggests that the primacy of divine love ought to dictate how the other divine attributes are constructed. This means that love will be the criterion for all speech about God, especially in terms of the traditional attributes of omnipotence, immutability, and perfection. If we mean to speak a genuine word of good news about God in our time, we must do so with the intention of making sense to the people to whom this word is addressed. And Keller suggests that the image of God as the unmoved mover, the absolutely powerful transcendent being who directs the cosmos toward its *telos* from beyond time and space, has little to say to twenty-first century women and men. Instead, she argues that the God constructed in process thought has considerably more power to speak this word in our time. This is a God literally in process: open-ended interactivity, relating intimately with all creation, giving and receiving love, moving and being moved, enfolding the entire cosmos in "com/passionate" love.

But what sort of love is this? Speaking of the divine love in itself is nothing new in the Christian tradition. But speaking of the divine love with images and metaphors drawn from the rich resources of our own experiences of love in its many forms is now being reclaimed in the Christian tradition. Keller suggests, somewhat counterintuitively it would seem, that the richest resources we have for describing divine love are found in the Greek concepts of eros and agape. To speak of the divine love as both eros and agape contradicts the traditional Christian

assumptions about divine love, which, to follow Anders Nygren, consists entirely of agape and includes not a trace of eros.¹⁷ On the contrary, Keller insists that eros and agape perfectly capture the giving and receiving, the luring and welcoming aspects of divine love as expressed in process thought. To love genuinely and freely means to give as well as to receive, to open oneself to the possibility of pleasure and of pain, of a returning of love as well as a rejection of that love. This love is a risky love, a love willing to be wounded; as philosopher of religion Eugene Thomas Long puts it, “Love apart from vulnerability makes little sense.”¹⁸ To speak of divine love as genuine love (if that word is to mean anything at all in terms of our own experience) is to speak of vulnerable, passionate, hopeful, expectant relations, not the dispassionate, unmoved unilateralism of the classical conception of divine love.

This love by its very nature will be susceptible to suffering and pain, perhaps inevitably. But just as certainly will it be open to joy and pleasure. As process theologians insist, all human (and indeed all creaturely) experiences are enfolded into the divine life, so that God experiences what we experience in the fullness of Godself and is enriched by those experiences. Every triumph and every defeat, every joy and every pain matters infinitely to God. And this brings us to Keller’s next contribution to our discussion, namely her reorientation of the classical doctrine of divine perfection.

Perfection in the classical theist tradition typically means completion and self-sufficiency; in the process theist tradition, perfection connotes neither of these qualities. As Keller asks her readers, which person would we say more closely represents the “perfect” human being: one who never changes regardless of the circumstances, or one who continues to evolve by incorporating each new experience and relationship into her identity and her life? We would all, I think, agree that the latter is the person more to be praised as an excellent individual. Why, Keller asks, should it be any different with God? Of what comfort is a God who is unaffected by anything that happens in creation, who is already entirely self-sufficient so as to have no need of what has

¹⁷ Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982). Curiously enough, in his first papal encyclical, Benedict XVI reclaims the use of both eros and agape, or “ascending” and “descending” love, as expressive of the unity of body and soul. Unlike Keller, Benedict admits no difference, finally, between eros and agape: the divine eros *is* the divine agape. See Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (2005). http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html. Accessed 29 April 2010.

¹⁸ Eugene Thomas Long, “Suffering and Transcendence,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 60 (2006), 146.

been created? What good are our myriad experiences crossing the entire spectrum of human emotion if they make no difference whatsoever in the life of God?

Here classical theism itself belies its own assumptions with its doctrine of the incarnation. If God is unmoved and unaffected by anything that happens in the course of human events, then why the incarnation? It was a question asked in much the same way (albeit with a quite different response) centuries ago by Anselm: *Cur Deus homo?* Why did God enter into the frailty and beauty, the promise and the peril of human existence unless it was to experience all that it means to be human and thus to transform humanity from within, to save and redeem the world God had created, to enfold all that was, is, and shall be into the life of God? For God so *loved* the world...

And this finally brings us back to the last of our initial questions: does theopaschitism and its doctrinal corollaries more effectively and appropriately speak a word of gospel to our situation? My response is yes, it does. In my continuing work on this issue I would like to spend considerable time mining the Christian tradition for additional resources to develop this idea in a process-relational key. I am particularly interested in exploring medieval mysticism for clues on divine love, Luther's Christology, specifically his interpretation of the *communicatio idiomatum* and his construction of a theology of the cross, contemporary Christologies and doctrines of the Trinity, and liberation and feminist theologies for additional insight into this notion of divine suffering. I also would like to spend much more time on the constructive side of the matter, to develop a doctrine of God in such a way that is both faithful to the Christian tradition and relevant to our contemporary situation. I hope that my brief comments here have provided some sense of how I envision this issue and of where I would like to continue my work on it, and I thank you for your attention and look forward to your comments.