

Moltmann's Crucified God

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Abstract

Forty years ago Jürgen Moltmann published *The Crucified God*, which set the cat among a few theological pigeons. In the face of the history of suffering in the world, Moltmann argued that we must speak of God ‘within earshot of the dying Jesus’. In the process he argues against the understanding of God, the immanent Trinity, as impassible. Having been sympathetic to Moltmann’s view, the author now raises some questions against it. Apart from the lack of a clear agreed meaning of impassibility (*apatheia*), the protagonists on each side of the question disagree fundamentally on the meaning of God’s transcendence and the abundance of God’s eternal ‘life’.

Keywords: cross, (im)passibility, Moltmann, suffering, transcendence.

1. Introduction

I remember well my first reaction to the publication of Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Crucified God*.¹ It is one thing to speak of the crucified Christ, but the claim of a crucified *God* seemed quite preposterous. Reading it stretched my then quite narrow theological horizons further than almost every other theological book I have read since. From the first chapter on identity and relevance in Christian faith and life to the final chapter on a hermeneutics of liberation based on a theology of the cross, I was fascinated by an understanding of the cross not governed by some version of the theory of the atonement. In particular, the sixth chapter, “The ‘Crucified God’”, the hinge on which everything in the book turns, captured my imagination, and it has never ceased to engage me, though in recent years also to concern me. Most students to whom I have taught classes on Moltmann’s theology have found it as rewarding a text to study as I found it satisfying to introduce it.

¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. R. A. Wilson and J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1974).

The book's central claim, that while the Son suffers dying the Father suffers the death of the Son,² remains staunchly defended and fiercely contested. I still find much in the book compelling, but now question whether the claim for divine passibility can be made as forcefully as Moltmann does in this text, now in the public arena for four decades.³ The question of God's impassibility or passibility has increasingly captured my attention.⁴ This essay aims to show how I read Moltmann's central claims and to outline the questions which it prompts.

2. *Why Moltmann wrote this book*

Some years ago Richard Bauckham, the foremost commentator in English on Moltmann's theological *oeuvre*, suggested that there were three reasons for Moltmann's emphasis on God's suffering.⁵ Moltmann had not explicitly declared these as the primary factors in his writing at the time but Bauckham proposed them as three closely connected elements: the passion of Christ, the nature of love and the problem of human suffering. It is clear that Moltmann took his stand squarely in the tradition of Luther's *theologia crucis*,⁶ in which the passion of Christ is also the passion of God. Moltmann also emphasizes the reciprocal nature of love and asserts, on the analogy of human love, that suffering is an unavoidable element of love. The divine love is not diminished by its openness to the suffering of the beloved but deepened thereby. Thirdly, of all major theologians of the last six decades or so, Moltmann has been most deeply exercised by the problem of suffering, the suffering of those who are abandoned by the rest of the world to their deprivation of food, shelter, education, medical care and the like. In a powerful passage he speaks of a metaphysical atheism which—unlike metaphysical theology, which sees the world as “a mirror of the deity”—adopts a similar logic. “But in the broken mirror of an unjust and absurd world of triumphant evil and suffering without reason and without end it does not see the countenance of a God, but only the

² Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 243.

³ This essay had its beginning as a paper given at a conference held in Melbourne in May 2012 to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the publication of *Der gekreuzigte Gott*.

⁴ See Christiaan Mostert, "God's Transcendence and Compassion," *Pacifica* 24 (2011), 172-189.

⁵ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 47-53. See also Bauckham's earlier *Moltmann: Messianic Theology in the Making* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1987), ch 3.

⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 208.

grimace of absurdity and nothingness.”⁷ Moltmann is passionate about articulating a better theodicy than the standard one that promised a reward “above the starry sky”. His *Crucified God* is above all an answer to the “protest atheism” powerfully articulated in Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov and echoed silently by millions after him.⁸

These points made by Bauckham could very easily be taken further, for all three of them go to the very nature of God’s being. Two points should be made immediately about this: about the triune identity of the God of Christian revelation and about the need to be aware of the danger of idolatry. First, the doctrine of the Trinity, more than anything else, sets the Christian faith apart from other religions, not only today but from the beginning. Moltmann’s answer to his two questions about the doctrine of the Trinity—whether the ‘human’, the ‘crucified’ God can be understood without it and, conversely, whether we can think of God trinitarianly without the event of the cross⁹—is a firm negative. The only way to avoid reducing this doctrine to abstract speculation, in Moltmann’s view, is to make the *theologia salvifica* the starting point of trinitarian thinking;¹⁰ in other words, to begin with the incarnation and the cross, rather than with any kind of natural theology. Moltmann delights in the discovery of a book written before he was born, B. Steffen’s *Das Dogma vom Kreuz: Beitrag zu einer staurozentrischen Theologie* (The Dogma of the Cross: A Contribution to a Staurocentric Theology), whose author wrote these remarkable words:

The scriptural basis for Christian belief in the triune God is not the scanty trinitarian formulas of the New Testament, but the thoroughgoing, unitary testimony of the cross; and the shortest expression of the Trinity is the divine act of the cross, in which the Father allows the Son to sacrifice himself through the Spirit.¹¹

For Moltmann, the theological meaning of the cross cannot be expressed unless both the Father and the Son are subjects: the will of the Father and the will of the Son are distinct, though they are completely at one in the Son’s going to the cross.¹²

⁷ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 219.

⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 219-227.

⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 236.

¹⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 239.

¹¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 241.

¹² Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 243. To be convincingly trinitarian, of course, greater attention needs to be given to the place of the Spirit in the event of the cross than Moltmann does in this early work. There he says little more than that the Spirit “proceeds from this event between Father and Son”. It is the Spirit who then “justifies the godless, fills the forsaken with love and even brings the dead alive ...” (244)

Second, it is one of Moltmann's major concerns that we should not fall into idolatry in our understanding of God. The Jewish philosopher-sociologist, Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), a member of the "Frankfurt School" of social research, had a considerable influence on his thinking.¹³ Moltmann quotes his criticism of "the religious idols of religion"—and no less the idols and "totalization" of capitalism, nationalism and Marxism.¹⁴ Horkheimer is an implicit exponent of a negative theology, a discourse about God which accepts the fact that we cannot really speak of God, since God is beyond all speech about God. Moltmann quotes an old theological principle to describe Horkheimer's position: *Deus definiri nequit* (God cannot be defined).¹⁵ While Barth interprets this *dictum* to create a space for God's self-disclosure in his Word, on the basis of which humankind *can* speak about God,¹⁶ Horkheimer finally declines to name God, lest it should turn God into an idol. In so doing, he challenges traditional theism *and* atheism, which are equally guilty of speaking too confidently of that which is ineffable.¹⁷ In Moltmann's view, passing lightly over the history of suffering in the course of declaring this world to be God's world implies an idolatrous view of God.¹⁸ (Of course, it is equally unsatisfactory to Moltmann simply to displace the theodicy question with *atheism's* assertion that there is no God.) Whilst Paul Tillich's strategy for resisting the danger of idolatry (and thus for speaking of God who is *really* God) was to speak of "God beyond God" or "God above the God of theism",¹⁹ Moltmann's approach is to take with utter seriousness the question of the dying Jesus on the cross, "My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15:34). This is the radical Christian alternative to both the idolatrous answer given by traditional 'theism' and

¹³ Horkheimer's most important works include *The Eclipse of Reason* (1947) and, in collaboration with Theodor Adorno, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).

¹⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 223. Horkheimer wrote, "... since Constantine in his unscrupulous way singled out Christianity from among the existing religions to fill in the cracks in his crumbling empire and elevated it to the state religion, Europe has stood under the sign of that doctrine and betrayed it again and again." In essence it has repeatedly turned its God into an idol. See his *Critique of Instrumental Reason* (Continuum 1974); <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/horkheimer/1963/theism-atheism.htm>, accessed 8 June 2012.

¹⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 224.

¹⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. T.H.L. Parker and others, Vol. II/1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 193.

¹⁷ It has to be remembered that in Moltmann's usage the terms "theism" or "theistic" are invariably pejorative.

¹⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 225.

¹⁹ Paul Tillich, *Ultimate Concern: Dialogues with Students*, ed. D. Mackenzie Brown (London: SCM Press, 1965), 2, 51. Tillich adds that "the God of theism" is "God limited by man's finite conceptions."

the atheistic answer to the question posed by the history of suffering, of which the cry of God-forsakenness from the cross is, theologically speaking, the sharpest form.²⁰

At issue, then, is the serious question of how to speak faithfully of God and avoid falling into idolatry. For Moltmann, it seems, we are most prone to this when we gloss over the problem of the history of suffering in the world, for which all traditional answers, theistic and atheistic, are highly unsatisfactory. This is why he insists on trying to understand the being of God from the death of Jesus. One good consequence of the ‘death of God’ theology of the 1960s is that it forced theologians to develop a theology “within earshot of the dying Jesus.”²¹ However difficult, the death of Jesus has to be in some way a statement about God. In a long passage from Rahner, Moltmann shows that Rahner goes a long way toward this: “If it is said that that the incarnate Logos died only in his human reality, and if this is tacitly understood to mean that this death therefore did not affect God, only half the truth has been stated.”²² Later in the same passage Rahner writes, “Jesus’ death belongs to God’s self-utterance.” Küng and Jüngel venture into the same controversial territory. If we are to adhere to the traditional divine perfection of impassibility, it will have to be in a softer, less rigidly philosophical sense of ‘impassible’.²³ We shall return to this in due course. Suffice it here to say that if the being of God is to be discussed “within earshot of the dying Jesus”, the divine attribute of impassibility will, to a greater or lesser extent, come under challenge.

More than three decades after the publication of *The Crucified God* Moltmann published his autobiography, in which *inter alia* he reflects on his major published works. In the chapter devoted to *The Crucified God* Moltmann makes it clear that he was “wrestling with God” on the interface of human suffering—his own and others’ in Hamburg in 1943 as well as that of “the victims of injustice and violence in human history”—and the theology of the cross, in particular the meaning

²⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 225.

²¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 201. Moltmann draws support for this approach to Christian God-talk from theologians as diverse as Paul Althaus, Karl Rahner, Karl Barth, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Hans Küng, Heribert Mühlen and Eberhard Jüngel.

²² K. Rahner (ed.), *Sacramentum Mundi*, Vol. 2 (London: Burns & Oates, 1969), 207-08, as quoted in Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 201-202 and 279, n. 6.

²³ Later Moltmann states that both Rahner and Küng stand at some distance from him on the theology of the cross. See Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 197-198.

of Jesus” suffering.²⁴ Belonging to the generation which was contemporary with Auschwitz, Moltmann is almost tormented by the question of what it takes to construct a credible post-Auschwitz theology. He ventures this judgment:

What we dare to say about God “after Auschwitz” surely depends on what we can say about God after the event on Golgotha, and the way we talk about God when we hear the echo of Christ’s death cry: “My God, why have you forsaken me?” The whole book can be understood as an attempt to wrestle theologically with that death cry.²⁵

Moltmann finds confirmation of his theology of the cross in some medieval images of the Trinity.²⁶

In one version of this iconographic tradition in the Western Church, the Father holds the cross-beam of the cross with Christ on it, and the Spirit between the Father and the Son; this is sometimes known as the “Throne of Mercy” Trinity or the “Mercy-seat” Trinity. Another version of it is a counterpart to the Pietà: the deeply moved Father holds the dead Son in his arms, with the Spirit again close to both the Father and the Son.²⁷

In summary, in the tradition of Luther, thus in the most radical sense possible, Moltmann argues the case for understanding God’s being from the cross.

... Christian theology cannot seek to understand the death of Jesus on the presupposition of [the] metaphysical or moral concept of God. If this presupposition holds, the death of Jesus cannot be understood at all in theological terms. Rather, faith must take an opposite course and ‘understand God’s Godness from the event of this death.’²⁸

This is not just a christocentric theology, radically carried through, but a *staurocentric* theology, the only theology capable, in Moltmann’s view, of speaking a word of comfort and hope to people who suffer. The problem of suffering is the driving force of this theology of the crucified Christ. In the very first pages of *The Crucified God* Moltmann writes, “To take up the theology of the cross today is to go beyond the limits of the doctrine of salvation and to inquire into the revolution needed in the concept of God. Who is God in the cross of the Christ who is abandoned by God?”²⁹ The question is whether these words from the cross can bear the weight of an entire doctrine of God.

²⁴ Moltmann, *A Broad Place*, 189-90.

²⁵ Moltmann, *A Broad Place*, 191.

²⁶ Moltmann, *A Broad Place*, 195.

²⁷ This tradition of art is dated from early in the 12th century to late in the 15th century, possibly a bit later. See Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, trans. Janet Seligman, Vol. 2 (London: Lund Humphries, 1972), esp. 122-24. I owe this reference to Dr Claire Renkin. I am also indebted to Prof Gerald O’Collins for reminding me of this artistic tradition. On a visit to the Louvre in July 2011 I came across an altar-piece of which one panel was a painting entitled “La Sainte Trinité avec Dieu le Père soutenant le Christ”, by Colijn de Coter of Brussels (c. 1450–c. 1539).

²⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 215. The last part of the sentence is a quotation from Eberhard Jüngel, “Vom Tod des lebendigen Gottes”.

²⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 4.

Moltmann acknowledges that there is much in the book that is “harshly formulated and overstated” and that this book, though more often translated than any of his other books, has aroused controversy.³⁰ Carl Braaten found much to approve in the book and welcomed the turn back to the theology of the cross. “But”, he added, “it will scarcely do to spin the whole of theology out of a single principle, no matter which one or how important. That omits too much of what Tillich called the “catholic substance.”³¹ There is a point here: God is defined by more than the cross. But whatever else is to be said about the God whose self-revelation finds its sharpest focus in Jesus Christ cannot, without significant loss, be said at any great distance from the place where that terrible cry of God-forsakenness was uttered.³²

3. Moltmann's challenge to the idea of God's impassibility

Not much less than a century ago, the Anglican theologian, J.K. Mozley, traced the history of the doctrine of divine impassibility in the Christian church. At the end of his survey, a classic text on the subject, he suggests that there are three main motives for asserting that God is impassible (*Deus impassibilis*) or that God's being is characterized by *apatheia*.³³ First, God is utterly transcendent to the created world; God is “not part of the furniture of the universe”, as Donald MacKinnon often said in his Cambridge lectures. As the early Barth emphasized, borrowing from Kierkegaard, there is an “infinite qualitative distinction” between eternity and time, between the Creator and the creation, between God and the world.³⁴ God's ways and our ways are as different as the heavens are higher than the earth, to paraphrase the prophet Isaiah (55:8-9).³⁵ Second, God's ‘life’ is one of perfect blessedness, which is incapable of being disturbed or impaired by the sins and sufferings of

³⁰ Moltmann, *A Broad Place*, 200.

³¹ Carl E. Braaten, “A Trinitarian Theology of the Cross,” *Journal of Religion* 56 (1976), 120.

³² Moltmann acknowledged that the cross is “not the only theme of theology” but it is “the *centre* of all Christian theology.” Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 204.

³³ J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 173-75. I have not limited my formulation of these points to Mozley's own language.

³⁴ Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 10.

³⁵ Robert Sokolowski argues that Christian theology has to be understood primarily in its differentiation from pagan religious and philosophical reflection, not simply in its differentiation from modern secularism and atheism. Christian faith introduced a new distinction into human life and thought, “the distinction between the world understood as possibly not having existed and God understood as possibly being all there is, with no diminution of goodness or greatness”. Each is determined by this distinction. Robert Sokolowski, *The God of Faith and Reason: Foundations of Christian Theology* (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1995), 23.

the created world. (If Greek and Hebrew thought were allies in respect of the first of these points, they do not coincide on the second.) The divine *ousia* (essence) in Greek philosophy after Plato is by definition incapable of being affected by what takes place in the world of time and space. Third, God cannot be described as having the feelings or passions which belong to human persons and interactions. In short, God does not have emotions like ours or of which our emotions might be considered to be analogies.

This list of motives for asserting divine impassibility is followed by a further set of three motives for challenging the belief that God is impassible.³⁶ The first concerns the nature of love and the basic Christian belief that God is love (1 Jn 4:16). If God loves the world, as the Fourth Gospel declares in no uncertain terms (Jn 3:16), it is unthinkable that God does not experience some kind of suffering or other ‘feelings’, when confronted with the evil and injustice that characterize life in the world. Second, if God is not only transcendent in relation to this world but also immanent in relation to it, it is thought unlikely that God does not in some sense suffer with those who suffer. If God is, so to speak, closer to us than we are to ourselves, does God not participate in that suffering to some degree or in some way, even taking into account the ontological difference between God and finite creatures? Third, the cross must express something that is true of the very being, the ‘heart’, of God. The New Testament declares that God was moved to send the Son into the world to live our life and die our death. This sending, whether in a Pauline or Johannine framework, is suggestive of a God with a loving heart. The language is, of course, unavoidably anthropomorphic or anthropopathic.

To move beyond this juxtaposition of opposing ways of thinking about God as impassible or passible, both of which have some support in biblical texts, it is necessary to consider how the philosophy of ancient Greece influenced the formulation of early Christian beliefs. It is sometimes thought, under the influence of Adolf von Harnack, that during the early centuries of the Christian faith understandings of God shaped by biblical ideas were gradually woven together with ideas

³⁶ Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 175-77.

from Hellenistic philosophy, and that the philosophical eventually became predominant. This tradition of philosophy, though by no means uniform, understood God (or the divine) as “unconditioned by creation in his simplicity, perfection, non-mutability, timeless eternity, omnipotence, impassibility, and so on.”³⁷ The opposition between these ways of thinking should not be overstated, since Jewish thought was already influenced by hellenistic thought-forms. Philo of Alexandria is a case in point, though it is simplistic to regard his interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures, especially its anthropomorphism, as simply the result of importing hellenistic categories of thought. His critical view of the anthropomorphism of the Hebrew Scriptures owes just as much to his understanding of the biblical vision of God.³⁸ Pannenberg offers a judicious assessment of the relation of biblical and hellenistic ideas in the early Christian writers. Far from regarding the use of hellenistic categories of thought as a corruption of early Christian theology, he sees the relation between the two ways of thinking in much more positive terms.³⁹ The motivation for bringing together the biblical idea of God with the philosophical concept of God came as much from biblical thinking about the one God, the creator of all things, as it did from within the middle Platonism that shaped the intellectual culture of the early centuries of Christianity. In Pannenberg’s view, Jewish monotheism and hellenistic philosophical monotheism were natural allies.⁴⁰ Christian theology was selective in its borrowing: what was received had to be transformed on the basis of the biblical idea of God, in which God was not simply the author of everything that exists but was also free to make history, as in the election of a Covenant people.⁴¹ The Apologists appropriated the philosophical accentuation of God’s otherness, transcendence and incomprehensibility, ideas which were benign to the Christian understanding of God.

³⁷ James F. Keating and Thomas J. White, eds, *Divine Impassibility and the Mystery of Human Suffering* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 4.

³⁸ See Paul Gavriluk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 43.

³⁹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology", *Basic Questions in Theology, Vol. 2* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 119-83.

⁴⁰ Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology", 137.

⁴¹ Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology", 138 & 146.

In the matter of divine immutability and impassibility the results were more ambiguous. Some of the Apologists accepted the idea of God's immutability as an extension of God's being unoriginate and indestructible. However, the idea is foreign to the biblical writers and, in Pannenberg's judgment, it is "inappropriate if applied to them without qualification."⁴² It may reinforce the idea of God's indestructibility and stability, but this does not say enough. It is also misleading: God is not immobile but has within Godself "an infinite plenitude of ever new possibilities in the realization of which he manifests the freedom of his invisible essence."⁴³ The divine stability is not a matter of "an immobility constitutive of God's essence but rather of his free, momentary ... decision."⁴⁴ To use biblical language, it is a matter of God's faithfulness. Pannenberg regards the idea of a God who is by nature immutable to have been seriously obstructive to the idea of God's historical action. The destructive implications of this are even clearer in the parallel idea of God's impassibility, which created serious problems in articulating the doctrine of the incarnation.

The adoption of hellenistic concepts was as much a help as a hindrance to a theology which, of course, was bound to be biblical. It is certainly a distortion to regard it as an unmitigated disaster, as is sometimes claimed. The picture is in any case much less uniform than is typically thought. Gavriluk describes it in terms of a "complex web of theological views", which left the Christian Fathers with anything but "a clear-cut choice between the involved God of the Bible and the uninvolved God of the Hellenistic philosophers".⁴⁵ To put it this way is misleading. The philosophers were not all in agreement on these matters, so it can hardly have been the case that the theologians simply agreed with, and adopted the views of, the philosophers.⁴⁶

Moltmann's rejection of the idea of divine impassibility presupposes a more clear-cut adoption by the Fathers of philosophical ideas about an essentially uninvolved God. It was not his objective to launch a direct attack on the doctrine of impassibility, but it could not avoid being targeted in the

⁴² Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology", 161.

⁴³ Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology", 161.

⁴⁴ Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology", 162.

⁴⁵ Gavriluk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 35

⁴⁶ Gavriluk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 36.

course of pursuing his purposes in writing the book, as identified by Bauckham: God's involvement in the passion of Christ, the nature of love and the intractable problem of suffering. Moltmann did, as noted above, call for a "revolution" in the concept of God,⁴⁷ and the use of such a robust term is indicative of what he went on to write about God's impassibility, notably in the sixth chapter. At the outset he throws down the gauntlet: "which God motivates Christian faith: the crucified God or the gods of religion, race and class?"⁴⁸ He might well have added "and philosophy". He embarks on a crusade against a view of God primarily determined by metaphysics and strenuously asserts that such a view of God cannot apply to a God involved in the death of Jesus. "For metaphysics, the nature of divine being is determined by its unity and indivisibility, its lack of beginning and end, its immovability and immutability."⁴⁹ Only in this way can finite being stand against "the threatening nothingness of death, suffering and chaos". "Death, suffering and mortality must therefore be excluded from the divine being." It is a conflict between "the zone of the impossibility of death" and "the zone of the necessity of death". Therefore, God cannot suffer and die. But "Christian theology *must* think of God's being in suffering and dying and finally in the death of Jesus." Moltmann chooses the God of the Bible, the God of the passion of Jesus Christ, over against the God of the philosophers. The theology of the cross liberates us from philosophical and political monotheism. The choice is for a God who makes all things new: "The metaphysical longing of all that is transitory for intransitoriness and of all that is finite for infinity undergoes an eschatological transformation and is taken up into the hope of the freedom of the sons of God and the freedom of the new creation that does not pass away."⁵⁰

We are now in a position to understand Moltmann's polemic against the concept of a God who cannot suffer. Consider one of his most strident assertions: "a God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved."⁵¹ For Moltmann, the Christian faith cannot be about an uninvolved God, and for the sake of this he is willing

⁴⁷ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 4.

⁴⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 201.

⁴⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 214. The next few quotations are from the same page.

⁵⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 218.

⁵¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 222.

to abandon a key attribute of deity as defined by the philosophical tradition, and to review the old theopaschite question whether God (the Father) suffered. On the basis of Jesus' death on the cross, Moltmann reiterates, "God himself loves and suffers the death of Christ in his love. He is no 'cold heavenly power', nor does he 'tread his way over corpses', but is known as the human God in the crucified Son of Man."⁵²

It follows, for Moltmann, that the axiom of the essential divine *apatheia* must be abandoned since it leaves Christianity not only with an unacceptable doctrine of God but also a problematic christology of the two natures of Christ. These two natures, divine and human, co-existed, according to the Definition of the Council of Chalcedon, without confusion, without change, without division and without separation, their difference being in no way taken away by their union, the properties of each being preserved. This would mean that the one person, Jesus of Nazareth, suffered in his human nature and did not suffer in his divine nature. Such a two-natures christology has been judged to be problematic by many in addition to Moltmann; it is unable to open the way to an understanding of the death of Jesus on the cross. According to Küng, it required some very fancy footwork on the part of theologians such as Thomas Aquinas to deal with the asymmetrical relation between the divine and human natures of Christ.⁵³ By declaring that the divine nature has a *conceptual* relation, not a *real* relation, to the human nature – the human nature having a *real* relation to the divine nature – it was assumed to be clear that the divine nature could remain unchanged in the incarnation and therefore the cry of God-forsakenness on the cross could be predicated of the human nature alone.⁵⁴ The trinitarian language of the relationship between the Father and the Son takes us much further into the death of Jesus and its theological meaning, in particular its meaning for God (the Father), as distinct from its salvific meaning.⁵⁵

The only sense in which Moltmann could accept the immutability of God is a very qualified one. God is "not changeable as creatures are changeable", not under constraint from that which is not

⁵² Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 227.

⁵³ Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology*, trans. J.R. Stephenson (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), 531-32, 541.

⁵⁴ It has to be remembered, of course, that the cry is uttered by a *person*, not a 'nature'.

⁵⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 201.

God, not, unlike creatures, subject to illness, pain and death.⁵⁶ But this does not mean, that God is “not free to change himself, or even to allow himself to be changed by others of his own free will.”⁵⁷ The early church thought only in terms of strict alternatives: capacity to suffer or incapacity to suffer (*apatheia*) and, under philosophical pressure, chose the latter. But there is also “active suffering, the suffering of love, in which one voluntarily opens [one]self to the possibility of being affected by another.”⁵⁸ Moltmann asserts, on the analogy of human love, that love contains the possibility of sharing in the suffering of another person and thus the freedom or capacity to suffer. He makes a bolder claim: “Incapability of suffering in this sense would contradict the fundamental Christian assertion that God is love, which in principle broke the spell of the Aristotelian doctrine of God.”⁵⁹ We shall see that this claim is certainly open to challenge.

Clearly, Moltmann is a passibilist in his understanding of God. The slight concession he makes to the impassibilists does not alter this. When he turns to an explicit discussion of God’s *apatheia* he acknowledges, in a brief historical account, that the term has many connotations as a metaphysical axiom as well as expressing a moral ideal.⁶⁰ In general terms it means being incapable of being affected by outside influences, incapable of feeling and being free from inner needs and external damage. As distinct from the gods of Greek mythology, whose feelings were much more like the feelings and drives of finite creatures, in Plato and Aristotle God’s metaphysical and moral perfection was described as God’s *apatheia*. God needs nothing, having no deficiency; God does not need a world of creatures in order to be fulfilled. Nothing can happen that would cause God to suffer.⁶¹ This God neither receives love nor expresses love.

⁵⁶ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 229-230.

⁵⁷ Sarot reinforces this point: ‘[God] may be influenced by the world, as long as this influence is subject to [God’s] will ...’ Marcel Sarot, *God, Passibility and Corporeality*, Studies in Philosophical Theology (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992), 66.

⁵⁸ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 230.

⁵⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 230.

⁶⁰ It is as a moral ideal, arising from an understanding of the (moral) character of God, that the idea of *apatheia* has a significant place in monastic literature, notably in Evagrius Ponticus (345-399) and John Cassian (360-435). In this literature *apatheia* means the purification of desire, the redirection of the passions rather than their elimination, achievable through love (*agape*), which was understood as an expression of *apatheia*. See Kallistos Ware, “*Apatheia*” in Gordon S. Wakefield (ed), *The SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (London: SCM, 1983), 18-19.

⁶¹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 267-268.

The Christian conviction that God loves the world and that God *is* love requires something more than what this philosophical tradition could provide. In the light of the incarnation, the Christian understanding of God could never be satisfied with giving an account only of the divine *ousia*; in due course it had to speak also of the relationships with divine Persons who are intimately inter-related. Surprisingly, the love of God—the mutual love of the trinitarian Persons and the love of God for the created world—was not thought to put the divine *apatheia* in question. But the concept of *apatheia* underwent change and expansion, as Moltmann notes, though with little detail.⁶² The doctrine of the Trinity, notably the *economic* Trinity, put the idea of divine *apatheia* into a different framework. Moltmann acknowledges that these changes need to be noted “if justice is to be done to the apathetic theology of antiquity and its acceptance in Judaism and Christianity.”⁶³ Yet his verdict on this whole philosophical-theological tradition remains negative: it would prove to be too restrictive in the light of the new relationship with God established by the incarnation and finally by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

If the negative term *apatheia* is to be negated or at least drastically qualified, is it not better to drop the original negative term and adopt a positive term instead? This is what Moltmann does, choosing to speak of the *pathos* or suffering of God, for which he draws on Abraham Heschel’s theology of *pathos*. This is a uniquely Israelite understanding of God, arising out of God’s involvement in what God has created, in particular humankind. The *pathos* of God is God’s “suffering, caused by Israel’s disobedience and his passion for his right and his honour in the world.”⁶⁴ This is a way of thinking, which has its place in theology of the Covenant; it is far removed from the idea of God’s absoluteness. In this context, as Moltmann observes, even the idea of God’s ‘wrath’ can be justified. Rather than being interpreted as an example of “the anthropomorphic transference of lower human emotions to God,” it belongs “in the category of the divine *pathos*.”⁶⁵ Its source is

⁶² Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 269-270.

⁶³ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 270.

⁶⁴ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 271.

⁶⁵ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 272.

God's love, which is disappointed and injured by the Covenant-people. God cannot be indifferent to evil and injustice. God's 'wrath' is the way God suffers evil and injustice in the world.

Few writers have been as provocative as Moltmann in advancing a theology of divine passibility, certainly not with the same sharp focus on the cross. An exception is Robert Jenson. His *Systematic Theology* contains few references to Moltmann, not all of them affirmative. Nevertheless, he too challenges the weight given to philosophical theism over against a narrative definition of God, based on the biblical texts. In this philosophical tradition deity is defined by immutability and "the usual repertoire of time-denying predicates, centrally 'impassibility', that is, immunity to suffering and temporal contingency in general."⁶⁶ But God, he argues, is identified by contingencies; unlike Aristotle, Christians do not need to regard contingency as an ontological deficit. God's being is expressed in an "eventful actuality" which has its particular dramatic coherence.⁶⁷ This is the story of Israel, from which arises the story of Jesus: his arrival on the human scene, his life and ministry, his death and resurrection. It is a story of redemption. Jenson does not articulate the event of the crucifixion in a way comparable to Moltmann but, like Moltmann, he believes that a story about temporal events determines "the final truth of God's own reality" and thus what can and must be said about God.⁶⁸ For Jenson too the simple equation of deity with immutability, impassibility and timeless eternity must finally be put to rest. Jenson describes in his own way how God transcends time's contingencies.

God the Son suffers all the contingencies and evils recorded in the Gospels, and concludes them by suffering execution. God the Father raises him from the dead; nor do we have reason to think of this act as dispassionately done. So and not otherwise the Father triumphs over suffering. God the Spirit is the sphere of the triumph. And 'triumph' is the precise word: the Father and the Spirit take the suffering of the creature who the Son is into the triune life and bring from it the final good of that creature, all other creatures, and of God. So and not otherwise the true God transcends suffering ...⁶⁹

4. Questions and criticisms

Unsurprisingly, not everyone is convinced by Moltmann's strongly staurocentric theology. There are also staunch defenders of the doctrine of God's impassibility, some of whom have targeted

⁶⁶ Robert W. Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 95.

⁶⁷ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 64.

⁶⁸ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 108.

⁶⁹ Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, 144.

Moltmann directly, not always in moderate terms. David Bentley Hart is scathing in his criticism. He is concerned that even the foremost theologians of the theology of the West, especially Protestants, have taken Rahner's maxim that "the 'economic' Trinity is the 'immanent' Trinity and the 'immanent' Trinity is the 'economic' Trinity"⁷⁰ too far, leading to a confusion of the two concepts or the abolition of any distinction between them at all.⁷¹ He is critical in general of neo-Hegelians, among whom he names Moltmann, Jüngel, Pannenberg and Jenson, noting that there are differences between them. Moltmann receives the sharpest rebuke for his "loose, rhapsodic, paraenetic expostulations", a criticism which is exaggerated and unfair;⁷² only Jüngel is accused of being more incoherent. Of the introduction of history into the being of God Hart takes a dim view: "we flirt here with calamity." On the immediate point, he laments that God's impassibility "may well prove to be a piece of conceptual furniture for which fewer and fewer theologians can find or remember a proper use."⁷³ In general, criticism of the trend towards affirming God's *passibility* can be summarised in five points.

First, a major criticism levelled against Moltmann, as well as others, is that insufficient account is taken of God's transcendence. Reference was made above to Sokolowski's strong assertion of the ontological difference between divine and creaturely being.⁷⁴ God's transcendence in relation to everything that is created needs to be understood in radical terms. God and the universe should never be confused or identified in their essential being, which is not to say that they should not be understood in relation to each other. God is not an 'entity which may be considered in relation to other things in the universe but a different reality in every possible respect. Even the word 'being' is problematic: to claim that God has being is to imply that God is an instance of the species 'beings'. God's transcendence is more radical; the relation between God and all created reality is utterly asymmetrical. Kathryn Tanner distinguishes between contrastive and non-contrastive accounts of God's transcendence. In a contrastive account, God is limited by what is different from (or opposed

⁷⁰ Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Joseph Donceel (London: Burns & Oates, 1970), 22.

⁷¹ See David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 155-57.

⁷² Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 157.

⁷³ David Bentley Hart, "No Shadow of Turning: On Divine Impassibility," *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (2002), 185.

⁷⁴ See note 35 above.

to) God; to claim more for God implies claiming less for created reality. In a non-contrastive account of God's transcendence, which is more radical, God does not merely transcend the world but also the very distinctions implied in the contrastive account.⁷⁵ This enables better justice to be done to both God's transcendence and God's real involvement in the world. It also prevents God from being confused with the non-divine. Understood this way, God can give all kinds of gifts to God's creatures without infringing on their freedom to act and their own range of causal efficacy. A further implication of this very strong view of transcendence is that we should be wary of speaking of any change in God's relation to us, especially of what the incarnation—and by extension the cross—means for God. Such speculation is unwarranted and unwise. Tanner writes, "God is not changing God's relation to us in Christ but changing our relation to God."⁷⁶ Whatever one's final judgment on the merit of this accentuation of God's transcendence, it raises the question whether the reciprocity intrinsic to human relationships, even where they are very one-sided, can simply be predicated of God's relation to the world, and thus to God's relation to Jesus on the cross.

Second, the criticism is made, especially of Moltmann, that his use of anthropomorphism, and especially anthropopathism, is taken too far. Of course, to predicate anything of God at all is almost invariably to err on the anthropomorphic side. (Anthropopathism, speaking of God's sufferings as we speak of human suffering, is simply one form of this.) Even to say that God loves and forgives, which are fundamental Christian convictions, must be said in the awareness that God's love and forgiveness are of a different order from ours. This does not rule out speaking of God in such terms but it requires care, lest we trivialise what we attribute to God. It can at least be asked whether Moltmann speaks too easily of the 'feelings' between the Father and the Son. In relationships between human fathers and sons (or mothers and daughters) we can identify with some confidence the dynamics of their mutual relations. But this cannot apply without qualification to God's relation to the world or to the relations between the three Persons of the Trinity. Does the Father suffer the

⁷⁵ Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology: Tyranny or Empowerment?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), ch. 2, esp. 19.

⁷⁶ Kathryn Tanner, *Jesus, Humanity and the Trinity: A Brief Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2001), 15.

death of his Fatherhood, forsaking himself, as Moltmann asserts?⁷⁷ McCall argues that ‘the broken-Trinity view’ is biblically unwarranted and theologically impossible.⁷⁸ Moltmann is actually more qualified than this: the event of the cross ‘contains community between Jesus and his Father in separation, and separation in community.’⁷⁹ But has he gone too far in the direction of speculation, inferring too much about the Father-Son relationship on the analogy of our human experience of grief? If so, what *can* be said about the Father’s experience of the Son’s death? Is it better to err by saying too little than by saying too much?

Third, Moltmann has stated bluntly that “a God who cannot suffer is poorer than any man. For a God who is incapable of suffering is a being who cannot be involved ... He cannot weep, for he has no tears. But the one who cannot suffer cannot love either. So he is also a loveless being.”⁸⁰ Richard Creel speaks of a clash between two convictions: “that God should be thought of as a loving person” and “that an impassible being cannot be a loving person.”⁸¹ On the human level, Moltmann’s claims are undoubtedly plausible: to love someone is inevitably to enter into that person’s pain, distress or grief at some time or other. But is it necessarily so for God? Thomas Weinandy denies it: for God to love is by no means to imply that God suffers. In fact, he contends the opposite: “a God who does not suffer is more loving, compassionate and merciful than a God who does.”⁸² While love often entails suffering, it is not a constitutive element of love. Suffering is not a good in itself, but an evil, or at least a deprivation. We do not ordinarily seek suffering as an end in itself. We are willing to suffer with or on account of someone we love, which is a good, “but it is precisely the love that is good and not the suffering itself.”⁸³ Weinandy concludes that, since there is no evil in God and since God cannot be deprived of any good, there is not and cannot be any suffering in God’s love. This makes God’s love entirely free in its expression. What God does to alleviate and overcome

⁷⁷ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 243.

⁷⁸ Thomas H. McCall, *Forsaken: The Trinity and the Cross, and Why It Matters* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 46.

⁷⁹ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 244.

⁸⁰ Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 222.

⁸¹ Richard E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An essay in philosophical theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2.

⁸² Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 159.

⁸³ Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 160.

suffering is solely for the benefit of those who suffer; it has in it no element at all of self-concern.

Unlike human love, God's love is "immutably and impassibly adapted to every situation and circumstance, not because [it] is indifferent and unresponsive, but because his love, with all its facets, is fully in act, and so he is supremely and utterly responsive to every situation and circumstance."⁸⁴ The cogency of this third argument increases in proportion to the emphasis given to God's transcendence.

A fourth criticism of the passibilist view is that its understanding of God's *apatheia* is flawed. It is argued by several defenders of God's *impassibility* that *apatheia* never mean detachment and indifference. Daniel Castelo writes,

... when ancient writers spoke of God's *apatheia* in glowing and favourable terms, they did not envisage a detached and unapproachable God. On the contrary, for many writers and thinkers, God's *apatheia* suggested the opposite: that God was so distinct from and transcendent to the world's occurrences that his presence and actions could carry meaning and significance. The assumption that God was beyond the ever-fluctuating circumstances of a hurting and dying world actually brought hope to believers.⁸⁵

The Latin term 'impassibility' is typically understood as 'passionless', as implying something impersonal, even unapproachable. But impassibilists deny that God is passionless, impersonal and unapproachable. Castelo proposes the following meaning of God's impassibility: that God "cannot be affected against [God's] will by an outside force."⁸⁶ This sounds straightforward, but many *passibilists* would agree with such a view of God. The term 'impassibility' lacks a single clear meaning, so the line of division between passibilist and impassibilist understandings of the key term is quite blurred. Creel shows that the choice is not between two simple alternatives, divine impassibility or passibility, but is considerably more differentiated. God can be thought to be passible or impassible in respect of God's nature, God's will, God's knowledge or God's feeling, leaving sixteen possible permutations.⁸⁷ Gavriluk argues that "divine impassibility functioned as an *apophatic qualifier* of all divine emotions and served to rule out those passions and experiences

⁸⁴ Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?*, 162.

⁸⁵ Daniel Castelo, *The Apathetic God: Exploring the Contemporary Relevance of Divine Impassibility* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 15.

⁸⁶ Castelo, *The Apathetic God*, 16.

⁸⁷ Creel, *Divine Impassibility*, 11-12.

that were unbecoming of the divine nature.”⁸⁸ Clearly, the term has had considerable flexibility over the centuries of its use, leaving a certain amount of common ground between impassibilist and passibilist understandings of God. Hart supports Gavriilyuk’s view that the Christian doctrine of divine *apatheia* never assumed a God incapable of knowing and loving us. In his view, “the juxtaposition of the language of divine *apatheia* with the story of crucified love is precisely what makes the entire narrative of salvation in Christ intelligible.”⁸⁹ It requires a clear distinction between the immanent Trinity and the economic Trinity. He strenuously insists that history can manifest who God is but never determine who God is.⁹⁰

This brings us to a fifth point of disagreement between passibilists and impassibilists—certainly between Moltmann and Hart—on the question of the relation between the utterly transcendent God and the contingencies of history.⁹¹ As Küng points out, Karl Rahner, not without influence from Hegel, looked for a way of making theologically intelligible the possibility of the incarnation on the basis of God’s own nature and initiative, the possibility of “the self-externalising of God in creation”. This would make the Christ-event, as God’s self-giving and self-externalising, “the history of God himself.”⁹² Rahner was careful to say that this history and change takes place on *this* side of the gulf between the unchangeable God and the world of change. But Rahner was already willing to speak of a *becoming* in God, “in the pure freedom of his infinite and abiding unrelatedness”. In the *kenosis* God comes to be “by *becoming* that other thing, the finite”, yet without having to change in God’s own proper reality.⁹³ Pannenberg speaks in a more radical sense of a *becoming* in God, though stopping short of predicating development of God.⁹⁴ He describes God as “absolute

⁸⁸ Gavriilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 16.

⁸⁹ Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 160.

⁹⁰ Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*, 162.

⁹¹ See also Mostert, “God’s Transcendence and Compassion,” 179-185.

⁹² Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 540, quoting from Rahner’s article, “Jesus Christus”, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, Vol. 5, 1960, Col. 956.

⁹³ Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 542, quoting Rahner’s *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 4, 114.

⁹⁴ See Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The God of History,” *The Cumberland Seminarian* 19 (1981), 28-41, esp. 32-35, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, “Problems of a Trinitarian Doctrine of God,” *Dialog* 26 (1987), 250-257. See also Christiaan Mostert, *God and the Future: Wolfhart Pannenberg’s Eschatological Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), 153-161.

in his relation to the world and not restricted by it, but fulfilled himself through that relationship.”⁹⁵

In Pannenberg’s case at least, the argument is delicately nuanced.

At issue is a clash of fundamental ontological principles on the relation between eternity and time between the defenders of divine impassibility and those who challenge it. For the former God’s eternity and transcendence are immune to time’s contingencies; for the latter the eternal God is open to them. If there is a hint of a third option, it may be in the idea, unavoidably paradoxical, expressed by Küng, that the eternal God lives, acts and *becomes* “in perfection and from perfection”. This would mean understanding God as “the God who is wholly other, in whom being and becoming, remaining in himself and going out from himself, transcendence and descendance, are not mutually exclusive.”⁹⁶ Pannenberg’s statement above—that God is absolute in his relation to the world and not restricted by it, but fulfilled himself through that relationship—is similarly paradoxical. Little sense can be made of such statements without observing the distinction between God as immanent Trinity and God as economic Trinity. As Pannenberg suggests, the unity of the economic and the immanent Trinity cannot be ‘located’ anywhere in time but only ‘in the eschatological consummation of history.’⁹⁷ Only in this perspective can the paradox be resolved and both being and becoming be predicated of the eternal God.

5. Conclusion

There can be no doubt that Moltmann’s book, *The Crucified God*, had an enormous impact on the theological scene, not confined to Western Europe nor to the period immediately following its publication. Many will testify that this provocative work opened the way to a new understanding of God as compassionate and involved in the struggles and sufferings of the world. For others it has been a problematic and troubling book, violating the quasi-sacred theological tradition of divine immutability and impassibility. The question whether the eternal God is impassible or passible is genuinely difficult, quite apart from the troublesome elasticity of the basic terms in the discussion.

⁹⁵ Pannenberg, “The God of History,” 35.

⁹⁶ Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 533.

⁹⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, “A Response to my American Friends”, *The Theology of Wolfhart Pannenberg*, ed. Carl E Braaten and Philip Clayton (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 323.

Both passibilism and impassibilism require significant qualification. In addition, at the very outset of discussion fundamental theological and philosophical commitments come into play. Eminent theologians stand on both sides of the question. A basic disposition to trust the patristic and medieval theologians on the nature of divine being tends to imply a suspicion of 19th century moves to read history—what Jenson referred to as ‘time’s contingencies’—into the *immanent* Trinity. Against this, those who instinctively find themselves sympathetic to Hegel’s questions, if not all his answers, will find there an unavoidable challenge to the ontological certainties of the ancient theological tradition shared by East and West.

Reading *The Crucified God* made a lasting impact on my own theological development and for some decades I was largely persuaded by Moltmann’s argument. In recent years I have read the views of impassibilists with a more open mind, willing to learn how the great patristic writers held together the doctrine of God’s impassibility with their belief in the God of Holy Scripture. Two issues stand out in the discussion, the centre of gravity for each side: the radical transcendence of God and the complex relation between eternity and time. The philosophical theology of Kathryn Tanner, with its radical interpretation of God’s transcendence, has recently further unsettled my reception of Moltmann’s theology of the cross. It has functioned like a mathematical sign outside the brackets, changing the value of everything inside them. My conversion is not complete, however, being resisted by an equally strong commitment to the idea that—to quote an unexpected line from Heidegger—God’s eternity, if it can be ‘construed’ philosophically, “may be understood only as a more primordial temporality which is ‘infinite’.”⁹⁸ Unavoidably paradoxical, this is perhaps an oblique way of speaking of “the abundance of the eternal life of the trinitarian God”,⁹⁹ of which no orthodox theologian of either persuasion, passibilist or impassibilist, could disapprove, yet which moves their thinking in almost entirely opposite directions.

⁹⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 499, note xiii.

⁹⁹ Pannenberg, "A Response to my American Friends", 323.