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THE INFLUENCE OF MYSTICISM ON THE SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF JOHN WESLEY

by Peter Dobson

I. Introduction

Even a brief study of John Wesley's life will reveal a number of influences that impacted the development of his theology and spiritual understanding. "The sensitive upbringing he received from his mother, the particular selection from the Romanic mystics with which he was familiar, the Puritan tradition as a whole, Henry Scougal, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law, all introduced him to a particular type of spiritual culture."[1] Between the years of 1725 and 1738, Wesley was particularly drawn to the mystic writers. The copious amount of reading undertaken by Wesley in these years not only led him to his evangelical conversion in 1738 but left a lasting imprint on his theological and spiritual doctrines.[2] Rattenbury says, "if mysticism is essentially the soul's awareness of God, or immediate consciousness of God's presence, then 'more than a touch of mysticism' undergirds the spirituality of the father of Methodism."[3]

A. Defining Mysticism

Evelyn Underhill states that "Mysticism is the direct intuition or experience of God. A mystic is a person who has, to a greater or less degree, such a direct experience - one whose religion and life are centred, not merely on an accepted belief practice, but on that which

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[1] Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*. (New York: Abingdon Press, n.d. Volume 1), 13.

[2] This is not to say that Wesley read more in these years than at other times in his life, but during this period (1725-1738) he certainly read a higher percentage of mystical writers.

[3] J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrine of Charles Wesley's Hymns.* (London: Epworth, 1941), 155.

he regards as first-hand personal knowledge."[4] Stated in simpler terms, mysticism is "the search after a direct knowledge of God or spiritual truths by self-surrender."[5]

Christian mysticism can also be separated into various streams that focus on varying means in order to gain an awareness of God's presence. Two distinct streams are evident in those who influenced Wesley. Albert Outler says "it was his [Wesley's] experimentation with the *voluntaristic* mysticism of Kempis, Law and Scupoli, and with the *quietistic* mysticism of the Molinists and Guyon, that drove Wesley to the pitch of futile striving which was such a vivid agony in his early years."[6] The voluntaristic mysticism which emphasised asceticism and self-abasement and the quietistic mysticism which employed a stillness and waiting on God were both evident in Wesley's search for assurance and faith.

II. Mysticism in Wesley's Search for Assurance

Wesley was greatly influenced by his mother in his spiritual development. She encouraged all her children to read and many of the books she chose had a mystical emphasis. Robert Tuttle describes Susannah's influence this way:

> Devotional reading was an important part of my parents' discipline. Many of the devotional books being read by serious minded Christians during the first part of this century were written by Roman Catholic Mystics. We were no exception. So, we read these as well. . .The result of this was that the influence of much of my earliest devotional reading, which accelerated my appreciation of asceticism (held in common with both puritan and mystic alike), quickly tapered off into a mystical contemplation that was so subjective that I no longer had sufficient roots to ground me in the evangelical faith.[7]

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[4] Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystics of the Church.* (London: James Clarke & Co. n.d.), 9-10.

[5] *Mysticism*, Webster's Dictionary.

[6] Albert Outler, *John Wesley*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 83.

[7] Robert G. Tuttle, *John Wesley: His Life and Theology*. (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1978), 46. Sections of Tuttle's biography are written in the first person. While the sentiments here are Wesley's, the words are in fact Tuttle's.

Other authors read by Wesley's mother and Wesley himself included Blaise Pascal, Lorenzo Scupoli, Thomas à Kempis, and Henry Scougal. Following his graduation from Oxford in 1724, "he sought to improve his spiritual status by various reforms, devotions, introspection, continual counsel from his virtuous and pious mother, and an extremely self-disciplined life."[8] After much deliberation and influence from his parents, Wesley decided to enter the ministry. This prompted him to be more serious in his devotion. He read extensively and was strongly attracted to mysticism. He was earnest in his search for assurance and faith.

Wesley found in the mystical writings a hope for assurance. Tuttle comments that Wesley hoped mysticism "would make him invulnerable to fear. His troublesome doubts would vanish. The enemy would lose his hold, and who knows, if the mystical stories were true, death might even become a friend."[9] Following Wesley's ordination in 1728, he assisted his father at Epworth before returning to Oxford to teach. It was at this time that Wesley was involved with the Holy Club where he met with other like-minded individuals for study and accountability.[10] These men, led by John, searched for inward holiness through obedience to self imposed rules of outward holiness.

In October 1735, Wesley set sail for Georgia as a missionary to the American Indians. While in Georgia, Wesley concentrated on the writings of the mystics.

> He subjected himself to severe ascetic discipline. The diaries reveal the relentless pressure of his self-mortification. Sometimes he would hold an inquisition on his soul. All his most intimate motives and emotions were interrogated at the bar of his own remorseless conscience.[11]

While he continued to search for assurance of salvation, Wesley was losing patience with the mystical way. He says, "In this refined way of trusting to my own works and my own righteousness (so zealously inculcated by the mystic writers), I dragged on heavily, finding no comfort or help therein till the time of my leaving

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[8] Howard F. VanValin, "Mysticism in Wesley." in *The Asbury Seminarian* (Volume XII, Summer 1958), 6.

[9] Tuttle, 76.

[10] His brother Charles was also a member of this small group.

[11] A. Skevington Wood, *A Burning Heart*, (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1978), 48.

England."[12] Tuttle summarises Wesley's futile attempts to find assurance during this period of his life.

> During the past ten years (1725-1735), this is what he has learned: reason alone could not produce faith; mystic solitude would not produce faith; works of charity (the exterior life) would not produce faith; inner penance (the interior life) would not produce faith. All of these even wrapped in asceticism produced nothing.[13]

III. Identifying the Mystical Influences in John Wesley's Life

From the time Wesley entered Oxford until his return from America in 1738, he became familiar with many mystical works. Some were more influential than others but all of them left a lasting imprint on his spiritual life.

A. Taylor, à Kempis and Law

In his book, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1765), Wesley mentions Jeremy Taylor, Thomas à Kempis, and William Law as the authors who had made a significant impact upon his early spiritual development. While Wesley did not agree with everything written by these authors, they certainly deepened his sense of inward holiness. Green says,

> Wesley was himself incorrect in supposing that à Kempis, Taylor and Law were the only significant writers who influenced his spiritual development at this period. But they more than the many others whom he read were primarily responsible in cultivating his search for personal salvation and personal holiness, which he believed to be a prerequisite before he could bring others to this end.[14]

James Gordon summarises their influence this way, "From Jeremy Taylor he learned the importance of purity of intention, Thomas à Kempis taught him that real religion is of the heart, and from William Law he heard the uncompromising call to a wholehearted Christian commitment."[15]

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[12] Outler, *John Wesley*, 63.
[13] Tuttle, 150.
[14] V. H. H. Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), 278.
[15] James S. Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality from the Wesleys to John Stott*. (London: SPCK, 1991), 13.

1. Bishop Jeremy Taylor

Wesley says,

> In the year 1725, being in the twenty-third year of my age, I met with Bishop Taylor's *Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying*. In reading several parts of this book, I was exceedingly affected; that part in particular which relates to purity of intention. Instantly I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts, and words, and actions; being thoroughly convinced, there was no medium; but that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil. Can any serious person doubt of this, or find a medium between serving God and serving the devil?[16]

Taylor especially influenced the way that Wesley scheduled the activities of his life. He began keeping a diary after reading Taylor and realised the value of assessing the worth of all one's activities. It was the combination of outward observance and inward intention in Taylor's writings that attracted Wesley.

2. Thomas à Kempis

Wesley says of à Kempis,

> In the year 1726, I met with Kempis' *Christian's Pattern.*[17] The nature and extent of inward religion, the religion of the heart, now appeared to me in a stronger light than ever it had done before. I saw, that giving even all my life to God (supposing it possible to do this, and go no farther) would profit me nothing, unless I gave my heart, yea, all my heart, to him. I saw, that "simplicity of intention, and purity of affection," one design in all we speak or do, and one desire ruling all our tempers, are indeed "the wings of the soul," without which she can never ascend to the mount of God.[18]

Although Wesley did have some criticisms of *The Imitation of Christ*, he was clearly moved by it and it was instrumental in his shift

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[16] John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), Vol. XI, 366.

[17] More commonly known as *The Imitation of Christ*.

[18] Wesley, *Works*, Vol. XI, 367.

toward a faith based in the heart as well as the mind. In a letter to his mother, Wesley said that "as a result of reading à Kempis, I began to see that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as our words and actions."[19]

3. William Law

Of William Law, Wesley says,

> Mr. Law's *Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call* were put into my hands. These convinced me, more than ever, of the absolute impossibility of being half a Christian; and I determined, through his grace (the absolute necessity of which I was deeply sensible of), to be all devoted to God, to give him all my soul, my body, and my substance. Will any considerate man say that this is carrying matters too far? or that anything less is due to him who has given himself for us, than to give him ourselves, all we hence, and all we are?[20]

This extract reveals the great influence that Law had on Wesley's spiritual development. VanValin notes that "In 1727 Wesley contacted a book that was to change his thinking and bear influence upon him for the rest of his life. Upon reading William Law's *Treatise of Christian Perfection*, he was 'seized with an idea that never after let him go'."[21]

In 1732, Wesley travelled to Putney to visit Law. For many years Wesley was greatly influenced by him and it was through Law that Wesley was introduced to other mystical writers. "The *Serious Call* played its part in confirming the habits of personal discipline and of pious exclusion which marked the life of Wesley at Oxford from 1729 to 1735 and strengthened his mystical leaning until the Moravian example gave to Wesley's religious life an essentially practical tendency."[22]

Wesley's personal acquaintance with William Law, which developed into a student/mentor relationship, moved to uncharitable criticism as Law became more heavily influenced by Jacob Boehme. Wesley wrote many letters challenging Law's drift toward dualism

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[19] Wesley, Quoted by Green, 80.
[20] Wesley, *Works*, Vol XI, 366-367.
[21] VanValin, 7.
[22] Howard Snyder, *The Radical Wesley*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 14.

and exclusive trust in the mystics, but it seems that they went unanswered. An example of one of those letters is as follows:

> O that your latter works may be more and greater than your first! Surely they would, if you could ever be persuaded to study, instead of the writings of Tauler and Behmen, those of St. Paul, James, Peter, and John. To spew out of your mouth and out of your heart that vain philosophy, and speak neither higher nor lower things, neither more nor less, than the oracles of God; to renounce, despise, abhor all the high-flown bombast, all the unintelligible jargon of the Mystics, and come back to the plain religion of the Bible, "We love him, because he first loved us.[23]

B. Other Mystical Authors

Apart from Taylor, à Kempis, and Law, many other mystical writers from the fourth through to the eighteenth century influenced Wesley.

1. Macarius and Ephraem

Macarius "the Egyptian" was a fourth century monk.[24] "In 1721, an English edition of the *Homilies* of Macarius was published and quickly came into Wesley's hands. From then on, both before and after Aldersgate in 1738, Wesley apparently returned periodically to Macarius."[25] Wesley published an abridgment of a number of Macarius' Homilies in his *Christian Library*.

Ephraem Syrus lived in the middle of the fourth century and wrote *A Serious Exhortation to Repentance and Sorrow for Sin, and a Strict and Mortified Life*. Ephraem and Macarius influenced Wesley's concept of perfection as a dynamic process rather than a static state.

2. Count Gaston Jean Baptiste De Renty

The Life of De Renty, which was also released as *The True Christian*, is a "significant and effective example of Romanic

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[23] Wesley, *Works*, Vol. IX, 587 (Letter dated January 6, 1756).

[24] Not Egyptian but a Syrian disciple of Gregory of Nyssa.

[25] Howard Snyder, "John Wesley and Macarius the Egyptian." in *Asbury Theological Journal.* (Vol. 45: 2 Fall 1990), 55.

mysticism."[26] Wesley began reading it in May 1736, he read it constantly while in Georgia, and it stayed with him his whole life. "De Renty was an individual witness, just as the Hernhutters had been a corporate one, to the fact that primitive Christianity could be realised in the present."[27]

3. Madame Guyon

Guyon was one writer Wesley kept close contact with throughout his life. He recommended her to his sister later in life, although he did warn of her quietistic tendencies. "Wesley was deeply moved by the life of Madame Guyon and her books, and even after his conversion and repudiation of mysticism, he wrote favourably of her."[28]

4. Lorenzo Scupoli

Scupoli wrote two books that influenced Wesley: *Spiritual Combat* and *Pugna Spiritualis.* These were favourites of both Wesley and his mother. Scupoli spoke of the call to Christian perfection, which is known to derive solely from God.

5. Gregory Lopez

Wesley read the biography of Gregory Lopez, a Spanish mystic who lived as a hermit in Mexico. Wesley was attracted to his knowledge of Scripture and his open intercourse with God.

6. Henry Scougal

One of the books recommended by his mother was that of Henry Scougal called *The Life of God in the Soul of Man* (1677). It was also a regular on the reading list of those in the Holy Club.

[26] Schmidt, 213.
[27] Schmidt, 216.
[28] Van Valin, 7.

7. Other Mystical Influences

Wesley read many other works by the mystics and these also influenced his life and thought.[29]

IV. The Moravian Pietists and Wesley's Conversion

On the ship to Georgia, Wesley was introduced to a group of Moravians and immediately recognised in them an assurance of faith. "While William Law's mysticism could instruct in the spiritual self-discipline through which a person could find God, it did little to foster an expectancy of the divine initiative. Moravian piety was a discerning of the pattern of God's initiative toward the believer."[30] It was the Moravian synthesis of mystical piety and reformed theology that appealed to Wesley's greatest weakness and fulfilled his greatest need.[31]

One of the Moravian pastors in Savannah was August Spangenberg. He exhibited this combination of mystical piety and the theology of the continental reformers. Wesley spent time with Spangenberg and the Moravians while in Georgia, but it was not until he returned to England that he would find the assurance he had been searching for and the witness of the Spirit that the Moravians stressed.

John Wesley, during the years of 1725-1737, had led a futile search for an assurance of salvation that mystical asceticism could not produce. Tuttle summarises Wesley's search to this point:

> In achieving his final goal, the Deists were little help. Reason alone (though important) would not lead to an assurance of faith. His High Church tradition was little help. The means of grace alone (though important) would not lead to an assurance of faith.

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[29] Some of these works included Francois Fenelon (*Discourse on Simplicity), The Life of Thomas Halyburton,* James Garden's *Comparative Theology,* Molinos, *The Life of Tauler,* Theologica Germanica, *The Whole Duty of Man,* Antionette Bourignon (*Light of the World and Treatise on Solid Virtue*), Fleury, A. H. Francke, (*Nicodemus),* Francois De Sales (*Introduction to the Devout Life),* Nathaniel Spinckes (*Collections of Meditations and Devotions),* Peter Heylin (*Devotional Tracts),* Spurstow (*Meditations),* Richard Lucas (*Enquiry),* John Scott (*The Christian Life),* and Rodriguez' *On Humility*.

[30] David Lowes Watson, "Methodist Spirituality." in *Protestant Spiritual Traditions.* Frank Senn, ed (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 220.

[31] Tuttle speaks at length regarding the blend of mystical piety and reformed theology in the Moravians.

> Even the Puritans were little help. Although they spoke of evangelical faith, Wesley was so predisposed to their asceticism that he could not hear it, and asceticism alone (though important) would not lead to an assurance of faith. Solitude was little help, for time apart with God (though important), being the result of faith but not the cause, would not lead to an assurance of faith. Finally the mystics were little help. Internal works-righteousness alone (though important) would not lead to an assurance of faith.[32]

When Wesley returned to England, through the help of Peter Bohler, he found assurance through faith in Christ.

> The unique mixture of theological notions thus far accumulated was now to be smelted and forged into an integral and dynamic theology in which Eastern notions of *synelthesis* (dynamic interaction between God's will and man's) were fused with the classical Protestant *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*, and with the Moravian stress upon inner feeling.[33]

Wesley maintained contact with the Moravians and visited their communities in Herrnhut, Germany. But it was only a short time before Wesley broke with them over the issue of Quietism.

V. Wesley's Withdrawal from Mysticism

Some would say that Wesley broke with Mysticism while in Georgia. In a letter to his brother Samuel on November 23, 1736, he says, "I think the rock on which I had the nearest made ship wreck of the faith, was, the writings of the Mystics; under which term I comprehend all, and only those, who slight any of the means of grace.[34] But there is evidence from his journals that he continued to read from the mystical writers.

Whenever this break with mysticism took place, there is no doubt that Wesley felt betrayed by the mystics and he therefore distanced himself from mystical thought. Commenting on this, Wakefield says,

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[32] Tuttle, 218.
[33] Outler, 14.
[34] Wesley, *Works*, Vol. XII, 41.

> In the despondency of the Georgian crisis he came to think that their teaching undermined faith, works and reason equally, and condemned the soul to a lone struggle through the dark wilderness of solitary, introspective religion, with no means of grace to be guide posts and no pilgrim song of assurance to speed the way.[35]

Wesley himself spoke of this period before his conversion:

> These considerations insensibly stole upon me as I grew acquainted with the mystic writers, whose noble descriptions of union with God and internal religion made everything else appear mean, flat, and insipid. But in truth they made good works appear so too; yea, and faith itself, and what not? They gave me an entire new view of religion, like any I had before. But alas! it was nothing like that religion which Christ and his apostles loved and taught. . .I had no heart, no vigour, no zeal in obeying, continually doubting whether I was right or wrong, and never out of perplexities and entanglements.[36]

This move to separate himself from mysticism is clearly seen in Wesley's preface to his *Hymns and Poems.*

> Some verses, it may be observed, in the following Collection, were wrote upon the scheme of the Mystic Divines. And these, it is owned, we had once in great veneration, as the best explainers of the gospel of Christ. But we are now convinced, that we therein greatly erred, not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God.[37]

In speaking of some of Charles' hymns John comments that:

> > ...some still savour of that poisonous mysticism, with which we were both not a little tainted before we went to America. This gave a gloomy cast, first to his mind, and then to many of his verses: This made him frequently describe religion as a

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[35] Gordon S. Wakefield, *Methodist Devotion: The Spiritual Life in the Methodist Tradition.* (London: Epworth Press, 1960), 33.

[36] VanValin, 10.

[37] Wesley, *Works*, Vol 14, 435.

> melancholy thing: This so often sounded in his ears, "To the desert;" and strongly persuaded in favour of solitude.[38]

VI. Wesley's Break from the Moravians

Wesley, who had great admiration for the Moravians, began to become wary of a Quietist influence among their number. Wakefield notes, "Ironically, the Moravians, who had pointed him to justification by faith alone, and thereby to the English Reformers and away from the Behmenist syncretism of William Law, proved to be the most dangerously mystical of all in their quietist disavowal of the sacraments."[39]

Wesley comments on the quietist influences that began to develop in the Moravians.

> The errors which had crept in among the Moravians in London at that time, were a refined species of Antinomianism, and mystic notions of ceasing from ordinances and waiting for faith in stillness; and these errors were afterwards carried by them into many of the Methodist societies in Yorkshire, Derbyshire, and other places.[40]

Philip Molther was identified by Wesley as one who was influencing the society at Fetter Lane towards quietism. On July 20, 1740, Wesley read a paper in disagreement with Molther and quietism. He and about eighteen others left the Fetter Lane society and began meeting in a foundry. This marked the beginning of the Methodist societies and reinforced Wesley's separation from the excesses of mysticism.

In writing to his brother, Charles, John gave reasons why he could not continue with the Moravians.

> Because their general scheme is mystical, not scriptural; refined in every point above what is written; immeasurably beyond the plain Gospel. Because there is darkness and closeness in all their behaviour, and guile in almost all their words. Because they not only do not practice, but utterly despise and decry, self-denial and the daily cross. Because they conform to the world, in

[38] Wesley, *Works*, Vol. IV, 487.
[39] Wakefield, 33.
[40] Wesley, *Works*, Vol. V, 22-23.

> wearing gold and gay or costly apparel. Because they are by no means zealous of good works, or at least only to their own people: For these reasons (chiefly) I will rather, God being my helper, stand quite alone than join with them: I mean till I have full assurance, that they are better acquainted with 'the truth as it is in Jesus.'[41]

In a letter to the Moravians in Herrnhut, Germany, Wesley said,

> You receive not the ancient, but the modern Mystics, as the best interpreters of Scripture. And in conformity to these, you mix much of man's wisdom with the wisdom of God. You greatly refine the plain religion taught by the letter of Holy Writ, and philosophise on almost every part of it, to accommodate it to the Mystic theory.[42]

VII. Wesley's Conclusions Concerning Mysticism

Though Wesley broke with mysticism on or around the time of his conversion, he still read from them throughout his life and included many of their works in his *Christian Library* which he recommended to his lay preachers.[43] Certainly Wesley chose his reading material more carefully and was known to edit large portions of text in his own abridgments of many of these books.

A. What Wesley Rejected in Mysticism

1. A Gradual Conversion

Largely due to his own experience, Wesley recognised that God could work in a person's heart in an instant. And "although Wesley recognised the need for gradual growth before and after sanctification, his insistence on an experience wrought in an instant remained a point of contention between himself and the mystics."[44]

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[41] Wesley, *Works*, Vol. 1, 345.
[42] Wesley, *Works*, Vol. 1, 371.
[43] The *Christian Library* is a collection of books and literature recommended by Wesley for the Methodists.
[44] Tuttle, 341.

2. Quietism

Quietism is the opposite extreme of salvation by works and Wesley rejected both. Mercer says, "Wesley was opposed to the quietists insistence that one must wait passively for salvation."[45] Wesley recognised that good works, the sacraments and the spiritual disciplines were all means of grace and should be encouraged in those who are seeking salvation.

3. Dark Night of the Soul

The five stages of mysticism are awakening, purgation, illumination, the dark night of the soul, and union with God. Wesley sought to follow this mystical path to union with God, but struggled with the dark night of the soul. "According to Wesley, sin alone occasions what the mystic refers to as darkness."[46] As a consequence, Wesley swapped the fourth stage of mysticism (the dark night of the soul) with justification by faith.

4. Private Religion

While Wesley appreciated much of the mystics, he stood against their tendency to privatise the revelation of God. Wesley "was convinced that the social implications of holy living were inescapable. Thus he opposed mysticism and solitary religion, arguing that Holy solitaries, or, as we would say solitary saints, is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers."[47]

The Methodist system grew out of Wesley's keen awareness of the social nature of Christian experience – the balance of the individual and the community.

> As early as 1729 a 'serious man' whom Wesley sought out told him, "Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember that you cannot serve him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them; the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion." This was the basis of his reservations about mysticism.[48]

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[45] Jerry L. Mercer, "Toward a Wesleyan Understanding of Christian Experience." In *Wesleyan Theological Journal.* (Spring 1985), Notes 87.

[46] Tuttle, 340.

[47] Snyder, 88.

[48] Quoted by Snyder, 148.

5. Morbidity and Extreme Asceticism

Wesley disagreed with the mystical premise that we should not enjoy the pleasures of life. Wesley was critical of à Kempis and Taylor when he first read them in 1725 because of their pessimistic and negative view of human happiness. Rack comments that "There was a kind of robust common sense touched with the optimism of the Enlightenment which had already led Wesley in 1725 to balk at the morbid misery of Taylor and à Kempis in favour of the theme of 'holiness and happiness'."[49]

B. What Wesley Adopted from Mysticism

It may appear that Wesley rejected mysticism completely for at one stage he said, "I believe the Mystic writers to be one great Anti-Christ," but later he retraced the statement saying it was far too strong.[50] "Wesley's anti-mysticism did not wholly persist and for the last thirty years of his long life it seems as though there was little of his past that he would repudiate."[51] Wakefield probably exaggerates here, however once the initial controversy had abated and he was able to see the crisis of his own conversion in a new light, Wesley softened some of his criticisms of mysticism.

1. Spiritual Disciplines

Wesley maintained a strong commitment to the spiritual disciplines throughout his life and instructed the Methodists to do likewise. "His acceptance of divine initiative as the dynamic of his spirituality did not negate the importance of the spiritual disciplines as its form."[52]

2. Personal Models of Piety

Wesley continued to read selected mystical writings throughout his life. He especially saw value in biographies that represented personal models of piety. Rack says, "It is worth noting that the Catholic and even the mystical literature and biographies continued to attract Wesley, not least Madame Guyon with her picture of a

[49] Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast.* (London: Epworth Press, 1989), 401.
[50] Wesley, *Works*, Vol. X, 468.
[51] Wakefield, 23.
[52] Watson, 222.

'short and easy method' which in a sense resembled the short cut to salvation offered by evangelical conversion, here applied to perfection as well.[53]

3. Self-Denial and Consecration

Wesley's focus on Christian perfection meant that he maintained a belief in the mystical concepts of self-denial and consecration. "The meditative writers he chose to edit or translate for his followers are distinguished by their ascetic bent; he championed their spirit of self-denial and consecration as instruction or necessary preparation for the active spiritual life and witness."[54]

VIII. Conclusion

Certainly mysticism played a pivotal role in John Wesley's early spiritual development and though he rejected the mystical approach to salvation following his own conversion, he was probably more influenced by mystical thought and doctrine than he was aware.

[53] Rack, 401.

[54] David Lyle Jeffrey, ed. *English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 30.

THE EFFECTS OF THE ARIAN CONTROVERSY ON THE LITURGY OF THE POST-NICENE CHURCH

by Glen O'Brien

I. Introduction

Before the conversion of Constantine, our knowledge of the church's liturgy is somewhat patchy. After the Church "went public," as Geoffrey Wainwright puts it, from the latter half of the fourth century onwards, we are given much more detailed information about Christian worship.[1] In this paper I would like to examine the effects of the Arian controversy on the liturgical practices of the Post-Nicene church. I will focus on three main areas - the use of creeds in the liturgy, the use of Trinitarian doxologies, and the development of the church calendar. The way in which the Christological disputes of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Church shaped each of these usages will be examined.

II. The Use of Creeds

The Creed we now know as The Apostles Creed originally began as a simple expression of praise before the Lordship of Jesus Christ.[2] By the second century, creeds were being used as a symbol or rule of faith for believers. Justin Martyr insists on the candidate for baptism

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[1] Geoffrey Wainwright, "The Periods of Liturgical History," in Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, Edward Yarnold, SJ, and Paul Bradshaw, eds. *The Study of Liturgy*. (London: SPCK and New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[2] Frank C. Senn, *Christian Liturgy: Catholic and Evangelical.* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 535. Cf. D. Gerhard Delling, *Worship in the New Testament*. trans. by Percy Scott (London: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1962), 88; Oscar Cullman, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. by A. Steward Todd and James B. Torrance (London: S.C.M. Press, 1953), 23.

professing to believe and live by the truth.[3] Irenaeus speaks of "the canon of truth which everyone received at his baptism."[4] Creeds were also used in connection with the rite of baptism. In both Hippolytus and Tertullian we find descriptions of a three-fold dipping corresponding to a three-fold interrogation oriented around the three persons of the Trinity. The candidate replies *Credo* ("I believe") after each question is put.[5] In the fourth and fifth centuries this threefold interrogation began to be elaborated into a rudimentary creed.[6]

The Nicene Creed was based on these earlier baptismal confessions, "amplified with Christological and pneumatological specificities to establish *orthodoxis* (true worship) against the false worship of the Arians...As such the Nicene Creed became a mark of catholic and orthodox identity, but it was also deeply evangelical because it summarized the gospel story of Jesus."[7]

Though the recitation of the Creed has its origins in the baptismal rite, in the struggles against the Christological heresies it came also to be inserted into the Eucharist celebration.[8] In the Byzantine liturgy it was recited after the Great Entry, always recited by the people, and never sung, as it would come to be in the West. The Western Syrian version of the Byzantine liturgy added the Nicene Creed in 476 AD, as a way of pledging Monophysite allegiance to the Council of Nicaea.[9] The custom of reciting the Creed in the eucharistic liturgy soon spread to the West, especially after the Arian Visigoths were restored to the Catholic faith at the end of the sixth century, though here it was recited before the Lord's Prayer in preparation for communion.

The Mozarabic liturgy inserted the Nicene Creed after the anaphora and fraction, and before the Lord's Prayer by decree of the Council of Toledo in 589, as a means of countering the Arian confession. This is the earliest documented instance of the use of the Creed in the Western liturgy.[10] In the eight century, Charlemagne

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[3] *First Apology* LXI, LXV, cited in James F. White, *Documents of Christian Worship: Descriptive and Interpretive Sources*. (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1992), 147.

[4] F.E. Warren, *The Liturgy and Ritual of the Ante-Nicene Church*. 2nd ed. rev. (London: Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, 1912), 57.

[5] K.W. Noakes, "From New Testament Times Until St. Cyprian," in Jones, Wainwright et al, 122.

[6] E.S. Yarnold, SJ, "The Fourth and Fifth Centuries," in Jones, Wainwright et al, 137. Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*. 3rd ed. (Longman, 1972), 30-52.

[7] Senn, 535.

[8] Peter G. Cobb, "The Liturgy of the Word in the Early Church," in Jones, Wainwright et al, 228.

[9] Senn, 172.

[10] Senn, 146.

would introduce the *filioque* clause after the Gospel reading, at Aachen, a practice which spread throughout the West and was adopted eventually by Rome in 1014.[11]

While the insertion of the Creed originated in polemical purposes, it need not serve this purpose today. Luther, for example, who retained it in his *Formulae Missae*, spoke of it as a *sacrificium laudis* ("a sacrifice of praise").[12] It may still serve for us as an expression of praise to the Triune God we adore, quite apart from any polemic against Arianism.

III. The Trinitarian Doxologies

The Arian controversy raised many questions for the public worship of the church. How should the prayers of the liturgy be organised? If Christ is not God, how then can prayer be addressed to him? If he is divine, in what ways should the church's address to him be differentiated from that to the Father, or to the Spirit? Such questions were all the more vital because the liturgical prayers in use from the Ante-Nicene period included expressions that could be understood in either an Arian or a Catholic sense.[13]

> Tertullian [had earlier] admitted that "the simple people...who are always majority of the faithful...shy at the economy," that is, at the distinction between Father and Son. He conceded that even orthodox believers could speak of the relations within the Trinity in such a way as to emphasize the monarchy at the expense of the economy. This judgment is substantiated by the sources, especially if one pays attention to what has been called "the hymnological theology of the congregation, whose characteristic is to revel in contradiction."[14]

For all their insistence on the Logos as a created being, the Arians in fact addressed prayers to Christ, finding such a practice an "unavoidable element of Christian worship." Athanasius pointed out

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[11] Cobb, 228.

[12] Senn, 535.

[13] Josef A Jungman SJ, *The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great*. Translated by Francis A. Brunner, C.SS.R. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1959), 189.

[14] Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*. Vol. 1 in *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1971), 177.

that "by this inconsistency between their dogmatic principle and their liturgical practice the Arians were in effect saying: 'Abandon the worship of the creature, and then draw near and worship a creature and a work'." Ambrose called upon the Arians, "if they do not worship the Son, [to] admit it, and the case is settled, so that they do not deceive anyone by their professions of religion."[15]

The *Gloria Patri* as prayed by the Catholics (*Gloria Patri* per *Filium* in *Spiritu Sancto*) supported, so it was claimed by the Arians, their subordinationist position. The Catholics began to drop this usage in order to avoid being identified with heresy, choosing instead to pray *Gloria Patri* et *Filo* et *Spiritui Sancto*. The dispute in the East took a similar shape, leading to a similar change - δια (through) του Υιου, εν (in) αγιω πνευματι becoming μετα (with) του Υιου, συν (together with) αγιω πνευματι.

St. Basil began to use both the older and the newer doxologies in the church at Caesarea. A storm of controversy broke out, Basil's adversaries accusing him of contradicting himself. In 375 he wrote his treatise *De Spiritu Sancto* giving a thorough exposition of both formulas. We are to pray both through the Son and in the Holy Spirit, as in the older formula, thus preserving a proper *oikonomia* within the Godhead, and at the same time we can pledge, through the newer formula, equal honour and glory to the three Persons, without fear of contradiction.

Nowhere did the controversy rage more fiercely than in Antioch of Syria. Bishop Leonitus felt hamstrung over the issue, not knowing which formula to use in his cathedral service. He began to pronounce the words so softly that they were inaudible to the congregation. He knew this was not an adequate solution and, in connection with this problem, one day somewhere around 350 AD, he pointed to his head of white hair and declared, "after this snow has melted away, there will still remain a lot of mud."[16]

By the end of the fourth century the issue was resolved in the East, in favour of the Catholic party, in part because the Byzantine emperors no longer supported the Arians as Constantius and Valens had done. In the West, however, Arianism would survive longer, among the Teutonic tribes that had been evangelised by Arian

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[15] Pelikan, 199. Interestingly, the same phenomenon occured in the sixteenth century among the unitarian Socinians. Rejecting the deity of Christ, they retained prayers to him and worship of him, thus becoming, if they were to apply their own theology to themselves, in effect, idolators.

[16] Jungman, 192-94.

missionaries. The ultimate victory of the Nicaean settlement did, however, have its down side. The true humanity of Christ tended to be obscured behind the stress on his divinity. "[T]he whole religious mentality of the people was deeply affected by the change, at least in the Oriental Church. For stress was now placed not on what unites us to God (Christ as one of us in his human nature, Christ as our brother), but on what separates us from God (Christ's infinite majesty)."[17]

There is also a decline in attendance at Holy Communion in the fourth and fifth centuries which may also be connected with the rejection of Arianism and an almost docetic tendency in Christology. St. Ambrose complained of it in Milan, likening the decline to a similar situation in the East. St. Chrysostom bemoaned, "In vain do we stand before the altar; there is no one to partake." Jungman suggests that this reticence to come to the Lord's Table may have been due to the increased fear and reverence felt in approaching the Divine Host.

> Even before [Chrysostom], St. Basil the Great and other Greek Fathers had been using a language calculated to inspire awe and fear in the recipient. The pertinent chapter in Basil's *Shorter Rule* is captioned "With what fear...we ought to receive the body and blood of Christ." Chrysostom speaks about "the terrible sacrifice," and about the "shuddering hour" when the mysteries are accomplished, and about the "terrible and awful table." Those who approach the table of God may do so only with fear and trembling. Is it any wonder that the ordinary faithful, conscious of the pressures of their daily occupations, conscious too of their unworthiness before the divine majesty, lost courage?[18]

With the stress on divinity came a corresponding stress on the *rights* of divinity - on the crown rights of Jesus over his subjects to judge the living and the dead, and assign their fate in eternity. This thesis might be confirmed by the case of the Monophysites, who in their rejection of the two natures Christology, leaned heavily toward the divine nature of Christ, and who perhaps more than any other group gave the most intense expression to the fearfulness with which one was to approach the sacrifice of the altar.[19]

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[17] Jungman, 195.
[18] Jungman, 197.
[19] Jungman, 198.

IV. The Church Calendar

The Council of Nicaea raised several questions surrounding the Christian calendar and the worship practices with which it was connected. Kneeling on Sundays and during the season of Pentecost was forbidden.[20] It also urged the celebration of Easter everywhere on the same day and date.[21] By fixing Easter on the first Sunday after the full moon of Spring, the Council gave to the church calendar a certain lunar quality. The primordial pattern of night followed by day came to be expressed in fourth century Jerusalem, for example, in Holy Week followed by Easter Week.[22] The ritual separation of Christ's death and resurrection was preserved in the forty days of Lent, called for in the fifth canon of Nicaea. Fast would be followed by feast, mourning by rejoicing. This practice spread throughout the church in the fourth century, though local variations took place.

By defining the divinity and humanity of Christ at Nicaea (325) and then later at Constantinople (381), and at Chalcedon (451), the way was now open for the development of the seasons of Epiphany (in the East) and Christmas (in the West). In both seasons, the theme of the Incarnation of the God-Man is pervasive. In the fifth and sixth centuries greater and greater elaboration became apparent, including a more central role for Mary as Θεοτοκος.[23] The development of the Theotokos idea precedes the Arian controversy, however, as Pelikan makes clear.

> In the conflicts with Gnosticism, Mary had served as proof for the reality of the humanity of Jesus: he had truly been born of a human mother and therefore was a man. But as Christian piety and reflection sought to probe the deeper meaning of salvation the parallel between Christ and Adam found its counterpart in the picture of Mary as the Second Eve, who by her obedience had undone the damage wrought by the disobedience of the mother of mankind. She was the mother of the man Christ Jesus, the mother of the Savior; but to be the Savior, he had to be God as

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[20] Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 196.

[21] Thomas K. Carroll and Thomas Halton. *Liturgical Practice in the Fathers*. Vol. 21 of *Message of the Fathers of the Church*. (Willmington: Michael Glazier, 1988), 103-4.

[22] Carroll and Halton, 207.

[23] Carroll and Halton, 170. Cf. Jungman, 195-96.

> well, and as his mother she had to be "Mother of God."...[I]n its fundamental motifs the development of the Christian picture of Mary and the eventual emergence of a Christian doctrine of Mary must be seen in the context of the development of the doctrine of Christ.[24]

Of course, once the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed had been established, the idea of the Theotokos also provided a means by which the divine and human natures of Christ are united in the Incarnation. In the *communicatio idiomatum* neither Christ's birth nor his crucifixion, nor his salvation could be attributed to one nature without the other.[25]

Nestorius became Patriarch of Constantinople in 428 and asserted that the Logos and Jesus were two distinct persons united in the Christ. When one of his priests openly preached against referring to Mary as "the Mother of God," the implications of his teaching become apparent to the defenders of the Athanasian orthodoxy. "The Catholic rejoinder was an increased devotion to Mary. The whole of the East arose to atone for the indignity to the Mother of God."[26] St. Epiphanius had made it clear that the orthodox were not to worship Mary as a goddess, and generally this warning was heeded. There was, however, an "increased solemnity" in the celebration of the glories of Mary. Churches were built to honour her, and at the Council of Ephesus, St. Cyril of Alexandria preached before the Fathers assembled there what some regard as "the greatest Marian sermon in the whole of antiquity."[27]

A number of feasts connected with Mary were added to the Church calendar. The *Dormitio*, or *Assumption of the Blessed Virgin* was in place before 500AD, originating in Bethlehem and extended through the whole of the Eastern Empire by the Emperor Maurice. The feast of the *Nativity of Our Lady*, of the *Annunciation* (nine months before Christmas), and of the *Purification* (forty days after Christmas) also arose. These feasts retain a Christological focus, however, and are not entirely focused on Mary. The Annunciation is the annunciation of Christ, and the Purification focuses on the manifestation of the Word to aged Simeon. Thus, the four great feasts of Mary that originated in the fourth and sixth centuries are

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[24] Pelikan, 241.
[25] Pelikan, 241-42.
[26] Jungman, 196.
[27] Jungman, 196.

direct outgrowths of the Christological disputes arising, first out of Gnosticism, then Arianism, and finally Nestorianism.

V. Conclusion

The Arian Controversy and the great Councils that arose in response to it, contributed to the liturgy of the church in the following ways:

1. A greater use of creeds in worship, and in particular the addition of the Creed to the Eucharist, whereas formerly its place had been more or less confined to the baptismal rite.

2. Revision of the *Gloria Patri* so as to ensure a proper stress on the coequality of each Person of the Holy Trinity.

3. A tendency to overstress the Divine Majesty of Christ, and his role as Judge, at the expense of his Humanity, and his role as Redeemer, with a corresponding drop in the numbers attending the Eucharist, for fear of offending the Royal Host.

4. Establishment, through a link with the Lunar cycle, of the forty days of Lent with its ensuing pattern of darkness and light, Holy Week and Easter Week, fasting and feasting.

5. Development of the festivals of Christmas and Epiphany, with a stress on the Incarnation of Christ.

6. Greater devotion to Mary as *Theotokos* and the four great Marian feasts of the Assumption, the Nativity, the Annunciation, and the Purification, each couched in a profoundly Christological setting.

PASSION AND THE NATURE OF GOD: THEOLOGY AND A BIBLICAL TEXT

by Michael Parsons

I. Introduction

Recently, in this journal, Glen O'Brien outlined the theological problem of the divine *apatheia*, specifically in relation to the subject of evil.[1] Though the subject is a notoriously difficult one, after a careful account the author concludes that a way forward might be found through the recognition and development of a greater distinction between human and divine passion. In the introduction to that article, O'Brien suggests the following dilemma:

> If God is a Being whose essence equals his existence, a Being in whom there is no contingency, no change, no potentiality, how can we say in any coherent sense, that he suffers with his creation, that he experiences its pain? *Even more unsettling is the question of whether God can be said to be a God of love, if he is incapable of passion*.[2]

Is God incapable of passion? O'Brien suggests that he is not, but that we need to re-evaluate and to re-work what it is that we mean by "divine passion" — and I agree with this.

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[1] Glen O'Brien, "The Divine *Apatheia* and the Problem of Evil," in *Aldersgate Papers* 1 (2000), 5-24.

[2] O'Brien, 5 — emphasis added.

However, the subject is a major area of contention in theology, and has been for some time. Indeed, it is not likely to go away. There seems to be a growing number of scholars who articulate concern and argue against the traditional views of *apatheia* (God is incapable of experiencing passion or feeling) and of *impassibility* (God cannot be affected by other realities). Dennis Ngien is one of the most recent to do so.[3] He suggests that, "The God whom the prophets face is a God of compassion, a God of concern and involvement, and One who is most moved by the actions and fate of humanity."[4] This, he argues, is part of God's functional relatedness with humanity. In the biblical narratives, "God is revealed not as an onlooker *but as a participant*."[5] In a similar way, Graham Cole has recently indicated the same preference on the grounds (as he sees it) that there is some counterpart to our emotional life in God. He is living and personal in himself (*ad intra*) and not merely in relation to creation (*ad extra*).[6]

Two important things are being emphasized in regard to methodology. First, it is assumed that we begin our enquiry from the idea that, by nature, God is a relational Being. Second, it is argued that our understanding of the nature of God is somehow tied up with the biblical narratives, not merely with the more propositional statements of both Scripture and past dogma. These scholars, for example, quite rightly highlight the significance of the biblical text in tackling this issue.[7] Of course, others would hold a similar view in general terms.[8] And, in fact, Mary Grey has recently reminded us that

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[3] Dennis Ngien, "'The Most Moved Mover': Abraham Heschel's Theology of Divine Pathos in Response to the 'Unmoved Mover' of Traditional Theism," in *The Evangelical Review of Theology* 25:2 (2001), 137-153. The ideas of *apatheia* and *impassibility* are reinforced in tradition by the concept of *autarkeia* (the self-sufficiency of God).

[4] Ngien, 138.

[5] Ngien, 150 — emphasis added.

[6] Graham A. Cole, "The Living God: Anthropomorphic or Anthropopathic?" in *Reformed Theological Review* 59:1 (2000), 16-27.

[7] See Matthias Gockel, "On the Way from Schleiermacher to Barth: A Critical Reappraisal of Isaak August Dorner's Essay on Divine Immutability," in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53:4 (2000), 490-510, who also emphasises the importance of the biblical portrayal of God's character for the experience of faith and the construction of theology.

[8] See, for example, R. B. Edwards, "The Pagan Dogma of the Absolute Unchangeableness of God," in *Religious Studies* 14:3 (1978), 305-14; Bruce A. Ware, "An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 29:4 (1986), 431-46; Charles Taliaferro, "The Passibility of God," in *Religious Studies* 25:2 (1989), 217-24; Duncan Reid, "Without Parts or Passions? The Suffering God in Anglican Thought," in *Pacifica* 4:3 (1991), 257-72.

this concept of divine passion is a vital and pivotal part of the feminist re-imaging of the concept of God.[9]

Against this, there are those who continue to argue for the traditional theory of *impassibility*. The important studies by R. E. Creel and W. McWilliams are perhaps seminal in this regard.[10] However, the more recent work by the Oxford scholar, Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* is likely to supercede them both in time.[11] Weinandy argues very adamantly for *impassibility*, and he does so from the biblical text as much as from the philosophical and theological tradition of the Church Fathers and Aquinas, for example.[12]

Clearly, a great deal of creative and constructive work needs to be done if we are to come to anything like a consensus on this significant problem. However, that is not the central aim of this article, although in an indirect way it may facilitate some thinking. In this brief essay, I would like to approach the issue from both a specific historical theology and a specific biblical text. In doing so we may illustrate the issue and see some of its complexity more clearly. The theology that I have chosen is that of the Reformation — in particular, the Genesis commentaries of Martin Luther and John Calvin; the specific biblical text is Genesis chapters 6–9, that is, the Flood narrative.

The story of Noah and the flood is well known, of course, and that is partly what makes it so attractive as a biblical starting point. In being attentive to this story we are also taking seriously the point made by Ngien and others that it is in narrative that we perceive something of the divine relationality. However, the fact is that the passage poses a problem of interpretation to those who believe God to be impassible. On one hand, this is because it presents the divine nature as full of regret (Genesis 6:6 — "grief"), pain (6:6) and anger

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[9] Mary Grey, "A Passion for Life and Justice: Gender and the Experience of God," in *Concilium* 1 (2001), 22.

[10] R. E. Creel, *Divine Impassibility: An Essay in Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); W. McWilliams, *The Passion of God* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985); idem, "Divine Suffering in Contemporary Theology," in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33 (1980), 35-53.

[11] Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

[12] See also, Richard A. Muller, "Incarnation, Immutability, and the Case for Classical Theism," in *Westminster Theological Journal* 45:1 (1983), 22-40; Paul Helm, "Omnipotence and Change," in *Philosophy* 51 (1976), 454-61; idem, *The Providence of God* (Leicester: IVP, 1993); idem, "God in Dialogue," in A. N. S. Lane, ed. *Interpreting the Bible* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 223-40; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, Tenn: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 177-203. Bruce Langtry, "Metaphysics and a Personal God," in *Pacifica* 14:1 (2001), 17-30, argues philosophically that God is immutable and eternal, yet responsive.

(6:7). The problem is still apparent in contemporary Old Testament commentaries, for example. In commenting on this perplexing attribution to God's character scholars seem to have recently divided between those who go no further than the surface of the text itself,[13] those who suggest an anthropomorphic construct,[14] and, finally, those who speak of God "beyond the text", as it were, as capable of involved, passionate response.[15] On the other hand, we note that in the narrative God is also said to be gracious in favouring the patriarch and his family (6:8, 18). I recalled above that O'Brien suggests a dilemma in positing a genuinely loving yet, at the same time, impassible God. This text presents interpreters and readers with exactly this problem.

As far as the theology is concerned, the reformers, Luther and Calvin, are both clear and staunch defenders of classical or traditional theism. That is, they both hold to an impassible and an immutable deity; one who does not have passions, is not able to be affected from without and one who never changes.

What, then, are we about? Simply put, the question is, What happens when theologians who hold this position regarding the impassibility of God exegete a biblical narrative that envelops a concept of a seemingly passionate deity? Is classical theism, at least as represented by these two reformers, capable of positive and self-chosen vulnerability in the face of the biblical text? Is it willing to question itself? And, if not, how do Luther and Calvin respond to the challenge? What takes priority, systematic theology or the Word of God? These are some of the questions that motivate and inform the enquiry that follows.

Two caveats seem appropriate before we proceed, however. First, I am not standing in judgement on the reformers' theology or exegesis — that is certainly not my task at this point. Rather, my task is to define and to describe their thought within the limited parameters of their comments on Genesis 6-9 as they seek to be consistent in their theology in conjunction with their reading of

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[13] For example, Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 78, who simply says, "The text affirms that God is decisively impacted by the suffering, hurt and circumstance of his creation." See also, Robert Alter, *Genesis. Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996), 28; Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 45.

[14] For example, Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (London: SPCK, 1984), 407; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis* (Jerusalem: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 47; Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1997), 61.

[15] See, particularly, Donald E. Gowan, *Genesis 1-11. From Eden to Babel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/ Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1988), 93-4.

Scripture. Second, the word *passible* and its opposite, *impassible*, can give the impression that we are necessarily confronted by two exclusive alternatives — that there is no middle ground to be discovered. This is an impression that I want to avoid because I believe that it is simplistic and, in that sense, necessarily false. It is to the credit of the reformers, as we will see, that their theology is more nuanced and subtle than that false and simple dichotomy would imply.

II. Luther & Calvin on the portrayal of God in Genesis 6–9[16]

There are nearly two decades between Luther's mature commentary on Genesis (1535) and Calvin's (1554).[17] It seems, however, that Calvin, the second-generation reformer, had to hand at least the first two volumes of Luther's Genesis lectures before him as he worked on his own commentary.[18] Luther's multi-volumed work is massive, whereas Calvin's exposition is reasonably and characteristically succinct and to the point.[19] The following is to a certain extent governed by this fact, of course.[20]

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[16] Luther's work is cited from the Weimar edition [WA] (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1883-1987), the Latin text of *In Primum Librum Mose Enarrationes*. The English translation is from the American edition [LW], J. Pelikan, ed. *Luther's Works, Lectures on Genesis*, vols 1-8 (St. Louis, Concordia, 1958-66). Regarding Calvin, the Latin text is found in *Joannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia* [CO] (*Corpus Reformatorum* 51; Brunswick, 1882). The English translation is from *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses, Called Genesis*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847-50), henceforth, CTS.

[17] Calvin's sermons on Genesis were preached in 1559. See W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 1994), 104.

[18] See A. N. S. Lane, "The Sources of Calvin's Citations in His Genesis Commentary," in A. N. S. Lane, ed. *Interpreting the Bible* (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 56-57.

[19] Bernard Cottret, *Calvin. A Biography* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 22, is right in suggesting that Calvin is "the friend of brevity". For an examination of this characteristic, see Richard C. Gamble, "*Brevitas et facilitas*: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," in *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985), 1-17; idem, "Exposition and Method in Calvin," in *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987), 153-65.

[20] Roland de Pury, "Pour marquer les distances: simple note sur une exégèse de Calvin et de Luther," in *Foi et Vie* 65 (1966), 42-45, is an early attempt to compare the two reformers' commentaries on Genesis 6:1-4. It focuses specifically on exegesis, suggesting Luther's to be superior and less philosophical. See also, my own forthcoming article, "The Apocalyptic Luther: His Noahic Self-understanding," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*.

A. Luther's view of God in the Flood narrative

At the end of the narrative, as Luther contemplates the rainbow given as a sign by the Lord after the flood, he speaks eloquently of what it signifies:

> [I]t preaches to the entire world with a loud voice about the wrath which *once moved God* to destroy the whole world. It also gives comfort, that we may have the conviction that *God is kindly inclined towards us again* and will never again make use of so horrible a punishment.[21]

With the implied change in divine favour — from anger to love, from destructive judgement to preserving grace — this passage underlines the reformer's narrative style of exegesis, in line with the biblical passage itself, of course. Earlier, Luther had asserted this idea more strongly: "So far, by His work, God has shown that He has been appeased and, as it were, *has been changed from an angry God to a merciful one*."[22] On face value, the readers are unlikely to suppose any hint of impassibility or immutability in Luther's concept of God. However, they would be quite wrong. At the heart of the reformer's account and exposition of the story of Noah lies a central comment that anchors his thinking to an impassible God. The comment in itself poses the theological problem. Luther then seeks to lessen the implicit tension caused and, at the same time, to be consistent.

In the passage he asserts the theological presupposition: "God is immutable and unchanging in His counsel from eternity."[23] It is clear to Luther, at least from a superficial reading of the Genesis account, that this seems to run counter to the God who reveals himself to Noah. There God regrets (grieves), is hurt, is angry to the point of destruction and then loves to the point of saving a whole family for the sake of one righteous man. Yet the reformer's basic theological assumption is that God is "immutable" — by which he seems to imply divine *apatheia* as well. He supports his assumption with a rule.

> I follow this general rule: to avoid as much as possible any questions that carry us to the throne of the Supreme Majesty. It is

[21] *Comm*. Gen. 9:12-16, LW 2.148 [WA 42.365] — emphasis added.

[22] *Comm*. Gen. 8:15-17, LW 2.112 [WA 42.341] — emphasis added. A little further on in his commentary he says, rather starkly, "In sum, He now begins to be a different God from the one He has been thus far" — *Comm*. Gen. 8:21, LW 2.118 [WA 42.345].

[23] *Comm*. Gen. 6:5-6, LW 2.45 [WA 42.293].

> better and safer to stay at the manger of Christ the man. For there is very great danger in involving oneself in the mazes of the Divine Being.[24]

We will return briefly to his comment on Christ below. However, we might notice that the phrase, "the mazes of the Divine Being" is such a telling one. Luther's argument is that God in his essential nature is altogether unknowable and unsearchable; it is simply not possible for humanity to define or to put into words what God is in his "Supreme Majesty" — "though we burst in the effort" (adds Luther). The hiddenness of God (*deus absconditus*) apart from what he has revealed is *not* the subject of investigation.[25] Luther is adamant about this. He writes concerning, God's "unveiled majesty, which is God Himself":

> From this the eyes must turn away, for it cannot be grasped. In God there is sheer Deity, and the essence of God is His transcendent wisdom and omnipotent power. These attributes are altogether beyond the grasp of reason ... An investigation into ... the Divine Majesty, must not be pursued but altogether avoided.[26]

Later he explains that the danger for a person looking into these things is that they will become proud, believing they have the Holy Spirit and even blaspheming — "seeking to scrutinize the unveiled God." Later, Luther implies that only a very few men are able to contemplate God and his will — called and spiritual men like the apostle Paul, for instance. Noticeably, the reformer does not seem to include himself in this.[27] Yet, people, generally, should not attempt this, indeed they should "flee as from hell and the veritable temptations of Satan."[28] Luther seems thus to close the door on any possibility of a passible God at the point of the Genesis account.

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[24] *Comm*. Gen. 6:5-6. See also, *Comm*. Gen. 7:2-3, LW 2.93-4 [WA 42.328-9].

[25] *Comm*. Gen. 6:5-6, LW 2.45 [WA 42.294]. See Robert W. Jenson, "The Hidden and Triune God," in *The International Journal of Systematic Theology* 2:1 (2000), 5-12; David C. Steinmetz, "Luther and the Hidden God," in *Luther in Context* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 23-31; Brian A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1982), 131-49; David L. Muller, "Karl Barth and the Heritage of the Reformation," in *Review and Expositor* 86 (1989), 52-3. Also, LW 10.119-20 [WA 3.124-5].

[26] *Comm*. Gen. 6:5-6, LW 2.46-7 [WA 42. 294-5].

[27] *Comm*. Gen. 6:5-6.

[28] See *Comm*. Gen. 6:5-6, LW 2.46-8 [WA 42.294-5].

Clearly, in his reference to Christ and the manger in the quotation above there is a hint of his teaching elsewhere on the fact that *in Christ* God feels and suffers; *in Christ* alone are we permitted to see a God who is *not* impassible. Indeed, this is generally "the epicentre" of Reformation thinking on God's revelation, as Peter Matheson puts it.[29] However, as Dennis Ngien correctly states, "God's eternal impassibility is presupposed in Luther's thought."[30] That is, *in abstracto* (in himself) God cannot suffer. It is this conclusion that makes me question how far we can accept Paul Althaus' comment that, "Luther became the first major theologian to challenge the traditional view of the divine impassibility."[31] Certainly, in his teaching on *deipassionism* (God suffering) in the person of Christ, this may be a reasonable judgement, but that does not really help the reformer at this point in the biblical narrative. It is also significant that Luther does not employ it to resolve the specific problem involved here; indeed, he appears to reject the idea as a solution.

How, then, does Luther make sense of the feelings and change depicted in the Genesis account and ascribed to God? The process seems to have two components: denial and transference. As well as that, it fits under the general theological concept of accommodation. As we will observe, the Holy Spirit is the key to understanding Luther's approach.

Bluntly put, when Luther reads in the Flood narrative that God grieves or is angry he denies it as a possibility. Commenting on the statement that God grieved, he says, "One should not imagine that God has a heart or that He can grieve. But when the spirit of Noah, of Lamech, and of Methuselah is grieved, God Himself is said to be grieved. Thus we should understand this grief to refer to its effect, not to the divine essence."[32]

That is, God can affect grief in others, but he himself cannot grieve. We notice from this quotation that, in regard to the text,

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[29] Peter Matheson, *The Imaginative World of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 44. Also, idem, "Whose Scripture? A Venture into Reformation Hermeneutics," in *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 70 (1996), 191-202.

[30] Dennis Ngien, "Trinity and Divine Passibility in Martin Luther's *Theologia Crucis*," in *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 19:1 (2001), 31-64, specifically, 52. Ngien cites WA 39^2, 101, 24.

[31] Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 197 — cited by O'Brien, Op. Cit., 10-11.

[32] *Comm*. Gen. 6:6, LW 2.49 [WA 42.296-7]. This is put slightly differently, but to the same effect, in *Comm*. Isa. 63:10, LW 17.358 [WA 31^2.538], "Such an emotion is attributed to God, not as though He were thus moved, but the holy prophets ... conceived of Him this way."

Luther transfers the emotions attributed in the text to God, from God to godly men where he claims they originate. Theologically, he transfers the emotions of godly men (particularly in their office as preachers of the Word) to God, himself. He states his conviction that "the emotions of the godly men are assigned to God Himself." Or, to put it the other way around, "When Moses says that God sees and repents, these actions really occur in the heart of the men who carry on the ministry of the Word."[33] Indeed, the whole process of preaching in judgement on and reproof of the world (and necessarily therefore in grief) is said to be "a public function in the church (*publicum officium in Ecclesia*)."[34]

As stated above, the key to coming to some understanding of Luther's position is the Holy Spirit's involvement in the process, but this in itself is complicated and certainly not clear. The reformer, citing Ephesians 4:30 as a New Testament example, states that the grief *is* the Holy Spirit's.[35] But, again, Luther cautions against too simplistic an interpretation: "He is not speaking directly of the Holy Spirit *as He is in His own essential nature* ... but of the Holy Spirit *in the heart* of Noah, Methuselah, and Lamech, that is, of the Spirit of God as He is carrying on His office and administering the Word through the saints."[36]

In the divine essence it is impossible for God to have or to feel emotions, he is impassible according to Luther's theology. This is the reformer's unshakable presupposition. But *as God relates to humanity through the Holy Spirit*, and particularly (at this point) to those involved in ministering his word of salvation and judgement, he grieves and affects grief. There is a danger of misunderstanding here and, certainly, a possibility of Luther being read as inconsistent. He appears to be aware of this and forges on because of both the text and his own experience as a minister of the Gospel.

It is the close identification of the Holy Spirit with the Word and with the act of preaching that Word that seems to lie at the foundation of Luther's thinking at this juncture. Notice in the following comment this relationship:

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[33] *Comm*. Gen. 6:3, LW 2.22 [WA 42.277] and 6:5-6, LW 2.44 [WA 42.293], respectively. See a similar comment on the transference of emotion: *Comm*. Gen. 6:3, LW 2.17 [WA 42.273]; 6:9-10, LW 2.56 [WA 42.301].

[34] *Comm*. Gen. 6:3, LW 2.16 [WA 42.273].

[35] *Comm*. Gen. 6:3, LW 2.17 [WA 42.274] and again, LW 2.19 [WA 42.275]. Eph. 4:30 begins, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God."

[36] *Comm*. Gen. 6:5-6, LW 2.44 [WA 42.293] — emphasis added.

> Noah, *who had the Holy Spirit* and was a minister of the Word, saw the wickedness of men and *through the Holy Spirit* was moved to grief ... Because Noah is a faithful minister of the Word and *the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit*, Moses correctly states that the Holy Spirit is grieving when Noah grieves.[37]

Such is the closeness of the Spirit with the ministers of the Word (they are, after all, "men full of the Holy Spirit") Luther speaks of the Holy Spirit as the "officiating Spirit, who preaches, prays, reproves, teaches, and sighs in His holy ministers."[38] Though the men themselves preach, pray, reprove, teach and sigh the Holy Spirit is said to be synonymously and intimately involved in their ministry, too.

It is in this complicated fashion that Luther seeks to work through the problem raised at the interface of his own theological presupposition on divine impassibility and the text that apparently pictures God as passible. By drawing on the distinction between God's essential nature (God-in-himself) and God as relational Being the reformer attempts to safeguard the traditional doctrine of God's impassibility. By identifying the Spirit with those who preach the Word in the world he is able to suggest that where Scripture says that God grieved (for example) it actually means that godly men grieved, prompted by the Holy Spirit in relation to their divine vocation. This, he suggests, is part of God's accommodating himself to our limited and finite understanding: "Scripture speaks in accordance with our comprehension." Again, he says that, "These statements are made to suit our frame of mind."[39] Elsewhere, Luther suggests that, "God lowers Himself to the level of our weak comprehension...in simplicity adapted to a child, that in some measure it may be possible for Him to be known by us."[40]

That is not to say that Luther solves the problem, of course, though he appears satisfied that he has done enough to set the theological record straight and at the same time to be true to the narrative of the text. However, there is still a hint that he feels more needs to be said, but he does not really pursue the two tangential ideas brought up in his commentary. He eschews using both the idea of God's passibility *in Christ* (briefly mentioned above) and the

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[37] *Comm*. Gen. 6:5-6 — emphasis added.

[38] *Comm*. Gen. 6:3, LW 2.21 [WA 42.277]. See also, *Comm*. Gen. 6:3, LW 2.18, 19-20 [WA 42.274, 275-6]; 6:6, LW 2.50 [WA 42.297].

[39] *Comm*. Gen. 7:11-12, LW 2.94 [WA 42.329] and 8:21, LW 2.120 [WA 42.347], respectively.

[40] *Comm*. 6:5-6, LW 2.45 [WA 42.294].

theological category of anthropomorphism in relation to the biblical depiction of the divine, though as I say he raises them within the context.[41]

Luther is not overly concerned with theoretical theology, of course. Bernhard Lohse indicates that the uniqueness of Luther's theology is that in speaking about God in particular, "it is *never* theoretical."[42] It should not surprise us then that, without embarrassment, the reformer continues to speak of God in a narrative way. His encouragement to readers is, "Let us rather think about God in the manner in which he presents Himself in the Word."[43] This results in Luther allowing for divine characteristics and actions that are contradictory or, at the very least on the face of it, inconsistent with his view of impassibility. Luther therefore pictures, in largely unqualified terms, the following characteristics and activity of God, which, for convenience will simply be listed:

- God is one who becomes angry — the reformer speaks of "the immeasurable wrath of God's rage"[44] — though he insists that it remains God's alien work (*opus alienum*).[45]
- God destroys in judgement, but he does not do it gladly, indeed, "he is *compelled* to inflict punishment," "he is *tortured* ... by their wickedness."[46]
- God is truthful and patient[47] (though he is "irritated" by the papists!)[48]

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[41] See for example Luther's comments, *Comm*. Gen. 7:2-3, LW 2.93-4 [WA 42.328-9] and 6:5-6, LW 2.45-7, 49 [WA 42.293-5, 296], respectively. Bruce Ware, "An Evangelical Reformulation of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God," in *Journal of the Evangelical theological Society* 29:4 (1986), 445, suggests that Luther treats Gen. 6:6 as a metaphorical way of expression. But, on the face of it, the reformer does much more than that.

[42] Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology. Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 209 — emphasis added.

[43] *Comm*. Gen. 6:18, LW 2.72 [WA 42.313] — the remark concludes, "and in the sacraments". See Mark Ellingsen, "Luther as Narrative Exegete," in *Journal of Religion* 63 (1983), 394-413.

[44] *Comm*. Gen. 9:12-16, LW 2.145 [WA 42.364]. See also *Comm*. Gen. 6:3, LW 2.21 [WA 42.276]; 6:5-6, LW 2.47 [WA 42.295]; 7:17-24, LW 2.99 [WA 42.332]; 8:21, LW 2.117 [WA 42.344].

[45] *Comm*. Gen. 9:2, LW 2.134 [WA 42.356]. See also *Comm*. Isa. 28:21, LW 14.335.

[46] *Comm*. Gen. 6:4, LW 2.39 [WA 42.289]; 6:13, LW 2.65 [WA 42.308]; 6.3, LW 2.22 [WA 42.277] — emphasis added. See also *Comm*. Gen. 6:3, LW 2.23 [WA 42.278].

[47] *Comm*. Gen. 7:17-24, LW 2.98-100 [WA 42.331-3]; 7:4, 11-12, LW 2.89, 93 [WA 42.325, 328].

[48] *Comm*. Gen. 6:22, LW 2.79 [WA 42.319].

- God is wise and good;[49] he delights and rejoices in his creatures, he loves mankind with an "extraordinary affection."[50]
- God comforts and saves — "he lifts up into hope."[51]
- God obviously enjoys talking to Noah. The patriarch "has a friendly and kindly disposed God, who loves him so much that it seems he cannot converse enough with this pious man."[52]
- God sometimes hides his face to appear to have forgotten his people.[53] Noah is therefore said to groan towards heaven, "in order to rouse God to judgement, as if from sleep."[54]
- God finally smells the odour of Noah's sacrifice and is said to be "recovering".[55]

Together with these notions of God's responsiveness and intimate participation, Luther concludes that God, "changes his opinion completely" and that, in the course of the Flood narrative, the Lord "has changed from an angry God to a merciful one."[56] It is clear from the reformer's writing on this passage that he is very self-conscious in his use of narrative imagery about God, because the Scripture does the same at this point. After all, he *has* clearly laid down the rule of divine impassibility and immutability. Given that theological, pre-suppositional understanding, whatever he now says has a different force than it might have done. And it is not insignificant, for instance, that he explains that what he has asserted about God — even, within the context of apparent divine inconsistency — is sufficient, "*for* it is conducive to faith."[57] This appears to be the bottom line for Luther's approach. But, as we have seen above, he makes certain that he gives the orthodox theological view firmly and categorically so that no-one doubts his intentions.

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[49] *Comm*. Gen. 6:22, LW 2.79; 7:17-24, LW 2.98 [WA 42.331].

[50] *Comm*. Gen. 6:22, LW 2.79 [WA 42.318]; 7:17-24, LW 2.98 [WA 42.331]; 6:6, LW 2.51 [WA 42.298]; 8:21, LW 2.117 [WA 42.345]; 9:1, LW 2.131 [WA 42.354]; 9:6, LW 2.141 [WA 42.361]; 9:12-16, LW 2.145 [WA 42.363]. The love of God for humanity is clearly a stress in Luther's understanding of the passage.

[51] *Comm*. Gen. 6:5-6, LW 2.48 [WA 42.295]; 8:2-3, LW 2.107 [WA 42.338].

[52] *Comm*. Gen. 7:2-3, LW 2.88 [WA 42.324, 325].

[53] *Comm*. Gen. 8:1, LW 2.104-6 [WA 42.335-7].

[54] *Comm*. Gen. 6:12, LW 2.61 [WA 42.305].

[55] *Comm*. Gen. 8:21, LW 2.117 [WA 42.345].

[56] *Comm*. Gen. 6:6, LW 2.51 [WA 42.298] and 8:15-16, LW 2.112 [WA 42.341], respectively.

[57] *Comm*. Gen. 8:21, LW 2.120 [WA 42.347].

Our conclusions and reflections on Luther's approach will need to be postponed until we have both reformers in view.

B. Calvin's view of God in the Flood narrative

We turn now to a brief examination of John Calvin's exposition of the Flood narrative and, in particular, his grappling with the apparently irreconcilable poles of the impassible God of his own theology and the responsive and passionate deity of the biblical text.

Calvin's more succinct commentary on chapters 6-9 of Genesis seems to revolve tightly around the twin ideas of God's judgement and his grace. He says, for example,

> The Lord would show the more plainly, that the dreadful desolation of the world had not fallen upon it accidentally, but was a remarkable proof of his judgement; while the deliverance of Noah was a magnificent work of his grace, and worthy of everlasting remembrance.[58]

Two things are immediately evident — even from a cursory reading of Calvin's work. First, the reformer naturally reads the events of the narrative as demonstrative of the divine-human relationship; that is, through the flood and Noah's salvation God shows himself as a relational Being — both as angry in judgement and as gracious, both destroying and delivering. Second, there is generally nothing resembling Luther's openness to the suggestion (however heavily qualified) that God changes his response to the world.

Clearly, Calvin understands that there is a problem in interpreting the narrative's insistence that God grieves, or that he is hurt or becomes angry. Calvin cites Luther's commentary with some appreciation, recognizing his interpretation as ingenious. Not wishing entirely to reject it, therefore, he elucidates his own approach to the problem.[59] The following, rather lengthy, quotation clearly demonstrates the reformer's approach:

> The repentance which is here ascribed to God does not properly belong to him, but has reference to our understanding of him. For since we cannot comprehend him as he is, it is necessary that, for

[58] *Comm*. Gen. 8:3, CO 23.136 [CTS 1.278]. There is a similar juxtaposition of these ideas elsewhere: for example, *Comm*. Gen. 6:13, CO 23.121 [CTS 1.254]; 8:1, CO 23.135 [CTS 1.276].

[59] *Comm*. Gen 6:2, CO 23.113 [CTS 1.241].

> our sake, he should, in a certain sense, transform himself. That repentance cannot take place in God easily appears from this single consideration, that nothing happens which is by him unexpected...The same reasoning...applies to what follows, that God was affected with grief. Certainly, God is not sorrowful or sad: but remains for ever like himself in his celestial and happy repose: yet, because it could not otherwise be known how great is God's hatred and detestation of sin, therefore the Spirit accommodates himself to our capacity. Wherefore, there is no need for us to involve ourselves in thorny and difficult questions, when it is obvious to what end these words of repentance and grief are applied; namely, to teach us... [60]

Essentially, Calvin's comments resemble those of Luther. We notice that when the scriptural text suggests a grieving or repenting deity, Calvin denies the actual possibility. Repentance "*cannot* take place in God," grieving is not an option because "God is not (read, *cannot* be) sorrowful or sad." The reformer is committed to the notion of an impassible God — one who is unchanging, unmoved and without passion; one who "remains for ever like himself in his celestial and happy repose." As Graham Cole puts it, "Calvin's *control beliefs* are that God is infinite, unchanging and passionless."[61]

There appear to be two underlying reasons for this preference on Calvin's part. First, the reformer, within the context of the theocentricity of his theology, holds to the idea that God is a mystery and as such that he reveals himself to humanity without ever forfeiting his otherness.[62] In much the same vein as Luther before him (but considerably less dramatically), Calvin underlines the fact that these are "thorny and difficult questions" and that it is best not to be involved in them. Bernard Cottret speaks of "the humility of a wise man before the grandeur of the universe" and it could well apply in this context.[63] Speculative incursions into the nature of God's essence

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[60] *Comm*. Gen. 6:6, CO 23.117 [CTS 1.248-9].

[61] Graham A. Cole, "The Living God: Anthropomorphic or Anthropopathic?" in *Reformed Theological Review* 59:1 (2000), 19 — emphasis added.

[62] This is one of the emphases in a recent essay, Pietro Bolognesi, "L'Héritage Théologique du Calvinisme et les Protestants d'Europe," in *European Journal of Theology* 4:2 (1995), 121-9. See also a similar emphasis in an earlier article, Richard Stauffer, "Un Calvin inconnu: le prédicateur de Genève," in *Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire du Protestantisme Français* 4 (1978), 184-203, particularly, 202. See also *Harmony of the Last Four Books of Moses,* CO 24.43-4 [CTS 1.73-4].

[63] Bernard Cottret, *Calvin. A Biography* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 301.

are out of place. As Brian Gerrish comments, it appears to the reformer to be "wanton, wicked and hurtful."[64] Though we cannot elaborate on this point in this short essay, we note that the second reason for Calvin's preference seems to be his underlying reliance on Aristotelian philosophy. Richard Muller, in his recent masterful study, *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, has suggested that Aristotle is more central to Calvin in his cautious interest in the essence of God than has hitherto been recognized.[65]

So, Calvin denies the literalness of the biblical text, as did Luther a generation earlier. Though the text says that God grieved, he did not — indeed, he could not. Interestingly, he also speaks of transference, which we noted as integral to Luther's method. In the quotation above Calvin says that God "transforms himself," by which phrase he means a transference of some sort as he clarifies later. Luther had adopted the idea that it was, in fact, the godly preachers and ministers of the Word who actually grieved and that this grieving was transferred to God. Calvin, on the other hand, speaks of God "clothing himself with our affections." He continues, "This figure... represents God as transferring to himself what is peculiar to human nature." By this he is referring to anthropomorphism, of course.[66] In Luther's understanding there *is* real grief (on the part of Noah, for instance) and this is transferred to God. In contrast, Calvin's portrayal seems to fall some way short of this — in denying its possibility for God, it becomes merely an image. He says, for example, "God was so offended by the atrocious wickedness of men, *as if they had wounded his heart with mortal grief*."[67]

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[64] Brian A. Gerrish, "Theology Within the Limits of Piety Alone: Schleiermacher and Calvin's Doctrine of God," in B. A. Gerrish and R. Benedetto eds. *Reformatio Perennis* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Pickwick Press, 1981), 67-87, particularly 74. See also Edward A. Dowey, Jr, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), 5-6; *Inst* I.ii.2; I.v.1, 10; I.xiii.21; I.xiv.1.

[65] Richard Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 156. William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin. A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 105, suggests that Calvin identifies the biblical God with the God of the philosophers. See also Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1977); Christopher B. Kaiser, "Calvin's Understanding of Aristotelian Natural Philosophy: Its Extent and Possible Origins," in R. V. Schnucher, ed. *Calviniana: Ideas and Influence of Jean Calvin* (Kirksville, Missouri: 16th Century Publishers, 1988) 77-92; Alister E. McGrath, *A Life of John Calvin* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 34-5; David C. Steinmetz, "The Intellectual Appeal of the Reformation," in *Theology Today* 57:4 (2001), 464-7.

[66] *Comm*. Gen. 6:6, CO 23.118 [CTS 1.249]. See also *Comm*. Gen. 6:5, CO 23.115 [CTS 1.247] — Moses "ascribes human affections to God".

[67] *Comm*. Gen. 6:6, CO 23.117 [CTS 1.249] — emphasis added.

Again, as in Luther's exposition of this issue, we find the subject of accommodation to be of central importance.[68] Indeed, in an early essay that still demands attention, Ford Lewis Battles suggests that, "accommodation would seem (even when Calvin does not explicitly advert to it) his fundamental way of explaining how the secret, hidden God reveals himself to us."[69] And again, the work of the Holy Spirit in the process of accommodation is pinpointed by Calvin: it is the Spirit who thus accommodates himself to human capacity.

Obviously, it is clear from the foregoing that Calvin approaches these two areas in a very different fashion to Luther. In a characteristic manner, Calvin stresses that it is because of humanity's lack of understanding that God graciously adopts an anthropomorphic way of revealing himself; that is, "in consideration of our infirmity."[70] That God wants to teach us is central to the reformer's perspective. For example, Calvin writes, "But Moses here, according to his manner, invests God with human character, *for the purpose of* accommodating himself to the capacity of an *ignorant* people." But it is never simply teaching for a growth of knowledge in the abstract, as it were. It *always* incorporates the idea of being deeply affected and of applying that accommodation to an understanding of God and of the lives that flow from such knowledge.[71]

Luther seems to want to stress the narrative transference of emotions from holy men to God in order to accentuate the crucial identification of godly ministers of the Word with the Holy Spirit and, therefore, with his purposes of judgement and salvation. In contrast, Calvin sees the biblical employment of transference (anthropomorphism) as merely figures of speech used for our edification.

Having thus tackled the problem caused by these texts that appear to show God as something other than impassible and immutable,

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[68] On the significant subject of accommodation, see Ford Lewis Battles' seminal essay, "God Was Accommodating Himself to Human Capacity," in *Interpretation* 31:2 (1977), 19-38; reproduced in Robert Benedetto, ed. *Interpreting John Calvin* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1996), 117-137. See also Jon Balserak, "The God of Love and Weakness: Calvin's Understanding of God's Accommodating Relationship with his People," in *Westminster Theological Journal* 62 (2000), 177-95, in which the writer develops Battles' concept from merely a communicative to a behavioural model of divine accommodation.

[69] Battles, 33. See T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Old Testament Commentaries* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 98-101 on accommodation in narrative exposition. See also *Inst* I.xvii.12.

[70] *Comm*. Gen. 6:7, CO 23.118 [CTS 1.250].

[71] *Comm*. Gen. 8:21, CO 23.139 [CTS 1.282] — emphasis added, and *Comm*. Gen. 6:5, CO 23.115 [CTS 1.247]; 8:21, CO 23.139 [CTS 1.283], respectively.

Calvin uses phrases that imply contradiction to his general thesis. In much the same way as Luther, he employs images to indicate divine responsiveness. The difference is that the former allows himself to do that because he follows a narrative approach to the text (having laid the foundation of traditional impassibility). Calvin, on the other hand, allows himself the use of imagery because he has asserted that that is all it is — imagery, or anthropomorphism.

Calvin describes God's characteristics and activity as Luther had done. But, we notice that he does so with more qualification than had the Wittenberg reformer. These follow, listed for convenience.

- God is one who becomes angry. However, Calvin assures his readers that, "God is not impelled by the heat of his anger into precipitation, nor had been more severe than was right; but *was almost compelled by necessity*, utterly to destroy the whole world."[72] Elsewhere, he writes that God was "induced" or "provoked" to judge the world in the way described.[73]
- Though he is angry, God defers punishment for a time in order to strive with humanity. He invites them to repentance.[74] Interestingly, God is said to invite both the elect and the reprobate to repentance: to humble the former, but to render the latter inexcusable.[75]
- God disowns sinners — the "degenerate and defiled."[76]
- God is longsuffering or patient. Calvin sees this in that God deliberates before flooding the world. The reformer gives as a reason for this image that we might be less able to complain about God's dealings with us, even though the punishment on Noah's world "seems to exceed the bounds of moderation."[77]
- God eventually punishes, "as if wearied out," with a "vengeance too terrible to be adequately described by the utmost severity of language."[78]

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[72] *Comm*. Gen. 6:2, CO 23.113 [CTS 1.240].

[73] See *Comm*. Gen. 6:13, CO 23.121 [CTS 1.254]; 7:17, CO 23.133 [CTS 1.273]; 8:21, CO 23.140 [CTS 1.283-4].

[74] *Comm*. Gen. 6:2, CO 23.113 [CTS 1.241].

[75] *Comm*. Gen. 6:13, CO 23.122 [CTS 1.255].

[76] *Comm*. Gen. 6:6, CO 23.117 [CTS 1.249].

[77] *Comm*. Gen. 6:7, CO 23.118 [CTS 1.250]. Also, *Comm*. Gen. 6:11, CO 23.121 [CTS 1.253]; 7:12, CO 23.131 [CTS 1.271] — God is said to finally see the sin in the world in order to commend his patience.

[78] *Comm*. Gen. 6:2, CO 23.113 [CTS 1.241]; *Comm*. Gen. 7:13, CO 23.131 [CTS 1.271], respectively.

- God is first and foremost a God who loves. This is Calvin's emphasis, as it was Luther's before him, and naturally so given the narrative. He stresses that the divine love towards his people is paternal, tender and protective. He speaks of the "special protection and guardianship of God."[79]
- God finds Noah acceptable and therefore preserves him. This, in itself, raises a question that is too large to pursue in this short study. When Calvin asks why Noah is acceptable to God he answers, according to Gen. 6:9, "Noah was a righteous man, blameless...and he walked with God." The reformer admits that Noah was preserved by God because his life was holy and upright, he was free from the pollution of the world.[80] He kept the law. He then insists that this was so only because of what he calls "the preventing grace of God."[81]
- God tests faith. In Noah's case God did this by telling him to build an ark and by allowing the waters to cover the world for more than three days. Calvin questions what other point there was in the longevity of the flood.[82]
- God restores order.[83]
- God alone gives life. By this the reformer indicates both natural and spiritual (salvific) life.[84]
- Finally, in keeping with the general tenor of Calvin's theology, he underlines that God is in control of everything.

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[79] *Comm*. Gen. 9:2, CO 23.143-4 [CTS 1.290]. See also the following: *Comm*. Gen. 6:5, CO 23.117 [CTS 1.248]; 6:6, CO 23.117 [CTS 1.249]; 6:8, CO 23.119 [CTS 1.250]; 6:13, CO 23.122 [CTS 1.255]; 7:11, CO 23.131 [CTS 1.270]; 8:20, CO 23.138 [CTS 281]; 9:10, CO 23.148 [CTS 1.297].

[80] *Comm*. Gen. 6:9, CO 23.119 [CTS 1.251]; 6:14, CO 23.121 [CTS 1.254].

[81] *Comm*. Gen. 6:8, CO 23.119 [CTS 1.251]. See also *Comm*. Gen. 7:1, CO 23.128-9 [CTS 1.265], where Calvin introduces New Testament notions of regeneration by the Holy Spirit and good works necessarily flowing from a relationship with Christ. Compare with *Comm*. Gen. 9:6, CO 23.147 [CTS 1.295], where he says, "Although they have nothing of their own by which they obtain the favour of God, he looks upon his own gifts in them, and is thereby excited to love and to care for them."

[82] *Comm*. Gen. 6:14, CO 23.122 [CTS 1.255]; 8:1, CO 23.135 [CTS 1.276], respectively.

[83] *Comm*. Gen. 8:1, CO 23.136 [CTS 1.277]. The idea of order (*ordo*) is a very powerful and determinative one in Calvin's theology generally, of course. See the seminal work by Joseph Bohatec, *Calvin und das Recht* (Feudingen: Buchdruck und Verlags-Anstalt, 1934), in which he highlights the reformer's passion for order (*Pathos der Ordnung*). Also, for example, B. C. Milner, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Church* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 12-45; Michael Parsons, *Reformation Marriage* (forthcoming, Edinburgh: Rutherford House), chapter 8.

[84] *Comm*. Gen. 7:3, CO 23.129 [CTS 1.267]; 8:21, CO 23.139 [CTS 1.283] and 7:17, CO 23.133 [CTS 1.273], respectively.

> He insists that "each species of animals was preserved, not by chance, nor by human industry, but because the Lord reached out"; that the ark was secure, "not because of human artifice, but by divine miracle ... by the secret power of God, and by the interposition of his hand."[85] Interestingly, in application (which is relatively sparse in Calvin's commentary) the reformer implies that God is still intimately involved in safeguarding his people in a manifestly contingent creation. He says, "And, truly, since at the present time, impiety overflows not less than in the age of Noah, it is especially necessary that the waters should be restrained by the Word of God, as by a thousand bolts and bars, lest they should break forth to destroy us."[86]

Calvin suggests responsiveness on God's part, then. However, the reformer's view on immutability is so bound to the logic of his theology and method, and to his insistence on the imagery being nothing other than imagery that he resolves the apparent problem in Genesis 6-9 by creating another one. As Garret Wilterdink says of Calvin's theology generally on this issue, "At times Calvin's defense of God's changelessness makes his immutability sound like immobility."[87] For Calvin, God appears to remain "in his celestial and happy repose", removed from the world that Genesis' imagery of responsiveness might suggest.

III. Closing Reflections

Luther and Calvin teach that God is both immutable and impassible. Both clearly take Scripture seriously. However, both deny that where the Old Testament narrative attributes hurt and grief to God that this is literally so.[88] Of course, this was a significant part of traditional and orthodox theology and methodology. In an almost

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[85] *Comm*. Gen. 7:13, 16, CO 23.132, 133 [CTS 1.272].

[86] *Comm*. Gen. 9:8, CO 23.147 [CTS 1.297]. Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of his Glory* (Durham, North Carolina: Labyrinth, 1991), 23, points out that, generally, Calvin's theology throws up an emphasis on the inherent instability of an order, which requires the "immediate, continual, and powerful presence of God".

[87] Garret A. Wilterdink, "The Fatherhood of God in Calvin's Thought," in *The Reformed Review* 30:1 (1976), 16. He suggests, further, that Calvin struggles to maintain a genuine sense of divine responsiveness — see 16, 20.

[88] One would have to considerably qualify the remark made by Pamela J. Scalise, in her essay "The Reformers as Biblical Scholars," in *Review and Expositor* 86 (1989), 26, that Luther and Calvin expound the "plain meaning of Scripture".

identical fashion, for example, the humanist Desiderius Erasmus, in his preface to *De libero arbitrio* says that, although in Scripture,

> God is angry, grieves, is indignant, rages, threatens, hates, and again has mercy, repents, changes his mind ... such changes [do not] take place in the nature of God, but that to speak thus is suited to our infirmity and slowness.[89]

Similarly, both reformers indicate that their theological preference is that there *cannot be* any passion in God. Yet, both identify a problem in the text of Genesis, for example, where grief, pain and regret are unembarrassedly attributed to God. Though both employ the convention of transference, here is a significant point of departure as we have noted above. Luther suggestively remarks that it is God *ontologically understood* who is passionless. In transferring the preacher's grief and hurt to God while, at the same time, somehow identifying the Holy Spirit with the preacher, Luther is able to intimate that God *in his economic relations* shares the emotions of those who stand as mediators between the divine and the human, the Creator and the created. This is apparently particularly so when the mediator speaks the word of salvation and judgement to a manifestly sinful world. Calvin, on the other hand, speaks only of literary device (that is, anthropomorphism) in a strict attempt to retain the idea of divine *apatheia*.

Both Luther and Calvin follow a narrative style in their commentary paralleling the narrative of the Noah-Flood story. We noticed above that this invites inconsistencies in which the reformers speak of God as having emotions — of pain, regret, hurt, love, anger, etc. Whereas Calvin is careful to qualify much of what he says, Luther speaks with some self-conscious exuberance.[90] The former makes it clear that God accommodates himself to our ignorance by the

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[89] Translated by E. Gordon Rupp, *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (London: 1969), 41 — cited by William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin. A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 263.

[90] This is not to suggest that in other contexts Calvin *cannot* speak of God in such non-qualified terms; of course, he can. Preaching, at one time, he says for example, "David is saying that our evil changes God's temperament, forcing him to be quite harsh and to act against his wishes" — Sermon on Micah 2:6-7, from Blair Reynolds, trans. *Sermons on Micah by Jean Calvin* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 107. In his work, *Concerning Scandals* (Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1978), 72, he says, "How seriously God is hurt when a life responds so badly to the gospel!" However, in the context of Genesis 6-9 Calvin almost invariably qualifies his comments.

imagery. The latter, though commenting on accommodation as well, suggests that in seeing God in this way we will be built up in our faith.

Two aspects of the reformers' conclusions are worth further comment. First, it seems to me that Calvin's insistence on emotions attributed to God as mere imagery is bound to failure. This is apparent, even in his own writing. If the narrative is not to be taken *literally*, then we need to recognise that it says *something* about God — too profound in the mystery of his Being (of course), yet authentic in some way. Though Calvin qualifies virtually everything he says of God's responsiveness to sin and to righteousness, he cannot deny that God loves and is angered, for example. If he denied that, then the narrative would say *nothing* genuine of God at all. In this general context Bouwsma notes that Calvin, "refrained, however, from denying God's ability to love."[91] He had to, of course, because he believes in a God of love and grace.

Second, Luther's suggestion about the role of the Holy Spirit in connection with the emotions attributed to God may have further mileage, although not necessarily in the way that the reformer suggests. More needs to be done, perhaps, on the subject of the Holy Spirit in this area. This may be particularly apparent from the fact that the apostle Paul singles out the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 4:30, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God."

In conclusion, we have found in answer to our initial questions that Luther and Calvin (at least) allow their theological understanding to take priority over their reading of Genesis 6-9. They show little self-chosen vulnerability in facing the challenge of the text, although they clearly discern a problem at the interface between dogma and exposition. If we are to reach a consensus on this difficult subject today, we need to take the text more seriously, perhaps, and to learn from the limitations of the past.

[91] Bouwsma, Op. Cit., 105. I think Bouwsma exaggerates in saying that Calvin's God is a remote and immovable philosophical deity.

GOD'S ROLE IN THE WORLD: THE INFORMING BUT DISTURBING DEPICTION OF JOB

by Carl Schultz

I. Introduction

The book of Job is commonly viewed and analysed as a test of Job's integrity and loyalty. Clearly that it is but it also presents another test, perhaps even more of a compelling one, a test of God himself - a test of his justice and goodness.[1] Perhaps the ultimate focus of this book is not Job but God.

That the book of Job is theocentric is evidenced by a rather general assumption[2] that its purpose is to present a theodicy[3] - the justification of the ways of God to humans. Job's case raises the question of divine justice in the most striking possible way. "How can such a situation be reconciled with divine justice and benevolent providence?"[4] Whether the book provides a reasoned theodicy or not does not negate its search for such.[5] The emphasis on Job's suffering

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[1] David Noel Freedman, "Is It Possible to Understand the Book of Job?" *BR* (April 1988), 31-32. James Gustafson observes "God ... is in the details." James M. Gustafson, "A Response to the Book of Job," in *The Voice From the Whirlwind*, eds. Leo G. Purdue and W. Clark Gilpin (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 183.

[2] Not all scholars view Job as a theodicy. [See complete information at end of article.]

[3] The English word "theodicy" comes from two Greek words: *Theos* (God) and *Dike* (justice). Brueggemann defines theodicy from a sociological perspective: "The practical effect is that theodicy is a theory of power about who makes decisions and who obeys them, who administers and controls good, who has access to them and on what terms. Or said another way, theodicy is an agreement about world-definition, about who gets to have a say, about who the authoritative interpreters are, and whose definitions and interpretations are 'true' in this community. Theodicy is about the legitimacy of one's view of the world." Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 170-171.

[4] Marvin Pope, *Job - The Anchor Bible.* (New York: DoubleDay, 1973), LXXIII.

[5] Pope insists that the book of Job fails to give a clear and definite theodicy. Pope, LXXIII. Tsevat, however, argues: "Were the book to contain no answer, we should be faced with a literary work posing a problem of the greatest moment without offering or

in spite of his essential goodness forces us to focus on God and raise questions about his justice.

The book's formalising of the problem and its response to it is without parallel in the Hebrew Bible. No other book of the Bible, with the possible exception of Qoheleth, has such open, frank, and conflicting discussions of the character of God. No other biblical book contains such outspoken criticism of God.

While the book carefully - even tediously[6] - establishes the integrity of Job so that it is never a serious issue of the book, it appears not to be so conclusive about God's integrity.[7] While Job and his friends concur relative to God's greatness, they radically differ relative to his justice. God has marvelous creating and sustaining power but seems to do nothing - at least not consistently - to prevent or redress wrongs - to administer justice. The book, rather than affirming the goodness of God may be seen as challenging it. While the comforters argue for a just God, Job challenges it and there is no formal establishment of God's integrity.

Further, while Job's test is finally settled - he remains faithful and does not curse God - there are still questions left relative to God. The great concern of this book about God's justice continues after Job's case has been settled.

II. Presentation of the Issue

It is in the graphic anthropomorphic narrative sections of the book - the Prologue and Epilogue - where the basis for questioning of God's character is found. While the cycle of dialogue which follow are necessarily oblivious of the heavenly schemes of chapters 1 and 2 they are only made possible by the corresponding earthly scene of these

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even attempting a solution. The reader would be cut loose from his moorings of tradition and faith and left adrift. The Book of Job without an answer to its problem would constitute a literary torso, an anthology of verbalized doubts; it would betray an utter lack of appreciation of the controlling conceptions which are everywhere in evidence in the work to allow this judgment to stand." Matitiahu Tsevat, *The Meaning of The Book of Job* (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1980), 80. Hauerwas disagrees: "To make the book of Job, and especially God's answer to Job out of the whirlwind, an answer to the problem of evil is to try to make the book answer a question it was not asking." Stanley Hauerwas, *Naming The Silences* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 45.

[6] The author characterises Job's integrity (1:1), the Lord affirms it twice (1:8, 2:3), Satan does not challenge it (1:19), and Job's wife accepts it (2:7).

[7] Job's goodness is expressed by four characterisations: He is said to be complete, straight, pious, and moral.

chapters and while Job and his three friends struggle in ignorance we, the readers, contextualise the discussion within the prose sections of this book.

A. The Prologue

The Prologue narrative which clearly indicates that Job is on trial, subtly - and sometimes not so subtly - insists that God is on trial. Perhaps it is a matter of perspective.

From the viewpoint of the divine council it is a test of Job.[8] He is the focal point of the council's discussion. But from the human perspective - from an earthly perspective - it looks quite differently as if God himself is on trial. The scene on earth features the victim Job and his friends in dialogue while the scene in heaven features the all-powerful and insistent God in meeting with his servitors.[9] While Job appears in a most favourable light in the Prologue and at least manages to hold his own in the dialogue with the comforters, God is portrayed in a rather distressing way, being cornered, bamboozled into a devilish action which it would seem that he never anticipated and one which he on his own would not have instigated.[10]

Job, in the Prologue, is portrayed as complete and well-adjusted to his social environment. Even after the contrived disasters happen and Job is sitting among the ashes, his wife acknowledges that he continues to be complete - to be sufficient - even though she is convinced that it means nothing to God. Job is also seen here in the opening chapters as moral and devout. Not surprisingly he fears God. He recognises that he needs God.

While Job's needing God is not surprising, startlingly God appears to need Job. He needs his worship, his proper behaviour, and his loyalty. He is charged with buying Job's piety and faithfulness. It would seem that God needs to be affirmed and so he blesses Job abundantly but at a price.

The Prologue also seems to suggest that while God holds Job to a rigid standard of conduct, he is free to do as he pleases or needs to do. A further assessment of God in the Prologue seems to allow that God does not know the outcome of Job's sufferings. By entering into the

[8] 8. 1:6-12; 2:1-6.

[9] 1:6; 2:1.

[10] While the Lord calls attention to Job, it is Satan who suggests the trial (1:9-11; 2:4-5).

wager God concedes that he is not all-knowing. In the words of Freedman:

> There are actually two problems here. If God knows everything and in particular that Job is truly faithful, as God avers, then why should he allow Job's faithfulness to be tested? First of all, it is a terrible thing to subject Job to all these trials, tribulations and outright suffering, especially when there is no point to it, except perhaps to show up Satan and his false pretensions. But, secondly, it isn't fair to Satan either. If God knows it is a sure thing, then he shouldn't enter into a wager with Satan.[11]

The Prologue leaves us with a fundamental question: Should God be judged on the basis of how well humans do? Is this a proper criterion by which to judge God?

B. The Epilogue

The Epilogue is perhaps no less troubling relative to God's character than the Prologue.

God who appeared to Job in a storm[12] now appears angry and insists that the three comforters (the ones who had defended him) were in the wrong while Job (the one who had challenged him) was right.[13] In the words of Pope: "How could the friends be condemned for such a valiant defense of the traditional dogma as they made in the Dialogue and how could Job be commended for his vehement attacks on their doctrine and the God they presumed to defend?"[14]

Perhaps the issue is mitigated somewhat by Delitzsch who notes that "right" includes objective as well as subjective truth.[15] Job was right in holding to his innocence while the three were wrong because they could not accept Job's established innocence, given their closed system of doctrine.

But it is still striking that the ones who most vehemently defended God were the ones who are declared in the wrong. Is this a concession

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[11] Freedman, *op. cit.*, 32.
[12] 38:1.
[13] 42:7-9.
[14] Pope, *op. cit.*, 350.
[15] Franz Delitzsch and C. F. Keil, *Old Testament Commentaries - Job* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc., n.d.), III, 777-778.

of guilt on the part of Yahweh? Further the sacrifice demanded is rather large, indicating a serious offense.[16]

The issue is further compounded by Yahweh, in the act of restoration, "giving Job twice as much as he had before."[17] Such compensation over and above simple restoration is demanded of the thief.[18] Job had charged God with confiscating his property, with taking it illegally.[19] So again, is this a concession of inappropriate activity by God? Or do we simply have here God's abundant grace?[20]

Job is vindicated but is it at the expense of God?

C. Summary Statements

Important in these narrative sections are the significant points which the writer establishes about God. These are crucial to the consideration of God's justice.

God is presented as sovereign. In the opening chapters God presides over the nameless angels[21] who "present themselves," i.e., literally "stand over" as servants stand before the seated master.[22] Obviously God is not one of them but is clearly distinct from and over the angels. While not called a son of God, The Satan is among them. He challenges the disinterest of Job's religion but cannot take any action until authorised by God. It is God who allows Job to suffer. This is clear to the reader but not to Job for obvious reasons. Nowhere other than here in the Prologue is The Satan referred to in this book. When Job speaks of his suffering he invariably assigns it to God.

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[16] 16. Pope, *op. cit.*, 350.

[17] 42:10. All quotations of Scripture are from the NRSV.

[18] Exodus 22:7.

[19] In 19:7 Job charges God with h m s - a technical term for wrongdoing in Exodus 23:1 and Deuteronomy 19:16. In Proverbs 4:17 this word is used to designate what is gained by illegal means. Scholnick states: "Job may well use this term to charge God with unlawful seizure of his property." Sylvia H. Scholnick, "The Meaning of *Mishpat,* in The Book of Job," *JBL* (1982), 525.

[20] Moshe Greenberg cautions that the restoration of Job's wealth should not be seen as vulgar or inappropriate. He states, "In its reversal, the conclusion is of a piece with the rest of the book, so consistently subverting expectations and traditional values . . . God reverses his misfortunes and smiles on him to the end of his life." Moshe Greenberg, "Job," in *The Literary Guide to The Bible*, eds. Robert Alter and Frank Kermode (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1987), 300-301.

[21] Even the word *satan* here is probably more of a designation than a name. His role or function is that of an accuser.

[22] H. H. Rowley, *Job - The New Century Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1980), 21. Pope suggests that the idea here is angels' positioning themselves as courtiers before a king. Pope, *op. cit.*, 9.

The above observations are critical to the question of divine justice. The absence of other gods (polytheism) and the absence of an evil being equal to God (dualism) immediately eliminates these as possible explanations for Job's sufferings. This exclusivity of Yahweh results here as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in his being the effective force in all matters.

Since this singularity of God should have meant coherence and consistency of purpose, issues arose in monotheism which would not have been found in polytheism. As Gottwald observes:

> In the ancient Near East, various aspects of power, justice, and mercy can be exhibited in one or another deity, emphasizing now this or now that attribute or activity and even uniting them momentarily in one deity in formal analogy with Yahweh, without necessarily bringing to the fore the question of how the sum total of divine manifestations are to be understood. In Israel, however, the fact that these manifestations exhibit the attributes and purposes of a single god pushes the question of the coherence of what is revealed farther into the foreground of communal consciousness. On the one hand, this means a heightened sense within the Israelite society of being confronted by a consistently purposing and revealing god; and on the other hand it means that serious problems of theological comprehension and of communal praxis and self-understanding are provoked in Israel when there is a prolonged absence of divine manifestations where they are expected, or when natural and historico-social developments unexpectedly contradict the understood purposes and attributes of deity. This opens the road to that consuming passion for theodicy.[23]

God is seen as active in the world. Not only does he know what is happening on earth he is keenly interested, taking pleasure in Job's

[23] Normal K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1979), 687. It needs to be noted that while the site of this book and the homes of the participants are not located the writer/s are reflecting an Israelite perspective. While the dating of Job is difficult it probably was written during the time of the monarchy, when as Gottwald observes, the coherence of the divine manifestation was a problem. It was perhaps such a climate that gave rise to this book. David R. Blumenthal sees theodicy as the Achilles' heel of monotheistic faith. David R. Blumenthal, *Facing the Abuse of God: A Theology of Protest* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 165

commitment. In fact, it is this awareness and satisfaction which leads to the wager.[24]

The fact that God permits Satan to function in the world also reflects his involvement with the world. Clearly in the mind of the writer/s God has not absented himself, he has not abdicated. Having created the world and being responsible for its management, he takes the world seriously. While he has a responsibility to the world of nature and animals, his primary occupation is with humans.[25]

The above observations relative to God's involvement with the world are also critical to the question of divine justice. There is no tendency in Job towards deism. In contrast to Psalm 14 where the fool does not sense any need to reckon with God, where God for all practical purposes does not matter, the book of Job clearly reflects an active God who is responsible for the events which happen. This involvement intensifies the issue of divine justice.

III. The Dialogical Response

Job and his friends are unaware of the events described in the Prologue. While insisting on his righteousness Job does not know that God reckoned him as righteous. The comforters, on the other hand, deny Job's righteousness, also not knowing that God considered Job righteous. The events of the Prologue must be kept from Job in particular for the proposed test to be valid. Given the assessment of Job's character found in the Prologue, the comforters with their traditional theology are at best strawmen. Their ideas are in a *de facto* way dismissed before they are given.

[24] Throughout the poetic dialogue Job is aware of the divine activity. He states that God has zeroed in on him, creating his suffering. Nowhere is this better observed than in 7:17-18 where Job expresses a parody of Psalm 8:4. The psalmist is honoured by God's attention; Job is distressed by it. Job argues that God makes too much of humans, devoting too much attention to them.

[25] In the Yahweh speeches it is noted that the Lord is creator of the earth (38:4-7), of the sea (38:8-11), and of time (38:12-15). He is the master of land and sky (38:16-38) and the protector of wild animals (38:39-39:30). Interestingly, no direct reference is made to humans in these speeches.

A. The Three Comforters

Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, well steeped in conventional theology[26], insist that God has given Job exactly what he deserves. They explain Job's sufferings by a cause and effect relationship. To them the issue is not God's justice but Job's sins. Suffering does not happen unless sin has been committed. So their focus is on Job.

The causal relationship enables the comforters to assume Job's guilt from his suffering. In the words of Eliphaz: "Think now, who that was innocent even perished? Or where were the upright cut off? As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same."[27] Job's sufferings are clear evidence that he is guilty of sin even as his children's deaths are proof of their sin.[28]

While the comforters are content initially to sustain Job's guilt by virtue of his suffering they are forced finally to catalog his sins. While Job at one time probably shared a common theological position with his friends, his recent experiences cause him to reassess his theology. As a result the friends' contention of his guilt based upon his suffering is not convincing to Job. This leads to the listing of Job's sins by Eliphaz.[29]

The listed sins are those most likely associated with the rich and powerful and hence allegedly practiced by Job during his earlier successful years. He is accused primarily of social sins: taking away the garments of the needy for their inability to pay their mortgage[30] withholding water from the weary and food from the hungry[31] and oppressing the widow and orphan.[32]

B. Job

As mentioned above, Job is oblivious of God's positive assessment of his character. While his theology suggested guilt, his empirical information argued otherwise. He never once questioned the source

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[26] The Deuteronomic idea of history was that the nation always got what it deserved (Deut. 28). In Judges the nation is subjugated or delivered, depending upon its relationship to the Lord. This collective idea is individualised by Job's friends. This personal application of retribution is one of the factors in seeing Job as late Old Testament thought.

[27] 4:7-8.

[28] 8:4.

[29] 22:6-9.

[30] 22:6. cf. Exodus 22:26; Deuteronomy 24:10. Denied by Job 31:19.

[31] 22:7. cf. Deuteronomy 15:7-8. Denied by Job 31:17.

[32] 22:9. cf. Exodus 22:22, Deuteronomy 10:18. Denied by Job 31:16.

of his suffering. He believed that God was punishing him but without reason. Thus he charges God with injustice, with reaching his verdict of "guilty" without allowing Job to speak on his behalf.

Desiring justice, Job wants to enter litigation with God but senses the impossibility of this since God is "not a man" as he is.[33] Given his background, his functioning in the judicial system of his community[34], it is not surprising that he would consider litigation. While at first this seemed impossible, his continued suffering and the repetitious charges of his friends necessitated such a move. He finally identifies God as his opponent[35] and states that he has prepared his case.[36]

God's response to Job's challenge is not immediate. No litigation results even though he has pressed charges against God.[37] Such legal procedure would cast Job in the role of plaintiff and God in the role of defendant.

So far in our consideration of Job's pursuit for divine justice our legal metaphor has seen Job as the plaintiff and God as the defendant. This is indeed the arrangement followed by many scholars.[38] But as Dick cautions, we need to be careful "in sharply delineating the roles of plaintiff and defendant, for ancient documents are often unclear in distinguishing these relationships, and too rigid imposition of this modern distinction might be anachronistic."[39]

Further complicating the issue is the fact that God is involved and understandably alternately assumes different roles. This can be demonstrated by Job's desire for an umpire,[40] a witness,[41] and a

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[33] 9:32. Here the idiom *bô'bemišpat* is used. While it literally means "go to the place of judgment," it is better translated here "enter litigation." A similar meaning is found in Psalm 143:2 where the possibility of appearing before God is accepted. Scholnick, op. cit., 524.

[34] 15:7; 29:12; 31:21.

[35] 13:3.

[36] 13:18

[37] 19:7

[38] Cf. B. Gemser, "The Rib or Controversy -- Pattern in Hebrew Mentality," *VT* Sup 3 (1955), 135.

[39] Michael Brennan Dick, "The Legal Metaphor in Job 31," *CBQ* (1979), 37-50.

[40] 9:33. The term "umpire" is seen by some as a "negotiator" or "reconciler" who brings quarrelling people together, one who would "lay his hand upon . . . both" as a common friend (Andersen, op. cit., 151). However, *môkîah* is better rendered "arbiter" (AV has archaic word "daysman"). When used with *bîn* as in Genesis 31:37 (cf. Job 16:21) *môkîah* is a legal term and seems to refer to a judge. The location of the function of the *môkîah* "in the gate" demonstrates that its domain is in *jus civile*.

[41] 16:19. Here God is clearly referred to since shed blood cries out to him (Gen. 4:10).

vindicator.[42] God seems to be designated by all these terms. Even though Job knows that God is also the accuser, the judge and the executioner, he nevertheless appeals to God and thus is appealing from God to God.[43]

Granted these difficulties, Dick is nevertheless correct in seeing Job cast in the role of a defendant.[44] Job's speeches indicate that he believes God has developed a case against and found him guilty. He has already been judged in some previous unaccountable and unannounced juridical proceedings. There is simply no other way for him to account for his losses than to recognise them as punishment.

The comforters also understandably see Job in the role of the defendant. They, too, believe that Job has already been judged and found guilty. While Job struggles with this verdict, the comforters are convinced that justice has been done.[45] Eliphaz in his concluding speech reminds Job of this divine litigation and defends the verdict by itemising Job's sins which led to this judgement.[46]

Convinced of his innocence, Job demands a writ of particulars, suggesting that God has initiated proceedings against him. In 13:23 Job requests that the nature and number of charges against him be specified.[47] He is convinced that he is not guilty of any crime.[48] But there is no response from the Lord.[49]

This silence of the Lord drives Job to extreme action - the use of the oath of clearance. This oath was taken by the accused of the Old Testament but was only invoked after all rational means of proof had

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[42] 19:25. While the term *gô'el* designates the "redeemer" and hence one who does not necessarily function within the court setting, when used of God it can suggest a defender of justice (Proverbs 23:10-11). Further, in the Job passage here the *gô'el* is said to "stand" (*qûm*), suggesting a court setting (cf. Psalm 1:5) where the witness stands to testify.

[43] The appeal from God to God may reflect a struggle between two differing conceptions of God in Job's mind (Rowley, *op. cit.*, 121).

[44] Dick, *op. cit.*, 38.

[45] 8:3.

[46] 22:3-9.

[47] 13:23. The desire for precision can be seen in Job's use of three words for sin: *'awon* meaning to err, *hata'a* meaning to miss the mark, and *pesa'* meaning to rebel.

[48] 16:7.

[49] 30:20.

been exhausted.[50] This use of non-rational proof brought the deity into the process which is precisely what Job wanted.[51]

When complete the oath expressed self-imprecation. For this reason generally only the protasis (If I have done X) was employed with the apodosis (Then may Y happen to me) omitted. The fact therefore that Job used so many of these oaths and completed several of them indicates the desperateness of his condition.

In this same chapter with these oaths of clearance Job registers his formal request for a writ of particulars: "Oh, that I had one to hear me! Here is my signature! Let the almighty answer me! Oh that I had the indictment written by my adversary."[52] Dick sees this request as a legal appeal of a defendant for a formal hearing through the assemblage of a tripartite judicial board.

The "one to hear" Dick identifies as the judge, the "adversary" as God, thus casting Job as the defendant.[53] The role of the judge here is to force the adversary to produce written charges.[54] Job wants to know what his crime is. He believes that he will be able to prove his innocence.[55]

In his desperation Job not only used the oath of clearance but he also employed the institution of the hue and cry (*vox oppressorum*).[56] This was a basic cry for justice and assistance by the dispossessed and oppressed. Anyone hearing such a cry was obligated to respond. Job made such a cry, obviously wanting a divine response: "O earth, cover not my blood, and let my outcry find no resting place."[57] Job must have had in mind the phrase "Listen; your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground."[58]

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[50] There is no evidence in the Old Testament that a witness ever took an oath. Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and The Administration Of Justice In The Old Testament And Ancient East.* Translated by Jeremy Mosier. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), 35.

[51] Given the non-rational character of the oath of clearance it is not surprising to note that the provenance of it was the cult rather than the local court (Num. 5:12-28). This does not mean that the trial became exclusively a cultic process. Rather it is likely that the priests functioned in conjunction with the local court.

[52] 31:35.

[53] Dick, *op. cit.*, 48049. Blank also argues that the oaths of clearance in this chapter can be seen as a part of Job's formal petition. S. H. Blank, "An Effective Literary Device in Job XXXI," *JJS* (1951), 105-107.

[54] In Hebrew trials the witnesses and the judge were not necessarily different people. This was also true of the plaintiff and judge. The accuser could pronounce sentence as judge with others (cf. Jeremiah 26). Boecker, op. cit., 34-35.

[55] 31:36-37.

[56] Psalm 30:9-10.

[57] 16:18.

[58] Genesis 4:10.

All of these efforts of Job to gain a response from God indicate the centrality of divine justice in this book.

IV. The Divine Response

The issue of divine justice[59] is a critical issue in the Yahweh speeches at the end of the book.[60] Failure to recognize this has resulted in charges that these chapters are at best irrelevant to the suffering of Job and to the book itself. To be sure, these chapters do not provide Job with the bill of particulars that he had demanded. Nor do they provide him opportunity to question Yahweh. Earlier Job had requested: "Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak and do thou reply to me."[61] Such a choice was not available to him. Yahweh did all the questioning.

The legal nature of this divine encounter is stressed at the beginning of both speeches: "Gird up your loins like a man, I will question you, and you shall declare to me."[62] Even as Jeremiah had been instructed to gird up his loins[63] in preparation for a legal encounter with Israel so now Job is told to ready himself for a legal encounter with Yahweh. "To gird up the loins" may be an idiom for the belt-wrestling ordeal which was used at Nuzi for settlement of a case where there was conflicting testimony.[64]

In these speeches Yahweh refers to *mišpat* only once[65] but the concept of divine justice is clearly central to these speeches. This has been the issue of the book and here in its culmination it does not seem likely that it would be ignored. What then does Yahweh say about divine justice?

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[59] The following material is taken in part from: Carl Schultz, "The Cohesive Issue of *Mishpat* in Job" in *Go To The Land I Will Show You*, ed. By Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews (Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 170-173.

[60] The Elihu speeches are omitted in this paper. His role in the book is uncertain. Protagonist? Adjudicator? Further, his contribution is seen as inferior to and duplicative of the three comforters. One theme does stand out in his speeches and may account for their presence in the book -- the vindication of divine justice.

[61] 13:22.

[62] 38:3; 40:7.

[63] Jeremiah 1:17.

[64] Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Literature* (Rome: Pontificum Institute Biblicum, 1949), 134. cf. *HUCA* XXIII:1 (1950f).

[65] 40:8.

A. He denies justice.

Tsevat claims that the speeches of Yahweh demonstrate that justice is a human convention and works well in controlling conduct within society but it does not function in the physical-ethical world. He states:

> No retribution is provided for in the blueprint of the world, nor does it exist anywhere in it. None is planned for the nonhuman world. Divine justice is not an element of reality. It is a figment existing only in the misguided philosophy with which you have been inculcated. The world in which you and the friends are spun is a dream. Wake up, Job![66]

Tsevat reasons that once the principle of *quid pro quo* is rejected, once the idea of the possibility of justice is given up, the issue of injustice disappears, because injustice can only exit when justice is possible.[67] He concludes:

> But the Book of Job does more than demythologise the world; it also 'demoralizes' it, which is to say, makes it amoral. It completes the process whose first phase is known to the reader of the Bible from the opening pages of Genesis: the removal from the conceptual world of an order of superhuman beings independent of the Deity. And it extends it by the denial of the realization of moral values - values deriving from the Deity, to be sure - other than realization effected by man. This new world is as harsh as it is simple, for in it man is deprived of the protection he enjoyed in a world saturated with myth and morality and populated with powers to which he might turn with a view to rendering them favourable to his well-being, foremost by his leading of a meritorious life.[68]

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[66] Tsevat, *op. cit.,* 100. Langdon Gilkey states: "The order of nature . . . is here distinguished from, in fact separated from, justice, the rule of natural law in the cosmos from the rule of moral justice in history." Langdon Gilkey, "Power, Order Justice and Redemption - Theological Comments on Job," in *The Voice From the Whirlwind,* eds. Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 159.

[67] Tsevat, 98.

[68] Tsevat, 102

B. He redefines justice.

This position, particularly as advanced by Buber, stresses the difference between human justice and divine justice:

> Not the divine justice, which remains hidden, but a divine justice, namely that manifest in creation. The creation of the world is justice, not a recompensing and compensating justice, but a distributing, a giving justice. God the Creator bestows upon each what belongs to him, upon each thing and being, insofar as he allows it to become entirely itself ... Designedly man is lacking in this presentation of heaven and earth, in which man is shown the justice that is greater than his, and is shown that he with his justice, which intends to give to everyone what is due him, is called only to emulate the divine justice which gives to everyone what he is.[69]

Von Rad's approach is similar as he maintains that God can root justice where he pleases:

> It is not as if God were blind to some norm of right, so that there was, as it were, an umpire who, in case of a dispute between God and man, could engage both to observe the rule (Job 11:32f). Yahweh is so full and powerful that he himself determines what is right, and is always in the right against man.[70].... Something very positive is revealed about the relationship of God to his creation. It is, doubtless, marvellous and incomprehensible .... All this allows man [sic] to see that God turns a smiling face to his creation ... the whole of creation is dependent upon Him ... the purpose of the divine answer in the book of Job is to glorify God's justice towards His creatures ... this justice of God cannot be comprehended by man [sic]; it can only be adored.[71]

A serious problem with this position is the definition of justice as that which is freely and appropriately given. Generosity is not

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[69] Martin Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1949) 194-195.

[70] Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*. Translated by D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1962) vol. I, 413.

[71] Von Rad, 417.

normally understood as the definition of justice, particularly not when it comes to large doses of suffering. Von Rad and Buber have sought to retain divine justice, but by means of a definition not normally accepted.

C. He expands justice.

Scholnick's position is not too radically different from the above positions. Her main stress is that divine justice is not limited to jurisprudence but also includes sovereignty:

> Yahweh's appearance before the hero and his friends signals his acceptance of the challenge for litigation. But in his testimony, rather than pressing charges or presenting a defense, God focuses on the more fundamental question of the nature of divine justice. Excluding any mention of man's system of justice through litigation, he speaks instead of his own authority over the universe, which he labels *mishpat* in 40:8. His concern for Job is expressed through teaching him that justice goes beyond the human legal system to include a system of divine kingship.[72]

Scholnick, while recognizing that the majority of the occurrences of the root *shpt* in the Hebrew Bible fall into the forensic category, notes that there are many that refer to governance such as the reference to the king in I Samuel 8:9.[73] Here the jurisdiction of the king allows him to draft, to enslave, and to appropriate property.

While the writer of Job uses both meanings for *misphat*, in the speeches of Yahweh the emphasis is clearly upon sovereignty. This accounts for his treatment of nature. Yahweh is the Creator and the sustainer of nature. He is indeed the Ruler of the world. Thus he rebukes Job for challenging his *misphat*, his sovereignty: "Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?"[74]

As the monarch described in I Samuel 8:10-15, so Yahweh has the right to appropriate property as he chooses without the consent of the owner. Such appropriations need not be seen as punishment. Yahweh

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[72] Scholnick, *op. cit*., 521-522.
[73] Scholnick, 522.
[74] 40:8.

is suggesting to Job that his loss of wealth, family, and health is not divine punishment but divine appropriation.

V. Job's Response

An assessment of Job's response to Yahweh's speeches is pertinent to our consideration.

Curtis, moving backward from Job's response to the speeches of Yahweh, also sees an emphasis on sovereignty in Yahweh's presentation. In fact, he sees such an emphasis on the divine perogative here that he reasons that Job has no choice other than to reject Yahweh. Curtis rejects the traditional translation of 42:6, rendering it: "Therefore I feel loathing, contempt, and revulsion toward you, O God; and I am sorry for frail man."[75] Job simply cannot accept Yahweh's unlimited and unanswerable power. The speeches of Yahweh do not solve, but rather compound Job's problem.

While some of Curtis' linguistic arguments in 42:6 are compelling, his conclusion requires him to deny unity to the book. (The Epilogue with its accepted ending and divine approbation of Job, deliberately conceals this blatant rejection of Yahweh.)[76]

Most certainly Job does not reject God but rather rejects his efforts at litigation. The root *nhm*, translated 'repent', has a forensic use in prophetic lawsuit literature and can mean 'retract'. Cyrus Gordon suggests that *nhm* in 42:6 may be used "apparently in the sense of a judge retracting and lightening his decision.[77]

Job thus now may be rejecting some of his earlier comments and his insistence on litigation.

VI. Conclusion

The portrayal of God in this book is indeed disturbing. The book has remarkable integrity, raising and struggling with uneasy questions about God. It soundly rejects the apologetic efforts of the

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[75] John B. Curtis, "On Job's Response to Yahway," *JBL* (1979) 498-511. The NRSV translates this verse in the traditional way: "Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." Such a translation portrays as repentant and submissive rather than a belligerent Job.

[76] Curtis, 510.

[77] Cyrus H. Gordon, *Legal Background of Hebrew Thought and Literature* (M.A. Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1928) Cf. Jeremiah 15:6.

three comforters to shift the blame to Job, thus exonerating God.[78] Job's harsh words seem to be allowed to stand.[79]

This book recognises the difficulty of innocent suffering and rejects simplistic answers. Perhaps the God speeches - the culmination of the book and the ultimate effort to deal with Job's sufferings - are difficult to interpret and seem evasive and inconclusive because the writer, while rejecting traditional ideas about suffering, did not have a final satisfying answer.

Perhaps there is no simple answer because of the intensity of Job's suffering and even more so because of the very complex being of God. Scholnick reflects such by her insistence that God is more than a judge; he is a sovereign king. Such an approach removes the issue from jurisprudence but it still leaves a picture of a sovereign who can exercise his rights to appropriate the wealth and health of one of his subjects to his own advantage. Such is indeed disturbing.

But perhaps herein is the key to the portrayal of God in this book. If sovereignty is part of Godness - as indeed it is - there will be scenes and experiences which will of necessity yield some very disturbing portrayals of God. This book of Job does not give up on the sovereignty of God even though such a commitment results in some disturbing depictions of God. Herein is that which makes this book stand out in the canon of Scripture, its integrity and refusal both to reject or ignore the sovereignty of God.

Scholnick notes:

> What Job learns is that the divinely ordained justice in the world is God's governance. Job speaks at the end of the drama, not as an innocent hero who rejects the divine Judge for improperly accusing him of wrong doing, but as an enlightened and humbled man who accepts an all-powerful King. His acceptance is based on a full understanding that *mishpat* integrates the ideas of human jurisprudence and divine sovereignty.[80]

[78] 42:7.
[79] 42:7.
[80] Scholnick, "Meaning of *mishpat*," 529.

So Job passes the test.[81] Contrary to popular perception, it is God who is on trial in this book.

Continuation of Footnote 2.
Terrien argues that the essential and primary question of Job is not theodicy but true worship. Samuel Terrien, *Job - The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), III, 913-914. Fohrer contends that the issue is not an explanation for undeserved sufferings but rather the question of how a sufferer should conduct himself. George Fohrer, *Introduction To The Old Testament*, translated by David Green (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), 334. Andersen notes the legitimacy of developing a theodicy but denies that Job does such. Francis I. Andersen, *Job - Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1976), 64. Terry Tilley adds: "Serious readers of Job have a choice. They can either read Job as silencing the voice of the suffering or allow Job to silence claims about how God and suffering are related. The book of Job displays the cost of providing the 'systematic totalization' a theodicy requires: silencing the voice of the sufferer, even if she/he curses the day she/he was born and accuses God of causing human suffering, Job shows the theodicists' place is in the company of comforters, 'delivering' their answers to those who are plagued with questions .... The comforters are 'academics' in the worst sense of that term, ineffective observers of the terrors of human suffering, or tormenters who intensify that suffering by the ways they respond to suffering. Job reveals the worth of such academic responses to real evil. Perhaps the better alternative is for the reader to remain silent." Terry Tilley, "God and The Silencing of Job" (*Modern Theology* 5 [Apr. 1989]), 267-68. Douglas Hall cautions: "The poem of Job is a paradigmatic and unforgettable grappling with the problem of God and human suffering because it is not theoretical, but a drama in which the identity of all those who put the question, especially Job himself, is revealed in detail. It is because Job is who he is that the question is put in the way that it is put, and that 'the answer' must be given in the form in which it is given. No human question is ever asked (and no answer given!) in a historical vacuum; it is asked in a specific time and place by specific persons. With certain kinds of questions this contextual dimension may not be so significant; but with our present question it is of primary importance." Douglas J. Hall, *God and Human Suffering: An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 24.

[81] References beyond this book to the man Job in the Bible take note of his righteousness (Ezekiel 14:14, 20) and his steadfastness (James 5:11). Again Job is seen as passing the test.