Karl Barth, Jürgen Moltmann,

and the Theopaschite Revolution

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The twentieth century has witnessed a theological revolution. The rejection of the idea of divine impassibility constitutes a momentous shift in the Christian conception of God, one affecting every aspect of Christian theology. In this article, Goetz reviews the proposals of two of the twentieth century's most influential and prolific advocates of divine passibility and suffering: Karl Barth and Jürgen Moltmann. In doing so, Goetz articulates and clarifies key elements of his doctrine of God and his eschatology. With Barth, Goetz stresses the freedom, self–sufficiency and sovereign Lordship of God. With Moltmann, he emphasizes the historical and eschatological nature of God's being and God's radical openness to the world. The result is a constructive theological proposal that uniquely affirms both God's being as love and God's eternal and eschatological purpose – the creation of authentic human freedom. Divine love, Goetz writes, "is the absolute self–giving of one who loves in freedom." God's sovereignty, Goetz argues, does not contradict God's love; on the contrary, it is the essential precondition of God's love. Only on the basis of God's sovereign Lordship and full self–sufficiency is it possible to assert God's self–humiliation in the Incarnation. Only a God who is wholly self–sufficient, wholly unconstrained by need or necessity, can be wholly gracious. In denying God's self–sufficiency and hence God's freedom, Moltmann obscures the full depth of God's grace and misconstrues God's love. But if God's love is God's sovereign and free "absolute self–giving," what is its object? Not just the bestowal of love, but of freedom – the very freedom of God – and with this freedom the bestowal of the gift of God's very life. Barth's historical and eschatological theomonism, Goetz argues, is in danger of trivializing human freedom and occluding the extent of God's love. The gospel, however, as Irenaeus so clearly saw, is that the Son of God "became what we are that he might makes us what he himself is." The God who is love "has determined to bind His very being to the creature and raise the creature to His own life. God has determined that His own life be affected by the creature, indeed to tie His own destiny to human destiny so tightly that our suffering is His suffering, and our growth in freedom is His growth in freedom." Such insights provide the larger framework for Goetz's understanding of the object both of the Incarnation and the atonement: God spares nothing in making common cause with humanity. The event of Jesus Christ reveals and actualizes God's eternal commitment to His human creation; the solidarity it creates between God and human beings is more than a social or affective bond – it is an ontological bond, a union in which God takes human beings irreversibly to Himself in their weal and woe, in their glory and in their shame, indeed, even in their servitude as perpetrators and victims of sin. In the cross, God submits Himself to human fate, accepts human judgment, and takes exhaustive responsibility for sin, suffering and evil.

Theologically ours has been the century of the suffering of God—the theopaschite century. The rejection by contemporary theologians of the ancient doctrines of divine impassibility and immutability has become epidemic. Apart from certain conservative defenders of older theological traditions, the vast majority of constructive theologians,

whether silently or noisily, have throughout the century been abandoning the traditional view. And it is perhaps equally significant that even among those theologians who have not embraced theopaschitism, a creative, modern restatement of the older dogma has failed to develop.[1]

The theopaschite revolution has occurred across all major denominational lines. Protestant, Catholic, and even Eastern Orthodox theologians of the highest importance have, in their own ways, contributed to its triumph. Nor is the revolution restricted to any school of theology; liberals and neo-orthodox find a curious coalescence at this point. Figures as diverse as Karl Barth and Alfred North Whitehead converge for a moment at the point of divine suffering before turning away once again in violently opposing directions. If there has been an emergent "orthodoxy" in our century, it lies in the new consensus that God suffers.[2]

The theological implications of the theopaschite revolution for Christianity are enormous. Every classical Christian doctrine—the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, creation *ex nihilo,* the atonement theories, sin (original or otherwise), predestination, etc.—was originally formulated by theologians who took divine impassibility to be axiomatic. Certainly, mainstream Protestantism, in inheriting the orthodox tradition, inherited with it the presupposition of God's impassible sovereignty. Even Luther, who in his theology of the cross affirmed the suffering of God even unto death, seemed to take back much of what he gave in his equally foundational doctrines of predestination and the *Deus Absconditus.* When contemplating the deterministic purposing of the hidden God, Luther's portrayal of God's inscrutably impassible divine sovereignty was even more severe than was Calvin's.

Eighteenth and nineteenth-century liberalism, which generally rejected or radically reinterpreted the orthodox tradition, was also, with few exceptions (Hegel chief among them), under the sway of the dogma of divine impassibility. As Karl Barth observed, "The God of Schleiermacher cannot show mercy."[3] There can be no suffering where there is no mercy.

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[1] For an examination of the historical dynamics of the theopaschite phenomenon in modern theology, see my article "The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy" in *The Christian Century* 103: 13 (April 16, 1986), 385-89.

[2] A partial list of twentieth-century theopaschite thinkers would include Barth, Berdyaev, Bonhoeffer, Brunner, Cobb, Cone and liberation theology generally, Küng, Moltmann, Reinhold Niebuhr, Pannenberg, Ruether and feminist theology generally, Temple, Tielhard, and Unamuno.

[3] Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God*, trans. J.N. Thomas and Thomas Wieser (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1960), 51.

Given the rejection of this centuries-old dogma, the task of contemporary theology must be to recast every Christian doctrine in the light of the modern assumption that God's being is a suffering being. No classical doctrine can look quite the same once the impassibility dogma is rejected. How can such a 180° turn on an assumption so basic to our understanding of God's very nature not cause a refocusing of every theological utterance? Generally, however, modern theologians who have committed themselves to the doctrine of divine passibility have done so piecemeal, without full recognition of the vast difference for the whole theological "language game" that this one move must make.[4]

However, Whiteheadian theologians cannot be faulted for having failed to provide a systematic reinterpretation of Christianity. The Whiteheadian metaphysic, grounded as it is in a concept of a limited deity, necessarily entails the rejection both of the Almighty God of the Old Testament and of creation *ex nihilo*. Indeed, the rationalist side of Whitehead's thought renders not only a full-blown Christology, but the whole panoply of Christian doctrine that flows from the event of Jesus Christ—the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, atonement, election, eternal life—as mere mythology. It is little wonder, then, that in offering its version of the theological tradition Whitehead's school should find it necessary to provide a sweepingly revisionist alternative account of Christian theology. For the burden of proof is on the process theologian to prove that Whitehead, in spite of the fact that he himself did not embrace Christianity, can nevertheless be best understood as a good and faithful servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

From the more "orthodox" side, the century's most far-reaching and monumental attempt to work out consistently the implications of the suffering—indeed, the self-emptying or kenosis (cf. Phil. 2:7) – of God for every aspect of Christian doctrine is clearly to be found in the *Church Dogmatics* of Karl Barth. As Donald G. Dawe observes:

> In Barth's theology, kenosis assumes its place as a major motif of Christian faith. . . . For Barth has grasped more clearly than any of his contemporaries the basic and all-pervasive importance of kenosis in Christian revelation.[5]

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[4] In surveying the widespread theopaschitism in early twentieth-century England, J. K. Mozley observed that many defenders of divine impassibility had failed to think the issue through (John Kenneth Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: CUP, 1926). In 1967, K. J. Woolcombe still thought this was the case (See his "The Pain of God," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 20 [1967]: 129-148). For similar appraisals, see also Donald G. Dawe, *The Form of a Servant: A Historical Analysis of the Kenotic Motif* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1963); and J. Y. Lee, *God Suffers for Us: A Systematic Inquiry into the Doctrine of Divine Passibility* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).

[5] Dawe, *The Form of a Servant*, 164.

For Barth, God does not suffer *vis-à-vis* the world because he is limited and cannot avoid suffering. Divine suffering is the result of a deliberate determination of the Almighty God who loves in freedom. It is precisely his insistence that both creation and redemption are free acts of God's self-emptying—indeed, God's "self-humiliation—which marks Barth's irreconcilable difference from the Whiteheadian conception of a limited deity. For Whitehead God is ontologically, indeed congenitally, limited. For Barth, God is ontologically the Almighty Lord who in loving freedom limits, or better, humbles Himself for the sake of His creation.,

Karl Barth began his career in a deliberate attempt to foment a theological revolution centered in his rediscovery of the awful sovereignty of God. Thus, the twentieth-century revolution initiated by Barth might hardly seem to fit the revolution this paper describes. In his *The Epistle to the Romans*, Barth portrays God as the "wholly other," as "death," and even as "the enemy." Commenting on Paul's statement of God's "everlasting power and divinity," Barth declares:

> And what does this mean but that we can know nothing of God, that we are not God, that the Lord is to be feared? Herein lies His pre-eminence over all gods; and here is that which marks Him out as God, as Creator, and as Redeemer.[6]

It is God's sovereign "everlasting" power which gives Him preeminence over "all gods," i.e., the false gods of human idolatry. The early Barth's vision of divine sovereignty might have appeared to lead to a hyper-Reformation sense of impassible divine determinism and double predestination.

By the time Barth began his *Church Dogmatics*, his sense of divine sovereignty was undergoing a radical change. Not that Barth would ever mitigate his affirmation of the utter sovereignty of God; but he came to hold that there is a sovereignty greater than the sovereignty of an imperious potentate; i.e., the sovereignty of a God who can even risk suffering at the hands of His creatures. God's "self-humiliation" becomes the first factor in the light of which "all the predicates of his Godhead" are to "be filled out and interpreted." The later Barth will say that it is in the light of God's self-humiliation that the "false gods" are revealed in their falseness. This is a far cry from his contention in *The Epistle to the Romans* that God's claim to "pre-eminence over all gods" lies in the utter superiority of His power over our puny power—as if there were a contest.

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[6] *The Epistle to the Romans*, sixth edition, trans. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), 47.

> It is in the light of the fact of His humiliation that on this first aspect all the predicates of His Godhead, which is the true Godhead, must be filled out and interpreted. Their positive meaning is lit up only by this determination and limitation, only by the fact that in this act He is this God and therefore the true God, distinguished from all false gods by the fact that they are not capable of this act, that they have not in fact accomplished it, that their supposed glory and honour and eternity and omnipotence not only do not include but exclude their self-humiliation. False gods are all reflections of a false and all too human self-exaltation. They are all lords who cannot and will not be servants, who are therefore no true lords, whose being is not a truly divine being.[7]

If we are right in the contention that the most basic theological revolution of the twentieth century is the movement toward divine passibility, then Paul Tillich and others are wrong in contending that in Barth's movement from *The Epistle to the Romans* to the *Church Dogmatics*, "Barthianism" underwent a shift from a revolutionary to a conservative, not to say a reactionary, stance.[8] In fact, the *Church Dogmatics* constituted a work of genuinely revolutionary import, whereas in *The Epistle to the Romans* period, Barth was still working with an older, indeed, philosophic concept of God's sovereignty, as he himself admits.

One can better appreciate the reluctance of the theology of past centuries to affirm the suffering of God if one considers the pitfalls that the doctrine faces in the contemporary situation. North American theology, for example, has flirted with such grotesque parodies of theopaschite faith as the Christian atheism of the "God is dead" movement and is presently much impressed by the attempt to which we've already referred—to pass off a limited deity as if such could be God.

Barth's greatest notoriety came when, in his attempt to avoid such theological disasters, his thought focused on negation, e.g., his attack on natural theology and apologetics, his Feuerbachian philosophy of religion, and his purely theologically grounded opposition to Hitler. Only by first saying "no" to the dictates of the modern *Zeitgeist*, and "no" to the anthropocentrism and ethnocentrism of "modern man," could

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[7] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* [hereafter: *CD*], four vols. in thirteen parts, ed. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956-1975), IV/1, 130.

[8] If indeed divine suffering is the key to the real radicalism of twentieth-century theology, then it is Tillich, not Barth, who was theologically conservative. Woolcombe was the first to observe that Tillich barely touched the issue, and then only to warn that theologians should not ignore the matter (Woolcombe, "The Pain of God," 132). Tillich himself worked with an essentially nineteenth-century liberal concept of deity.

the suffering of God be affirmed without its slipping into a call for atheism or the curious presumptuousness of a rationalistic reconstruction of the Deity.

The widespread enthusiasm with which the English speaking theological audience embraced the "new" Barth of *The Humanity of God* was revealing in two ways. First, it indicated the degree to which, in one form or another, the theopaschite revolution was already a *fait accompli*. Second, in this general acceptance there was a tacit acknowledgment that Barth's supposedly newborn concept of God was acceptable only if the discomfort and pain of its delivery could be avoided. However, Barth's theology could only say "yes" the way it finally did because it had established its prior "no." Further, *The Humanity of God* would be merely an aborted fragment, wholly without viability, if it were not supported by the fundamental theological undergirding of the *Church Dogmatics* and Barth's kenotic reinterpretation of such seminal Christian doctrines as the Trinity, revelation, predestination, creation, and redemption.

Barth's theological radicalism is often not noticed. If, for example, one gives too much emphasis to his often nearly fundamentalist approach to Scripture, or to his irritating "revelational positivism," or if one misconstrues his constant dialogue with and appreciation for the orthodox tradition, one could indeed interpret him as merely a maddeningly resourceful reactionary, and his theology finally as a mere *tour de force*. But this would fail to see that though Barth's appreciation of orthodoxy is genuine, his intimate use of it is finally in order to turn it on its head by changing the basic axis of every doctrine from divine impassibility to divine self-humiliation.

For example, Barth the Protestant partisan, the self-styled Calvinist, interprets the atoning death of Christ and God's eternal decree kenotically, and thus in the very teeth of Luther and Calvin: "Man is not rejected. In God's eternal purpose it is God Himself who is rejected in this Son. . . . Predestination means that from all eternity God has determined upon man's acquittal at his own cost."[9] Such an interpretation of the saving import of the Christian faith, from double predestination to a theology of divine suffering and sufferance bordering on universal salvation, constitutes—by itself, even if Barth had written only this!—a drastic turning from the terrible inscrutability of the God of Luther and Calvin, whose sovereign decree or secret will is shrouded in a mystery of awful darkness.

This movement toward a universalistic understanding of God's saving intention is certainty not original; it reflects the generous spirit of the very liberalism against which Barth so long contended. However, liberalism had claimed that the only way to affirm the universalism of God's love was to reject the orthodox tradition. Orthodoxy, in its view, had long since excluded the universal self-giving love of God by its

[9] *CD* II/2, 167.

portrayals of the dark side of God's inscrutable will. Consider its doctrine of predestination, or its seeming celebration of the terrible wrath of God visited on his Son implicit in the classical substitutionary doctrine of the atonement. Liberalism's horror at the ferocity of the orthodox version of God's impassible exercise of His purpose, together with its rationalism and skepticism respecting the Trinity, the Incarnation, etc., led liberalism to leave orthodoxy for dead.

Barth saw that only by coming to terms with the whole orthodox tradition, only by an interpretative reaffirmation of the Trinity, Incarnation, the atonement, and even predestination, could the generous concerns of liberalism be given a biblical and, indeed, a rational grounding.

Without such a revelational orientation, the liberal spirit has no foundation in divine reality. It is left hanging in the air by its speculative anthropocentrism. Barth, in one bold stroke, radically changed but a single fundamental orthodox assumption—a philosophic assumption imported into orthodoxy without biblical foundation: divine impassibility—and in so doing he so drastically altered orthodox Christianity that what resulted was neither orthodoxy nor liberalism. It became the most far-reaching statement to date of theopaschite Christian theology.

Jürgen Moltmann has gained much of his reputation as a theologian from efforts to push Barth beyond himself to a more radical working out of the implications of God's suffering relationship to the world. Clearly, Moltmann, as a post-Barthian theologian, is radically indebted to Barth for his biblically-oriented, Christocentric, Trinitarian, and indeed, kenotic theological perspective. Nevertheless, Moltmann contends that Barth's stress on God's primordial sovereignty renders the Trinity merely a revelation of God's changeless eternity. This, in turn, precludes a recognition of the historical and eschatological character of God's being (*Theology of Hope*); makes it impossible adequately to ground the cross of Jesus Christ in the very being of God (*The Crucified God*); and finally, gives expression to a "nominalist," virtually totalitarian version of the freedom of God (*The Trinity and the Kingdom*).[10]

Although I have many reservations concerning Moltmann's theological program, I confess to sharing his fundamental instinct that despite his theology of the divine kenosis, Barth holds back from drawing the radical historical and eschatological conclusions such a theology logically entails. However, the root cause of Barth's hesitancy before the full logic of kenosis cannot be properly located in his doctrine of

[10] Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1967); *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974); *The Trinity and the Kingdom* [hereafter: *TK*], trans. Margaret Kohl (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1981).

the immanent Trinity, as Moltmann supposes.[11] In the final section of this paper, I will try to show, over against Moltmann, that Barth's emphasis on the freedom of the one God in his doctrine of the immanent Trinity is a necessary emphasis for a theology of divine kenosis. Indeed, in his refusal consistently to push his teaching on the divine kenosis into history and eschatology, Barth has to that extent turned away from the full logic of his doctrine of the immanent Trinity.

For Moltmann, Barth's doctrine of the immanent Trinity entails such a radically monotheistic conception of God that is in fact closer to a philosophic theism than it is to genuine Trinitarianism.[12] Moltmann argues that Barth's unwillingness to speak of the "persons" of the Godhead, preferring the non-personal phrase "modes of being," reveals the typical "modalistic" tendency of Western Christianity.[13] It cannot be denied that for Barth the personhood of God is singular, as the eternal Trinity is "posited" in an act of free will by the one God. God wills His own nature as love. He wills eternally not to be alone, but to be the Father of the Son, and as such He generates forth "the Spirit of Love."[14]

Moltmann contends that such a doctrine renders the Triune love of God an act of simple divine will, which in turn entails that the sovereign will of the one person of God is ontologically prior to His Triune being. Thus, Moltmann argues that Barth, in spite of his "defining God as 'the One who loves in freedom,'" sees God's primordial nature as His free, essentially autocratic sovereignty, and not His love. In radical opposition, Moltmann argues that the Father generates the Son out of the demands of His nature, not by virtue of the freedom of His will.

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[11] Bauckham correctly perceived how important were Moltmann's early criticisms of Barth's doctrine of the immanent Trinity in the development of Moltmann's doctrine of the eschatological character of God's ultimate being. See Richard Bauckham, "Jürgen Moltmann," in *One God in Trinity*, ed. Peter Toon and James D. Spiceland (Westchester, Il: Cornerstone Books, 1980), 111-132. Bauckham wrote this article prior to the publication of *TK*, which provides a further confirmation of the correctness of his judgment.

[12] *TK*, 139-144.

[13] *TK*, 171-173, 190.

[14] "By being the Father in Himself from eternity, God brings Himself forth from eternity as the Son. By being the Son from eternity, He comes forth from eternity from Himself as Father. In this eternal bringing forth of Himself and coming forth from Himself, He posits Himself a third time as the Holy Spirit, i.e. as the love which unifies Him in Himself. By being the Father who brings forth the Son, He brings forth the Spirit of love; for, by bringing forth the Son, God already negates in Himself, from all eternity, in His utter simplicity, existence in loneliness, self-sufficiency, self-dependence" (*CD* I/1, 552-553).

> The generation and birth of the Son come from the Father's *nature,* not from His will. That is why we talk about the *eternal* generation and birth of the Son. The Father begets and bears the Son out of the necessity of His being.[15]

Moltmann insists that there cannot be eternal love in God without relationship, and there can be no relationship without there being genuine persons who are *in* relationship. "Love cannot be consummated by a solitary subject."[16] Therefore, "God is love" entails that primordially and eternally the Trinity is comprised of three distinct persons. "The three Persons are independent in that they are divine, but as Persons they are deeply bound to one another and dependent on one another."[17]

Moltmann is aware that such language might be read as tritheism. However, Moltmann insists that while the "Persons" of the godhead are distinct "Beings," their divinity is one. "Father and Son are alike divine Beings, but they are not identical. The Son is other than the Father, but not other in essence."[18] Notwithstanding his claim that the Father and Son are "not other in essence," the phrase "Father and Son are alike divine Beings" clearly retains a tritheist ring.

Moltmann runs this risk of incipient tritheism because he believes that only by radically stressing the personal distinctions between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit can theology overcome Barth's tendency to subsume the significance of human history and human freedom in the primordial freedom of the one God. "An absolutist sovereign in heaven does not inspire liberty on earth."[19]

Moltmann is therefore particularly incensed by Barth's vision of God's primordial motive for creation. For Barth, the creation is a reflection of the Trinity. Thus, it mirrors the absolute loving freedom of the one God who has eternally posited His own Triune nature. As God freely chose out of the graciousness of His Triune self-sufficiency to create the world, it follows that God might have chosen *not* to create. Moltmann vigorously rejects the contention that God might not have created the world, that before He created, God was eternally impassible and self-sufficient in the love of the Father for the Son through the Holy Spirit.

> What concept of liberty is Barth applying to God here? Is this concept of absolute freedom of choice not a threat to God's truth and goodness? Could God really be content

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[15] *TK*, 55, 167.

[16] *TK*, 57.

[17] *TK*, 172.

[18] *TK*, 58.

[19] *TK*, 218.

> with his 'impassible glory'? Does God really not need those whom in the suffering of his love he loves unendingly?[20]

Moltmann calls the belief that God might have chosen not to create the world a "fictitious suggestion of arbitrariness in God" which "leaves behind it a residue of despotism in the concept of God."[21] On the contrary, Moltmann insists that given the fact that "[c]reation is a fruit of God's longing for 'his Other,'"[22] creation is necessary to God's very being. "In this sense God 'needs' the world and man. If God is love, then he neither will nor can be without the one who is his beloved."[23]

For Moltmann, only a love that results from the eternal and necessary longing of the Father for the Son escapes the alleged despotism of Barth's schema and is worthy of humanity's free loving response. But why a love that is compelled by one's very nature—and thus not free—is more winsome than a love which in freedom is freely initiated and freely bestowed, Moltmann never satisfactorily explains.[24]

There are many problems connected with Moltmann's doctrine that God creates out of necessity. In this context, however, I will underscore only what I take to be its most glaring difficulty: Moltmann's confusion of *eros* with *agape*. This error grows directly out of the very tritheistically tinged version of the immanent Trinity which he hopes will preserve the love of God. In spite of his protests to the contrary, Moltmann's doctrine renders God a prisoner of His own need to love. [25] For God's love toward us is not as the New Testament witnesses, an act of free loving divine condescension *(agape);* it is rather the necessary by-product of the Father's need for the Son *(eros)*. Moltmann

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[20] *TK*, 53.

[21] *TK*, 106.

[22] *TK*, 106.

[23] *TK*, 58.

[24] Moltmann appeals to an essentially Augustinian doctrine of freedom to shore up his contention that God is in fact both free and under the pull of necessity. "True freedom is not 'the torment of choice', with its doubts and threats; it is simple, undivided joy in the good" (*TK*, 55). Ironically, the "tritheist" Moltmann turns to the "modalist" Augustine for his definition of freedom, even as he insists that his Trinitarian alternative alone provides the basis on which to ground true freedom. More important, however, is the question that Moltmann's definition of freedom implies but leaves unanswered: Is "the good" ontologically prior to God's loving freedom and thus the eternal criterion by which God Himself is judged? Does not the Bible suggest the opposite? Namely, that God in His loving freedom created the good as a reflection of His own eternal goodness which He eternally wills.

[25] *TK*, 55, 107-108.

would try to have it both ways—that God *chooses* to create[26] and at the same time must create in order to complete His love.[27] This simply will not do. Either God creates in loving freedom, or God is in the thrall of a need to create which He cannot control, for creation is a function of His primordial, eternal, Tri-personal need and desire.[28]

For Moltmann the oneness of God is achieved through the passionate relationship of the three personal Beings of the Godhead. Such language obviously has sexual overtones. His Trinitarianism requires language of "bisexuality or transexuality,"[29] The creation is the "fruit" of the Father's "longing for" the distinctly "Other" person of His Son, and God's love could not be completed unless "the divine love presses even beyond the Trinity."[30] Creation is the inevitable love child of the *eros* of the Father for the Son.

In denying the primordial loving freedom of God, Moltmann is flirting with a doctrine of an ontologically limited deity.[31] And even the suggestion of such a thing precludes the free graciousness spoken of in the New Testament. There can be no divine *agape* where there is not utter majestic sovereignty and self-sufficiency to undergird it. For there is no divine *agape* if there is divine need. Process theology holds that God can be love only if God is the limited "fellow suffer" of the Whiteheadian conception. This is true if by "love" *eros* is meant. But there is not the least shred of *agape* in either pole of the process concept of a bipolar deity. God in both His impassible and suffering modes—i.e., in His primordial or His consequent nature—is in the thrall of a prior necessity to create.

In the Bible, God is the sovereign Lord who limits Himself. Any act of God toward the creature entails a movement of divine condescension, of divine kenosis—i.e., of *agape*—for the terms are virtually synonymous. God loves not out of any need for

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[26] *TK*, 108.

[27] *TK*, 106.

[28] Moltmann's ambivalence in these matters leads to flat contradictions. He argues that "God loves the world with the very same love which he himself is in eternity" (*TK*, 57). Yet in another context the love of the Trinity for itself is incomplete and needs an "Other" (the creature) to love in order to become "creative love." "But this inner-trinitarian love is the love of like for like, not love of the other. . . . [I]t is not yet creative love" (*TK*, 106).

[29] *TK*, 164.

[30] *TK*, 106.

[31] In light of the harshness of his criticism of Barth, it is interesting that Moltmann's few references to Whitehead are quite benign and even appreciative (*TK*, 249-250; *Crucified God*, 250, 281). He also draws lines of contact between his understanding of creation and that of Neo-Platonism (*TK*, 113). Plotinus is clearly the greatest philosophic exponent of a limited deity the Western world has produced.

an object to love, for in His own Triune life He is rich in love. God is not forced to create us, and given the fact that we are sinners, estranged and hostile, the graciousness of God in redeeming us can only be received as a miracle of dazzling grace. Indeed, it is so dazzling that were it not a miracle of sheer good will and graciousness, it would appear to be "arbitrary." Yet we could not resent such surprising grace or reject it as autocratic unless we resented the fact that we ourselves are not God, and thus that we are dependent for our very existences, as well as for our salvation, on a grace which we cannot earn or command. God is not arbitrary; God is God.

The sovereignty of God does not contradict the love of God; His sovereignty is the *sine qua non* of His love, of His kenosis. On this issue Barth was absolutely correct. Only one whose dominion is complete can actually be said to humble himself with respect to the creature. The coming of a limited God could not be an act of kenosis. It could only be the movement of one imperfection to another imperfection, and thus be no self-humbling at all.

Once the loving freedom of God has been firmly acknowledged, then it is possible to speak of God's sovereign kenosis in a way that would provide a solid basis for many of Moltmann's concerns. Of course, God "needs" the world. For God has, in His free condescending love, bound Himself, His eternity, His being, to the creation so completely that He can no longer be the God He has chosen to be without His dependence on His creation. Luther saw clearly the logic of the incarnation: "Mary suckles God with her breasts, bathes God, rocks him, and carries him . . . ."[32]

God wills to be cared for by the very creature He creates and sustains. And once God has chosen to be our God, there is no turning back. "For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29). Of course the honor of God is tied to the freedom of the creature. Of course there can be no despotism in God. However, *eros* will not secure our freedom, for it is not itself free. But *agape,* as the love of One absolutely free, must liberate, must set free the objects of its good will, or it is not *agape*.

On the other hand—and here the concerns of Moltmann *vis-à-vis* Barth

must be carefully acknowledged—*agape* is not paternalism. Like *agape,* paternalism is the love of that which is greater for that which is lesser, but it is finally alien to *agape*, for it is offered to guarantee the rights and prerogatives of the lover. It is ultimately a self-serving philanthropy. It cannot humble itself.

On the other hand, since genuine *agape* can be expressed only in acts of kenosis, it cannot but enrich its object with the gift of the very being of the lover. *Agape* is the absolute self-giving of the One who loves in freedom. It bestows on humanity not just

[32] Cited in William Hordern, *Experience and Faith: The Significance of Luther for Understanding Today's Experiential Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1983), 90.

love, but that attribute that makes love divine: freedom. In the words of Irenaeus, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, of His boundless love, became what we are that he might make us what he himself is."[33] The Incarnation absolutely entails the promise of the deification of humanity.

Modern theology is confronted by a dilemma which threatens heresy on either side. It must steer a course between the Scylla of divine despotism and the Charybdis of divine impotence. Either is a philosophic distortion of the God and Father of Jesus Christ. And as such, either constitutes an equally irrefutable ground for the widespread protest atheism which constitutes the reverse side of the theopaschite revolution. In the face of the problem of evil an ultimately limited, finally impotent deity who creates a world of suffering but cannot redeem it is no less contemptible than a despot who damns or saves by his incomprehensible decree. How dare a cosmic blunderer make a world in which there is anguish for most and death for all, in which He can only be a "fellow sufferer?" How dare the Creator of all plead diminished responsibility? It is slim comfort to be told that while God cannot rescue us from death, we do have a certain survival since we are forever remembered by God, and as such contribute to the self-creation of God.[34] If the God who loves us is constantly enriched by the memory of His creatures who—notwithstanding such a God's sympathy—are all dead in the long run, how does His love differ from that love of a gourmet for a good meal? The cannibalistic implications of Whitehead's conception of God make the impassibility and apathy of the God of classical theism seem positively wholesome.

Moltmann could never finally be classed as an exponent of the concept of limited deity. Nevertheless, he tries to resolve the dilemma between despotism and impotence by qualifying the free Lordship of God in his doctrines of the immanent Trinity and in creation. Yet Moltmann's deeply eschatological faith brings him finally to affirm the all-sufficient power of God to redeem all things in the end. This triumphalism seems rather strange after all his attacks on Barth's triumphalism.

> If God exalts Christ alone to be Lord, then he 'must' reign over everything and everyone; otherwise God would not be God. That is why all other rulers have to be destroyed. The sole lordship of Christ is universal. And because he is "Lord both of the dead and of the living" (Romans 14.9), he cannot rest until death too has been destroyed. But if death is

[33] *Adversus Haereses* 5.praef.

[34] Cf. A. N. Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. D. R. Griffin and D. W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978).

> no more, then Christ with his life-giving Spirit has made all the dead live. Then his rule is consummated. Then his goal is achieved. Then all promises and hopes are fulfilled.[35]

If in the eschaton God's triumph is assured, if God's reign will be over a "kingdom" in which His "friends" will achieve the complete bliss of perfect freedom, then the power to accomplish such a thing must have been in God in the beginning. "The sole Lordship of Christ" could not be "universal" if from the beginning the Lordship of the Father was not universal and free.

Barth, for his part, never tries to minimize the primordial sovereignty and power of the self-humbling God. Thus he understands far more urgently than does Moltmann that there can be neither divine *agape* nor the eschatological redemption that God's *agape* necessitates (Mark 12:26-27) without divine dominion (Mark 12:24). Nevertheless, as Moltmann's protest indicates, Barth's theology does not always pass the litmus test of *agape* on the human side. *Agape* would not be *agape* if it were simply a display of divine condescension. The test of *agape* lies in the answer to the question: Does the love that begins in the free love of God create in the object of that love the very freedom of its source? It is "for freedom" that in His crucified love, "Christ has set us free" (Galatians 5:1).

It is precisely on the question of the historical significance of human freedom and, above all, on the question of the eschatological significance of human freedom, that Barth's theology is most problematic. One example will have to suffice. G.C. Berkouwer, who was one of the earliest of Barth's critics to pick up on the theopaschitism of the *Church Dogmatics*, was extremely critical of Barth's expounding of the Christian hope of eternal life as merely an "eternalizing" of our completed lives.[36] Thus, Barth takes the scriptural promise that in the end God will be "everything to everyone" to indicate that *our* finite life will be finished, that time will have ended, and that humanity will forever stand completed in the eternal impassibility of God. There can be no question of our developing in our ongoing redeemed life new enterprises in a hoped for "beyond."

> Man as such, therefore, has no beyond. Nor does he need one, for God is our beyond. [37]

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[35] *TK*, 91-92.

[36] G. C.Berkouwer, *The Triumph of Grace in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 151-165. The section to which Berkouwer refers is found in English translation in *CD* III/2, 623-632. See especially 624f.

[37] *CD* III/2, 632.

Barth's irenic and appreciative reception of Berkouwer's work is well known, but despite the urgency of Berkouwer's protest against Barth's doctrine of eternal life, it is perhaps revealing that in the *Church Dogmatics* Barth's only critical response to Berkouwer was over the question of his triumphalism concerning the problem of evil.[38]

Though I would argue the matter differently and to a very different conclusion, Berkouwer was quite right that Barth's triumphant view of the problem of evil was further evidence of the same dynamic that inspires Barth's eschatology.[39] If "from the very outset" evil has been defeated, and human history has already been secured by God in election, does this not render history a "mere process" by which God can affect the inevitable triumph of His grace, with human beings little more than the passive beneficiaries of His boundless and irresistible good will and grace? Does not Barth's historical theomonism, together with an eschatology that seems to render redeemed humanity frozen in eternity, undercut the very *agape* that he elsewhere so eloquently defends? How can God's love be truly *agape* if we are so swamped by grace as to trivialize our contribution to anything?

God, in the freedom of His love, has determined to bind His very being to the creature and to raise the creature to His own life. God has determined that His own life be affected by the creature, indeed to tie His own destiny to human destiny so tightly that our suffering is His suffering, and our growth in freedom is His growth in freedom. Luke tells us that under the care of Mary and Joseph "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature" (Luke 2:52). If God was truly incarnate in Jesus, it was not His humanity abstracted from His divinity that was subject to development in fellowship with human beings. It was both natures of the inseparably united God-man that "increased." The paradox of God's love is that the all-great God wills to achieve even greater richness and glory by means of His humble dependence upon His creatures. A theology of divine kenosis must celebrate, not minimize, the fact that God wills to evolve His ever increasing glory by irreversibly binding Himself to His creatures in eternal and reciprocal relationship.

A final comment: There is, to be sure, a one-sidedness in Barth's radically monotheistic Trinitarian emphasis. The personhood of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit is given insufficient witness in Barth's doctrine. For example, when Jesus prayed in terrible anguish in Gethsemane, Scripture describes an I/Thou encounter between the Son and the Father. "Modes of Being" is a pale and abstract designation for

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[38] *CD* IV/3.1, 173-180.

[39] Of course, Barth died before writing the fifth volume of *CD* (on eschatology). Nonetheless, a major shift in his theology would have been required in order to answer Berkouwer's criticism of the eschatology of III/2.

the Father and Son, particularly when the relationship between these so called modes flairs up in such awful personal passion. Jesus' cry, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34), reveals a profound personal tension between the Father and the Son for which Barth's doctrine cannot adequately account.

Nevertheless, Barth's one-sidedness does not necessitate or justify Moltmann's counter one-sidedness, especially in the light of the radical monotheism of the Old Testament and Jesus' own monotheism (Mark 12:29-30). Neither a doctrine of the primordial oneness nor a doctrine of the primordial threeness of God gives sufficient witness to the radical mystery to which the doctrine of the Trinity by its very paradox points. Any exposition of the one being of the Triune God that cannot or does not keep in finally unresolvable tension the Triune being of the one God and the oneness of the Triune God errs by virtue of its very resolution of the tension. Only by maintaining the mystery of the paradox can we give witness to the all-sufficient good will, unity, stability, power, and eternity of God, while at the same time witnessing to the complexity of God's personal self-giving unto death and even self-alienation which is portrayed in the human suffering of Jesus Christ.