Catching the Divine Breath in the Paschal Mystery: An Essay on the (Im)passibility of God, in honor of Elizabeth Johnson¹

ROBERT DAVIS HUGHES III*

Introduction

Does God somehow share in the suffering of the world, or does God simply, perhaps by nature, stay above the fray? This is one of the most enduring questions in Christian theology, having become particularly acute during the period of dogmatic formation at the early ecumenical councils, as the emerging church wrestled with the humanity and divinity of Jesus as revealed in the gospel story on the one hand, and the philosophical definition of the divine nature as impassible, incapable of suffering, inherited from the Greek and Hellenistic philosophical tradition that shaped the intellectual climate of the time. This is not a merely historical debate, however. The horrors of the twentieth century have, for many, made a God who does not personally engage and share in human suffering morally repugnant;² the

---

* Robert Davis Hughes III is the Norma and Olan Mills Professor of Divinity and Professor of Systematic Theology at the School of Theology, Sewannee: The University of the South, where he has taught for thirty-four years. He was a fellow of the Episcopal Church Foundation from 1972 through 1975 while pursuing a Ph.D. at the University of St. Michael’s College, Toronto. His recent book, Beloved Dust: Tides of the Spirit in the Christian Life, received the des Places-Libermann Award in pneumatology from Duquesne University in 2010, and was short-listed for the 2011 Michael Ramsey Prize.

¹ On March 24, 2011, the Committee on Doctrine of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a critique of Elizabeth A. Johnson’s Quest for the Living God: Mapping Frontiers in the Theology of God (New York: Continuum, 2007); see www.usccb.org/doctrine/statement-quest-for-the-living-god-2011-03-24.pdf. The Board of Directors of the Catholic Theological Society of America responded; see http://www.ctsa-online.org/johnson.html. One of the criticisms raised of Johnson’s book was its apparent acceptance of a doctrine of God’s suffering or passibility, the topic of this essay, though I do not directly engage Johnson’s work here.

threat to human survival caused by these very same horrors has also revealed, however, our need for a God who is somehow reliable in the face of such evil, one who will not be overcome by it and can thus help us in the midst of it. This tension continues to be evident in current controversies about the (im)passibility of God, and dissertations continue to be written about it that reflect not merely the history, but the existential concerns on both sides of the tension. Meanwhile, the larger theological context in which the discussion takes place has been shaped by the revival of Trinitarian theology, particularly the recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity as one having immediate impact on human life and devotion, as represented by the work of the late Catherine Mowry LaCugna of Notre Dame. One question, then, is how does the reviving doctrine of the Trinity inform the theological need for a God who engages human suffering fully and in person, while remaining reliable in the midst of it? In particular, this essay will look at the pneumatological perspective on the question: What might be the role of the Holy Spirit as breath, life, and love of God in the issue of divine suffering? Can the paradox of a God who suffers but remains reliable be fully articulated without taking the Spirit into account?

I. The Cross as the Crux of the Issue

The suffering of God would still be an issue even for those of us in the “incarnation anyway” school, who believe that the incarnation would have occurred even had sin not. The very fact of incarnation, of the person of God the Word/Wisdom fully joined to humanity as a human being, raises the issue of divine suffering, the degree to which the divine person of the Word/Wisdom “undergoes” in propria persona the normal events of a human life, even apart from sin and its consequences. In the only history we actually have and know, however, sin did occur, and hence so did the cross, which becomes par excellence the locus of inquiry about divine suffering. Indeed, this was in many ways the paramount issue for the ecumenical councils from Ephesus

---

3 Margaret Anne Bamforth Adam, The Perfect Hope: More than We Can Ask or Imagine (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, submitted Spring 2011). I am grateful to my colleague, Robert MacSwain, for bringing this dissertation to my attention and to Adam for her willingness to share it with me.


through III Constantinople. From the time of the condemnations of Sabellianism in the West, there was general agreement that the first person of the Trinity, the Father or Fount, did not in person suffer and die on the cross, and hence condemnation of Patrissianism, though the question of the relationship of the Father to the suffering of the Word/Wisdom remained and remains open, a question to which we shall return. The real focus, then, came to be on the cross, and the possible suffering in death of the second person of the Trinity, the Child or Son of God, the Word/Wisdom, incarnate as the human being Jesus of Nazareth, on that cross.

In recent years there has been a major shift on this point in patristic scholarship and theology deriving from it. The *locus classicus* arguing against divine impassibility in the light of the cross (and of Auschwitz) is Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Crucified God*, which has inspired a substantial discussion pro and con. A critique of defining God by a metaphysical property of impassibility rather than by the biblical account of a God deeply and personally engaged in human suffering is one of the key points Lutheran theologian Robert W. Jenson made in his systematic theology. In the process he gives a clear account of the shift in patristic scholarship and the newer view of the textual evidence, which allows us to see that most of the heresies condemned in the period attempted to protect God from human and worldly change and suffering, usually by demoting the Word from full divinity in some fashion (Arianism) or weakening the identity between Jesus and the Word.6 Older liberal views, deriving from Harnack among others, had developed a picture of the school of Antioch as proto humanists, favoring literal exegesis and the humanity of Jesus, and of the Alexandrian fathers as theocrats, emphasizing allegorical exegesis and the divinity of Jesus to the extent that the humanity was lost. Jenson provides a clear exposition of the newer view that in fact no one at the time emphasized the humanity of Jesus in the modern sense, and that the real interest of the Antiochians, especially those leaning toward what came to be called and condemned as Nestorianism, was rather in protecting the second person of the Trinity from actual suffering in either birth or death by postulating a second “person” (hypostasis) of a merely human Christ who actually undergoes the birth and death and is conjoined to the divine Word/Wisdom in a kind of moral union.

---

or conjunction. In contrast, the Alexandrian view, especially as championed by Cyril at Ephesus and the lead up to Chalcedon, was that the second person of the Trinity, God the Word/Wisdom, was the one and only “person” (hypostasis) of Jesus of Nazareth and did truly suffer death (and, by implication birth and everything in between) “in that flesh which he had made his very own” in the incarnation, and hence Mary his mother is truly called Theotokos, God-bearer. Since the liberal and neo-liberal view of Antiochians as humanists and the Alexandrians as seeking to promote a nice human Jesus to divine imperial status still lingers in the popular imagination, it is vitally important to let this more accurate recent view sink in: the issue is about the death of Jesus and the suffering and hence passibility of the Word/Wisdom, and the Alexandrian proposal is the more radical one, now favored by many, if not most scholars and theologians. Bishop Christopher Cocksworth puts it with elegant simplicity:

In 431 the Council of Ephesus decided in favour of the Alexandrian position on the grounds that this best protected the full implication of Nicea’s earlier affirmation of the full divinity of Jesus Christ—that the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus were the actual experience of the divine Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. By calling Mary Theotokos it allowed no escape from the radical Christian conviction that in Jesus Christ the eternal God has been through human birth in all its physicality, human life in its joys and pains, human death in its suffering, and resurrection in its new and permanent future for humanity.

This brings us to a more difficult and controversial bit. Jenson claims that Pope Leo the Great just did not get the issue in the lead up to Chalcedon, and that his famous “Tome” was crypto-Nestorian by so separating the human and divine natures that Jesus suffered death in the human nature only and not the divine. The result was

---


that Western theology tended toward this crypto-Nestorianism from then on, while in the East the neo-Chalcedonian theologians kept trying to give the “Tome” a more “orthodox” interpretation and to convince the majority of the Alexandrians that the definition of Chalcedon really was not Nestorian, an attempt bravely but unsuccessfully made at II and III Constantinople.  

There is, of course, a legitimate theological point made by the concern for God’s impassibility, and Jenson seems to me to get one aspect of this absolutely right:

The God of Exodus and Resurrection is assuredly absolute Lord, and so not subjected to created time’s contingencies. The notion could never occur to any biblical writer that an event or aspect of history could be outside the Lord’s control. This is doubtless much of the reason Christian theology has had such difficulty resisting the lure of the doctrine of divine impassibility, deeply alien although that doctrine is. But the question is, How does God transcend time’s contingencies?

A second truth of God’s impassibility is our need for God somehow to be reliable, especially in the teeth of what looks like historical evidence to the contrary. A God who cannot suffer, who is an unmov ed mover by nature, at first glance appears to be a rock in the midst of change that is mostly for the worse. But in the end that is illusory if God merely remains above the fray. Only as a redeemer who somehow gets involved in human suffering can God be this necessary rock, according to Jenson, Moltmann, Adams, and other theologians who take this line. Yet we need some assurance that God is reliable, will not be overwhelmed by our suffering or God’s own, and will ultimately triumph over it. But, argues this school of thought, this reliability cannot be adequately demonstrated as a metaphysical attribute of the divine nature; it must be embodied as a reliability of character in the character(s) of God in the biblical drama. It is not impassibility in the divine nature that is at stake on the cross—not, that is, a metaphysical refusal of suffering in the abstract—but rather the steadfastness of God’s steadfast covenant love, God’s chesed in the biblical history of suffering.

---

10 Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, see the argument that culminates on p. 133.
11 Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 144.
There is a third truth the divine impassibility protects that Moltmann and Jenson do not seem to consider, but which has become common coinage in liberation theologies, most especially in feminist, womanist, and mujerista theology: we need a theology that both validates and fully engages the worst of human suffering, without valorizing suffering as such. Ultimately this requires a theology in which God is fully engaged in human suffering in history, but not in a way that treats suffering as redemptive in itself, especially not by way of suggesting the oppressed continue to suffer in their current state as a kind of religious duty. My own suggestion, then, is that the (im)passibility of God is in an impossible impasse, which cannot finally be resolved at the conceptual level. In the end, it is a mystery that confronts us on the cross as, for Christians, the heart of the biblical narrative and drama.

For here, as throughout, Jenson is concerned that God, especially as the Trinitarian identities, be defined not by metaphysical impassibility, but by the biblical drama itself, in which they are “characters.” Taking the Alexandrian side of the debate on this point makes it clear that the second “identity,” “person” (hypostasis) of the Trinity suffers, including both death (or at least, per Moltmann, dying) and birth. (Of course, the typical Alexandrian Christological heresies such as Apollinarianism and Eutychianism, in which God the Word replaces something essential from Jesus’ humanity, are still to be avoided, but Cyril himself knew that.) But what of the other Trinitarian identities? Can we be satisfied with leaving the second identity passible in some paradoxical manner, but insist that the first and third remain impassible? Does this not simply reinforce the Arian solution by isolating the second person of the Trinity from the other two as the only one who is somehow both capable of suffering and triumphing over it, perhaps with a compromised divinity? Have we solved anything by putting all the passibility on the Word alone and leaving the Spirit and the Fount untouched, uninvolved, and impassible? If not impossible, this is at least impassable, and the impasse remains the cross, the mother of all aporias, to use the preferred postmodern Greek term for impasses. Here again, I find Jenson helpful:

13 See Cynthia S. W. Crystale, Embracing Travail: Retrieving the Cross Today (New York: Continuum, 1999). In her dissertation, Margaret Adam makes a similar argument from the growing theology of disability.

14 See especially his reply to John of Antioch, in Decrees, 1:70–74.
With the proposition at last in place that the sufferer of the Gospels is, without qualification or evasion, the second identity of God, we are free to say what would otherwise have been obvious to faith all along. God the Son suffers all the contingencies and evils recorded in the Gospels, and concludes then by suffering execution. God the Father raises him from the dead; nor do we have reason to think of this act as dispassionately done. So and not otherwise the Father triumphs over suffering. God the Spirit is the sphere of the triumph. And “triumph” is the precise word: the Father and the Spirit take the suffering of the creature who the Son is into the trine life and bring from it the final good of that creature, all other creatures, and of God. So and not otherwise the true God transcends suffering—whatever unknowably might have been.\(^\text{15}\)

It is this last assertion I wish to explore here: what does it mean that “the Father and Spirit take the suffering of the creature who the Son is into the trine life” in order to bring about the *summum bonum* for all creation and even for God? Moltmann struggled toward a fully Trinitarian theology of the cross, but at least in his early work left pneumatology relatively undeveloped, seeing the Spirit in typical Western terms as proceeding from the rift of abandonment between Father and Son.\(^\text{16}\) Jenson points toward a more complete pneumatology, and hence, a deeper Trinitarianism.\(^\text{17}\) More specifically, what is the precise role of the Spirit in this “taking” of Jesus’ suffering into the inner Trinitarian life, and when in the gospel narrative can we most clearly see it? That is, what does the contemporary revival of pneumatology (study of the Spirit) have to say about this issue of impassable (im)passibility in God?

The current renewal of Trinitarian theology has given particular birth to what amounts nearly to an explosion in pneumatology.\(^\text{18}\) One particular element of this phenomenon is the rise of “Spirit-Christology,” especially among Roman Catholic theologians, more as a complement to classical Christology than a replacement.\(^\text{19}\) As Ralph

---

\(^{15}\) Jenson, *Systematic Theology*, 144.


\(^{19}\) See especially Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), and several of
Del Colle puts it, “What is new and distinctive in Spirit-christology [sic] is that, on the level of theological construction and doctrinal interpretation, it proposes that the relationship between Jesus and God and the role of Christ in redemption cannot be fully understood unless there is an explicitly pneumatological dimension.”

This would lead theology toward a balance between a pneumatological Christology and a Christological pneumatology, reflecting the classical tradition of the Word and Spirit as the two hands of God, the Spirit as the mediation of that of which Jesus is the mediator. Elsewhere I have explored these themes using the suggestion of seeing in the double helix of DNA a vestige of the inseparable intertwining of the missions of the Word/Wisdom and Spirit throughout the divine economy. This implies, I suggest there, that we must now speak also of the role of the Spirit in the eternal begetting of the Word/Wisdom within the Trinity in a manner that reflects what has been revealed in the second begetting in history in the womb of Mary the Godbearer. It is with these lenses that we now approach the crux of the matter of (im)passibility, the impossible impasse of Jesus dying on the cross.

II. The Cross as Pneumatological Abandonment and Desolation

All four gospels record the moment of Jesus’ death in similar language: Jesus makes a final cry (a loud cry in the synoptics, “It is finished!” in John) and then there are two traditions: one is that he gave a final death rattle, breathed his last, as found in Mark; the other that he lets go of, sends away, or hands over the Spirit (Matthew and John, the essays in Advents of the Spirit: An Introduction to the Current Study of Pneumatology, ed. Bradford E. Hinze and D. Lyle Dabney (Milwaukee, Wis.: Marquette University Press, 2001), especially the exchanges on Spirit-Christology among Jürgen Moltmann, David Coffey, and Del Colle, 302–346.

Del Colle, Christ and the Spirit, 4.


Robert Hughes, Dust and DNA: The Intertwining of Word and Spirit in History and the Trinitarian Life (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University, 2011); the lecture on which this monograph is based was given at the Holy Spirit Lecture and Colloquium at Duquesne University on September 17, 2010. On the final point, see also Jenson, Systematic Theology, 143–144, and 146–61.

interestingly, with no possessive adjective, though it may be understood), which Luke then combines as Jesus commending his spirit to the Father (possessive adjective in the text in this case) and then adds the reference to giving a last breath. The two basic threads are not as far apart as they sound in English, however, as pneuma means both the human spirit or the divine Spirit and the breath of either creaturesly life or God, and indeed biblical theology tends to see the breath of life as indeed the breath or Spirit of God which is then also the source of human spirit. The word in Mark and Luke for “breathed his last” is a compound of pnew, breathe or blow, which shares a common root with pneuma. First-century hearers and readers would not have heard here the modern variety of quite different meanings, but a rich and resonant chord in which breathing one’s last, handing over or commending one’s own spirit, and letting go of the Holy Spirit all sound. There is still some sense of this in the Latinate English “expire,” though because of the way Latin works, it is harder to see the root of Spirit that lurks there.

What are we to make of this—simply a final death rattle, or a moment when the human Jesus/incarnate Word and Wisdom lets go of his spirit and the Holy Spirit? Is there an untwisting of a portion of the double helix of missio Christi and missio Spiritus that appears a failure, but by opening up a space in the helix actually makes possible future creativity? (That’s actually the way biological DNA works. In response to a messenger chemical, a “bubble” forms in a portion of the double helix, making possible the work of either transcription or replication.24) Or is this, as Ephraim Radner suggests, an experience of pneumatological abandonment as Christ dies, a final desolation that completes the rift between Father and Son that Matthew and Mark report in the cry of Psalm 22:1, which figures so strongly in Moltmann? Is there a moment, this moment above all, when the whole Trinity seems to be coming unraveled? Is this, the dying and finally dead Christ, truly the death of God, the opening of the abyss that leads to a loosening of the sinews of the world (earthquake), the exposure of an empty temple as the curtain is torn, and the erasure of the boundary between the living and the dead (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38)? That is where the texts leave us for a time, with a dead Christ abandoned by followers, Father, and Spirit alike, dying utterly bereft.

24 See Hughes, Dust and DNA for details.
We are compelled to ask, I think, however much it is speculation, what happens to the breath, the spirit of Jesus, the Holy Spirit, when Jesus hands it over, lets it go, sends it away, in a final death rattle? Does it dissipate or disperse into the void? Or does the Fount (Father who is also Mother) tenderly and in deep grief catch it? I have elsewhere suggested that we can and perhaps must now imagine the Fount “inhaling” before beginning to speak the Word of Wisdom that always forms the Breath/Spirit, before exhaling the Breath/Spirit who is always vocalized as Word of Wisdom.\(^\text{25}\) That is, even the very formation of the inner Word is inSpired as the Fount prepares to speak the external Word. If God does so inhale and is so inSpired, it can only be with God’s own self, and yet with a difference, a different “identity”—the Holy Spirit—who must indeed for this reason alone be also God, as I Constantinople concluded. As that Breath/Spirit is now handed over and handed back by the incarnate Word, does the Father now catch his own Breath? Is there even (I speak as a fool) from our perspective at least, a moment, just a moment, of divine apnea as God catches God’s Breath and we, standing at the foot of the cross, try to catch ours, even though it seems as if all the air has been sucked out of the room? Is this, indeed, the essence of Holy Saturday, a day of divine apnea when it all seems to hang in the balance, all at risk, the outcome somehow unknown?

Our desperate need, precisely at this point, for God to be both passible and impassible is the deepest of all aporias, all points of deconstructing paradox, all sources of doubt and faith. One of the foundational principles in contemporary renewed pneumatology is that the Holy Spirit is the point of return to the Father.\(^\text{26}\) But what returns to the Father who is also Mother and thus Fount at this point? The Spirit alone in abstract? Or the Spirit who is now also the final death rattle of the incarnate Jesus? Now vocalized as that final death rattle of the abandoned and the bereft Son, does the Spirit now take into the Trinitarian heart the fullness of that suffering and desolation, where Spirit and Fount mutually grieve their own role in the abandonment, with throats too swollen to speak again or even breathe? Will this last breath of the Word be the last word?

Does the Word return empty or has it accomplished what was purposed, and prospered in that for which it was sent (Isa. 55:11)?

\(^\text{25}\) Also in Hughes, *Dust and DNA*.

And what is that purpose, if not to take all “the suffering of the creature who the Son is,” which has somehow become all the suffering of the world, “into the triune life”? Can the Spirit and the Father, having “sucked it up,” survive “and bring from it the final good of that creature, all other creatures, and of God,” or is this moment of apnea possibly fatal even for God? Dumbledore has drunk the poisoned chalice; what happens next? For a time, on Holy Saturday, we don’t know the answer. It all seems to hang in the balance. What I think we can see is that the impossible impasse of the divine (im)passibility does not stay on the cross, but is inhaled directly into the inner heart of the triune life. Just so all the Trinitarian identities fully engage the suffering of the world, and the (im)passibility of God is not, as we stare at the hanged man of Golgotha, a metaphysical question about the divine nature, but a dramatic question about the biblical narrative. The ultimate theological aporia is first the final narrative cliffhanger.

III. Catching a Glimpse of the Spirit as God Catches the Breath

For Christian faith, the story does go on. God catches and breathes in the breath and Spirit which Jesus gives up, and with it all the suffering of the world, but even more the great act of suffering in which Jesus absorbs all the evil of the world without sending it back out magnified; Simone Weil saw this ability to absorb evil without subsequent retribution as the essence of God’s saving power in Christ. God takes it all in, and survives. All the suffering of Jesus and the world is taken back into the womb of God our Mother, which then trembles with fatherly compassion. Exactly what happens to it there is as mysterious as what happens in the tomb of Jesus until it is revealed as empty. By definition, for just a moment, as God catches God’s breath, we can catch no sight of it, even as we hold our own.

What we need in the tension between a God who is passible and one who is impassible is a God who is reliable, who can take in all the suffering of the world, survive it, and share that survival with all creation. That’s exactly what we get. By catching the Spirit as Jesus gives it up, the Fount takes in all the suffering not only of Jesus, but of the universe, holds it in until all the evil is completely absorbed and digested, and then breathes it out, first as a great sigh of grief, which

becomes a shout, a song of triumph, and a great act of resuscitation, a kind of cosmic CPR, first in the resurrection of Jesus, and then in the new life breathed into the whole creation, which experiences it then as a great inhalation, a great expansion of diaphragm, lungs, and chest. In Jesus, Dumbledore swallows the poison but survives, and more. Note that this solution is not in denial of any actual suffering; it fully engages and “takes in” all suffering, in one sense validates all suffering in the suffering of Jesus, but without making any suffering as such valorized as inherently redemptive, and therefore to be perpetuated in ongoing human life. Redemption is not in suffering, but in liberation for, but ultimately from, suffering, and this too is the work of the Spirit. Indeed, Jenson sees this motif of liberation as key to understanding the Spirit’s work both within and without the Trinity. Redemption is not apart from, nor in the suffering, nor in a metaphysical refusal of the suffering, but in the narrative of its being “taken in” and the breath of liberation for new life that then proceeds from it.

At the Ascension, the flesh of Jesus, which was gratuitously prepared for the Word by the Spirit resting in the covenant history culminating in the womb of Mary, that flesh the Word/Wisdom of God made his/her very own and in it truly suffered death on our behalf, is taken into the inner trine life of the Godhead as a permanent, now eternal feature, scars, history, glory, and all, as a permanent sacrament of the moment of divine apnea and its outcome, the moment when God impossibly and impassibly suffered yet proved reliable. The risen, ascended, glorified flesh of Jesus is the bridge we all walk across to theosis, and also the abiding sacrament that nothing good of the material creation is “left behind.” As Teilhard de Chardin pointed out, it is the redemption not just of our intentions, but also of our work, our opus, as the possibility of our work joining God’s in the final eschatological reign and pleroma remains open. At the heart of the trine life this flesh is glorified, the suffering transfigured, without being discounted or obliterated. How, we do not know, but Abba God has managed to make something of it which eye has not seen and ear has not

---

28 See, for example, the final Trinitarian “description,” Jenson, Systematic Theology, 161.
heard and that “making something of it” takes place in the same womb of all making, which is now also the ultimate aporia of the (im)possible God fully taking in the suffering of the world in the suffering of Jesus and making of it something new that is the source of all renewal.

At Pentecost, not as what comes “after” Easter but as the climax of the paschal mystery, we now get caught up, catch up, catch on, put up a big catcher’s mitt and field the perfect pitch which is fastball, curve, slider, and change-up all at once, as God pitches woo to the world in the Trinitarian identity whose proper name is Love. We catch the gospel as new life, just like catching a cold, only in a positive sense, as the catcher is caught in a perpetual game of catch. Through baptism, we die with Christ (Rom. 5:1–11; 6:1–11) in a death like his, and are thus ourselves taken back into the womb of the divine im-passe and apnea, only to begin the process of being raised to a new life-like Jesus’ in the power of the Holy Spirit who is now breathed out as new life on all flesh, as our bodies (not our souls or spirits) become temples of the Holy Spirit.

The great inhalation, apnea, sigh of the paschal mystery is also proleptic of the eschaton, the final end, able to cope with the end of the universe as we know it. The ability of God in the triune identities to take in and transfigure the suffering of Jesus as a bearing of the suffering of the world at precisely this point of the story, to take it all in, survive, prove steadfast, and breathe new life, is the ground of all hope for the final outcome, in which nothing shall be left behind, God shall be all in all in Christ, and, in the pleroma of the reticent and gratuitous Spirit, eternal life will in some way embrace all (even in hell, if there is anyone still there).32 I believe this outcome is indeed morally inadequate if it rests on a metaphysical refusal of suffering in divine impassibility, but also narratively inadequate if limited by an absolute passibility of God. Nor can we seek the desired outcome in some kind of dialectical solution or conceptual compromise, or locate salvation in the suffering as such. The (im)passibility must remain ultimately impassible and can only be caught as we catch our breath at the moment God catches that Breath which is the death rattle of Jesus, and wait to see what the end will be.


32 See Jenson, Systematic Theology, 159–60, 224–236.