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Donald Macleod's Doctrine of Divine Passibility

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Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, 2023

This thesis is entirely original research and has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

Hunter Owen Nicholson

11 September 2023

In memory of Ima Jean Nicholson

Omnia exeunt in mysterium.

Abstract

Donald Macleod (1940-2023) has been called by James Eglinton one of the two most outstanding Scottish Reformed theologians of the twentieth century. As a long-time journalist, preacher, and professor at the Free Church College (now Edinburgh Theological Seminary), Macleod has left a lasting mark on the religious and cultural landscape of Scotland. To date, however, his work has received little attention in the academy. This thesis marks the first significant step towards interpreting Donald Macleod's theology by considering his doctrine of divine passibility and its key role across his thought. That the first major foray into Macleod's work should come by way of this view might sound surprising given Macleod's well-established reputation as an ardent defender of the Scottish Reformed tradition of Westminster federalism. This research demonstrates, however, that rather than being a doctrinal anomaly unrelated to his larger body of work, Macleod's doctrine of divine passibility is inseparable from some of his core theological commitments.

In order to contextualize Macleod's doctrine of divine passibility (and for the benefit of future Macleod studies) this research opens with a biographical account of Macleod followed by an overview of his critical engagement with his own tradition's doctrine of God. In the subsequent three chapters, we explore in turn three key loci in Macleod's theology—the image of God, Christ as the image of God, and Macleod's doctrine of sin as *anomia*—in order to show how these aspects of Macleod's theology either inform or are informed by his view of passibility. In the final two chapters, we show the distinctive expressions of this doctrine in Macleod's preaching and his journalism. These latter chapters reflect a key premise of this research, which is that proper interpretation of Macleod's theology requires engagement not only with his strictly theological writings but also with his sermons, his journalism, and his classroom lectures.

Lay Summary

Donald Macleod was born in 1940 and died in 2023. In the course of his life, he became one of the most important Scottish Reformed theologians of the twentieth century. For most of his career, Macleod served as the professor of systematic theology at the Free Church College in Edinburgh (now Edinburgh Theological Seminary). He was also a much-lauded preacher and journalist. The present thesis represents the first major academic contribution towards understanding the work of this key figure in the landscape of late twentieth and early twenty-first-century Scottish Reformed theology by examining his doctrine of divine passibility.

The impetus of this research flows from an apparent paradox within Macleod's theology. On the one hand, Macleod was a vocal advocate of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. He believed this document was both a faithful articulation of the Christian faith and had ongoing relevance in his own Scottish context. On the other hand, Macleod denied one of the key doctrines within it, the doctrine of divine impassibility. That doctrine affirms, among other things, that God cannot suffer. More broadly, it means that God cannot be acted upon from without, nor can he undergo changes of emotional state. Macleod strongly disagreed with aspects of the doctrine even though he knew it put him at odds with a tradition (and the doctrine of God embedded in that tradition) that he otherwise embraced.

The purpose of this research is to understand how Macleod's rejection of divine impassibility fits within the larger context of his work. We ask, how does his commitment to the idea that God can suffer impact other parts of his theology? We also want to ask how other parts of Macleod's theology impact how he defends the notion that God can suffer. To answer this question, we look not only to Macleod's explicitly theological publications. We also explore the relationship between divine passibility and Macleod's preaching and journalism.

Acknowledgements

This thesis never could have reached the present stage without the help of a number of people to whom I owe my gratitude. I first must thank the academic communities that have formed me and my research. That includes the professors at Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, MS and especially Dr. Guy Waters who guided my steps to Edinburgh. At New College my supervisor Dr. James Eglinton has been an invaluable resource, not only for his wise counsel but also for his unique and personal insights into Professor Macleod, the Free Church, and the Gàidhealtachd. Dr. Simon Burton and Dr. Thomas Davies have my thanks for their critical feedback on my work. I am also grateful for the fellowship of fellow students who made the burdens of study much lighter: Ray Burbank, Dr. Israel Guerrero, Dr. Robb Torseth, Matthew Baines, Chun Ho Terence Chu, Heng Li Chiong, David Meinberg, Sebastian Bjernegård, and Dr. John Nelson.

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Throughout this project (and a global pandemic) my family and I were sustained by the love and fellowship of the saints at St. Columba’s Free Church. For twelve years now, these people have been an encouragement to me. Rev. Derek and Catriona Lamont have helped form a community for which I will always be grateful. Derek will be relieved to know his name does not appear in this thesis! I should also include here Dr. Cory Brock who has been a close friend and mentor across two continents and my first call in times of trouble these past years.

I owe my greatest thanks to my family. My mother and late father, Vicki and Charlie, shaped me in more ways than I know. And to Carlee, my best friend. Thank you for your selfless support these past years.

Abbreviations

MR – *The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*

WCF – *The Westminster Confession of Faith.* 3rd ed. Lawrenceville, GA: Committee for Christian Education and Publications, 1990.

WHFP – *West Highland Free Press*

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Introduction

One Sunday evening during the 1970s (we do not know the precise date), a thirty-something-year-old Donald Macleod stood in the pulpit of Partick Highland Free Church in Glasgow where he was minister and preached on Luke 19:41, Jesus' weeping over Jerusalem. The sermon was a wide-ranging exposition on the reasons why Jesus had compassion on that city. First, Macleod said, Christ weeps because he sees the temporal condition of the world. He reasoned that the church must be equally moved by the tragedies of urban life and engage itself in a 'ministry of compassion' in the city.[1] He then went on to speak at length about the reality of divine judgement. Jesus weeps because he recognizes the gravity of that judgement, temporal and eternal. He weeps because Jerusalem (and, by extension, humanity) will not turn to him in their need. Throughout the sermon, Macleod kept turning back to that image of Christ weeping as illustrative of the depth of the divine compassion. 'Men can preach the gospel better,' he told the congregation, 'But not a man can preach a better gospel than this: A weeping savior. But we are so blind and Christ weeps over that blindness.'

Towards the end of the sermon, Macleod spoke directly to the children in the audience, telling them that even they were not too young to seek Christ's mercy. Then he offered them a mental image that he said he wanted them to hold onto forever:

> I would say to you, children, I don't know what picture you have of God. There are some men, and they think of God as a force, difficult to conceive. Others (who are very much closer to the mark) think of God as an old man with white hair. That's closer, but again that's not the real truth. But I would say to you this. If you want to have just one great idea of God, one and no more… Remember that once upon a time you heard a particular man… and he said to you as a little child, if you're going to have…one idea of God, then have this one: A man who

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[1] He said in part,

> Surely tonight, the church, which is His body, as it contemplates our civilization, must be moved in the same way. We ought to reflect more than we do on the depth and the variety and the misery around…The Lord has called His church to exercise a ministry of compassion. The Lord has established the church—in the church—a diaconate for the care of its poor. The Lord has established in the church that there be almsgiving for the relief of human misery.

All sermon or lecture recordings referenced in this thesis have been deposited at Edinburgh Theological Seminary where they are available for review.
Donald Macleod, 'Luke 19:41,' (sermon, Partick Highland Free Church, Glasgow, date unknown). This sermon is included in its entirety in the Appendix. See, 'Sermon 7.'

> weeps over people who are lost—God who became man and who as man wept over people who were lost—A God you can always go to, a God who wants you to go to him and a God with whose mercy we trifle at our own peril.

This picture of God as one whose compassion is such that it brings Him to grief is an image that Macleod would dwell on to the very end of his career. The directions in which he eventually developed it forms the central concern of the present research. This thesis is about Donald Macleod's doctrine of divine passibility.[2]

For at least forty years, Macleod argued that God's suffering is not limited to Christ's incarnate humanity. Rather, it is the case that all three persons of the Trinity are not only capable of suffering but do suffer.[3] Given Macleod's well-established reputation as an ardent defender of the Scottish Reformed tradition of Westminster federalism, this might give rise to the impression that his work on divine passibility as a doctrinal anomaly unrelated to his larger body of work.[4] Such a view would be erroneous. This research demonstrates that Macleod's view of divine passibility is inseparable from some of his core theological commitments including the atonement, sin, and the image of God. Thus, while his doctrine of divine passibility does not negate his claim as an inheritor of Scottish Westminster federalism, it does qualify the nature of that commitment.

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[2] It is not clear to what extent Macleod would have attributed passibility to God when he delivered his sermon on Luke 19. His opening comments in the sermon are ambiguous:

> Now these words have sometimes been an embarrassment to some sections of the Christian church, and there have been attempts (going back to very ancient times) to remove them from the actual manuscripts of the New Testament. And it is because men have felt that there is some kind of inappropriateness and some kind of impropriety in portraying the Lord Jesus Christ as weeping. Now, of course, this kind of caution is wholly misplaced, because the words are a reminder to us of a pity and a compassion that lie right in the depths of the being of God himself. And it is perfectly proper that Christ, even as a divine person, should be portrayed in this way, because this weeping expresses so admirably the depth of his yearning, the depth of his pity as he contemplates the plight of man. And of course, alongside of that, it is in perfect accordance with the humanity of Christ that he should be portrayed as one who wept because our Lord had the same kinds of affections, the same kinds of attachments and loyalties and emotions as we ourselves possess and exercise as human beings.

This passage would eventually become key to Macleod's argument for passibility.

[3] Whether Macleod had arrived at this commitment by the time he delivered the above sermon is unclear. As we will see, however, this passage will become a key text in Macleod's argument for divine passibility.

[4] The Westminster Confession of Faith upholds a doctrine of divine impassibility when it states that God is 'without body, parts, or passions.' *WCF* 2.1.

Why Consider Donald Macleod?

At the outset, this research requires an *apologia*. What relevance does Donald Macleod have for theology today? After all, prior to this year not a single academic article or monograph had been written specifically about Macleod's contribution to dogmatics.[5] Several considerations suggest that the lack of direct attention to Macleod's corpus is an oversight in contemporary Reformed and Scottish theology that should be remedied. Consider, for instance, the claim recently made by James Eglinton that Macleod is one of the two most outstanding Scottish Reformed theologians of the twentieth century (alongside T. F. Torrance (1913-2007).[6] This early assessment of Macleod's legacy is supported by a lengthy list of theological publications that spans almost six decades. His influence also continues through the generations of Free Church of Scotland ministers who sat under his lectures at the Free Church College in Edinburgh (now Edinburgh Theological Seminary) where Macleod lectured full-time from 1978-2010 and continued part-time for years afterwards. As Eglinton notes, Macleod ultimately positioned himself as the chief constructive inheritor of the strand of Scottish Reformed theology deriving from Westminster federalism. In this respect, Macleod has a parallel significance to T. F. Torrance, who was the inheritor of the other major stream of Scottish Reformed theology flowing from John McLeod Campbell (1800-1872).[7] Such accolades notwithstanding, it is challenging to judge Macleod's lasting influence upon the landscape of Scottish Reformed theology. If size is any measure of influence, the post-1900 Free Church to which Macleod belonged was dwarfed in size by its sister denomination, the Church of Scotland. Moreover, Macleod himself was painfully aware of the fact that the Westminster federalist stream of

[5] The first academic article specifically related to Macleod's was Hunter Nicholson, 'Donald Macleod: Free Church liberation theologian?' *Scottish Journal of Theology*, doi: 10.1017/S0036930623000054.
[6] James Eglinton, 'Reformed Theology in Modern Europe (19th and 20th Centuries),' in *Oxford Handbook of Reformed Theology*, ed. Michael Allen and Scott Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 138.
[7] Eglinton, 'Reformed Theology in Modern Europe,' 138.

Reformed theology for which he advocated was a minority view within Scottish Reformed theology.

Even so, part of Macleod's appeal as a theologian is that his influence extended in surprising ways beyond the narrow bounds of his own tradition. During his career, Macleod gained a popular following in Scotland's wider cultural and religious landscape. As cultural geographer Fraser MacDonald notes, in the latter half of the twentieth century, Macleod established himself as 'Scotland's outstanding, if controversial theologian.'[8] From 1977 to 1990 he was the editor of the Free Church of Scotland's *Monthly Record*, where he was just as willing to engage in (often biting) social and political commentary as he was to wade into critiques of T. F. Torrance's Christology.[9] He also wrote regularly to local and national audiences in newspapers such as *The West Highland Free Press* and *The Observer* for decades.[10] Brian Wilson (1948-), a former UK Minister of State and former editor of *The West Highland Free Press* described Macleod as 'by far the most literate and stimulating columnist writing in the Scottish press.'[11] Through these avenues, Macleod became not only a voice *to* Calvinism, but also a voice *from* Calvinism to a much wider audience.

Even so, to speak of the state of 'Macleod research' in the academy is to say very little at all. Where Macleod's legacy has received the most focused attention has been in the various historical accounts of his own life. They include (1) a brief biographical chapter written by his son, John, for his *Festschrift*, (2) a documentary of his life that aired on *BBC Alba*, (3) his own

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[8] Fraser Macdonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre in the Free Church of Scotland, 1981-2000,' *Northern Scotland* 20 (2000):125-148, 28. Macdonald offers a helpful primer on many of the controversies that surrounded Macleod's work at the end of the twentieth century.

[9] See for example, Macleod's critique of Torrance's assertion that Christ had a fallen human nature in 'Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?' *MR* (March 1984), 51-53. The editorial merited a direct reply from Torrance two months later in which Torrance called Macleod's position rather 'Roman' and 'unevangelical.' T. F. Torrance, 'Letters to the Editor: Christ's human nature,' *MR* (May 1984), 114.

[10] The *West Highland Free Press* is an influential, local newspaper of the West Highlands and Islands. The import of Macleod's own editorials at the paper was evidenced by the furor that surrounded his firing in 2015. See, 'West Highland Free Press apology over columnists', *The BBC*, July 13, 2015, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-highlands-islands-33511398. *The Observer* is published on Sundays across the UK as the sister newspaper of *The Guardian*.

[11] Brian Wilson, 'Footnotes Columnist in The West Highland Free Press,' in *The People's Theologian: Writings in Honour of Donald Macleod*, eds. Iain D. Campbell and Malcolm Maclean (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2011), 59. In recent years Wilson has served as editor-at-large of the *Stornoway Gazette*.

semiautobiographical work, *The Living Past*, and (4) Fraser MacDonald's important article, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre'.[12] The last of these (and the only academic piece) is a historical account of the conflicts in the late twentieth century Free Church that ultimately led to a denominational split and the formation of the new 'Free Church of Scotland (Continuing)'. MacDonald has argued convincingly that the wider conflicts in the Free Church were inseparable from Macleod's own personal life and theology. Indeed, a consistent theme across each of these accounts is the way in which Macleod's own life shaped his theology and vice versa. The interwovenness of Macleod's life and thought is a key reason why this thesis begins in Chapter One with a brief biographical account.

Aside from the widespread influence of his work in and beyond Scotland, part of what makes Macleod such a compelling subject for research are the theological paradoxes that lay on the surface of his corpus. On the one hand, Macleod consciously stood downstream of the Scottish Reformed orthodoxy flowing from Calvin through the Westminster Confession and through Scottish divines like Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847), and William Cunningham (1805-1861).[13] Indeed, whatever turns Macleod's own theological development has taken, he has always asserted that the work these Reformed theologians and others have been the bedrock of his own theology. In fact, he often defended his own so-called radical views as faithful appropriations of these men's legacies.

On the other hand, Macleod's theology is often marked by the ways in which he challenged the key assumptions of his theological inheritance. As Chapter One will show, some of these challenges were specific to the ecclesiastical contexts of the Free Church. For example,

[12] *Freumhan*, produced by Angus MacKay, Corran Media and MG Alba, 2009; John Macleod, 'Logic on fire: the life and career of Donald Macleod,' in *The People's Theologian: Writings in Honour of Donald Macleod*, eds. Iain D. Campbell and Malcolm Maclean (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2011), 15-51; Fraser MacDonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre in the Free Church of Scotland, 1981-2000,' *Northern Scotland* 20 (2000),125-149; Donald Macleod, *The Living Past* (Stornoway: Acair, 2006).

[13] James Eglinton has also noted Macleod's debt to 'the Old Princeton school and the Dutch neo-Calvinism of Bavinck and Kuyper.' Eglinton, 139. In one lecture to his students, Macleod listed B.B. Warfield (1851-1921), J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), and William Cunningham (1805-1861) as his three theological heroes. Donald Macleod, 'Marrow Controversy (2),' Scottish Church History (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, February 3, 2005).

Macleod eventually came to support women's ordination and the end of exclusive psalmody in worship. In the eyes of some of his peers, his political and social stances also represented aberrations from orthodoxy. However, nowhere is his challenge to Reformed Westminster federalism clearer than in his rejection of divine impassibility. On this point, Macleod has called for a review of the tradition to which he is committed.

Defining Impassibility

Before continuing, it is important to provide a definition of impassibility to which this thesis can refer. The historic Christian doctrine of impassibility denies God's subjection to passibility in three ways:

1. 'external passibility or the capacity to be acted upon from without,
2. internal passibility or the capacity for changing the emotions from within, and
3. sensational passibility or the liability to feelings of pleasure and pain caused by the action of another being.'[14]

One benefit of this three-fold definition is that it is widely accepted by both proponents and critics of impassibility as an accurate statement of the historic doctrine. In his book *Does God Suffer?*, Thomas Weinandy (1946-) makes this definition the thesis he defends. Years earlier, Oliver Quick (1885-1944), an early critic of traditional divine impassibility, accepted it as an historic statement of belief. (He went on to reinterpret what divine impassibility *should* mean.)[15] Macleod also accepts this formulation as an accurate statement of the traditional doctrine, and it is against this definition that he compares his own view.[16] We can state his own position briefly.

[14] *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* 3rd edition edited by E. A. Livingstone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[15] Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 38; Oliver Quick, *Doctrines of the Creed: Their Basis in Scripture and Their Meaning To-day* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1938), 184-7.
[16] Donald Macleod, 'Impassibility (1),' Systematic Theology 101 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, November 30, 2010). Though it does not appear to be a material shift in meaning, it may be worth noting that Macleod adds one sentence to his definitions of external and sensational passibility in his lectures. To external passibility, he adds, 'No event outside of himself can have any emotional or affective impact on the deity.' To sensational passibility he adds, 'God will have pleasure and blessedness, but the source will be in himself, not outside of himself.'

Consistent with the traditional doctrine, Macleod unreservedly denies God's subjection to internal passibility. However, he also argues that God is subject to both external and sensational passibility with the qualification that God's suffering is freely chosen. God 'can never be a helpless victim, falling into pain or overtaken by it. Whatever occurs, occurs by His own arrangement and remains under his control.'[17] This thesis will show how and why Macleod approaches impassibility in this way.

Twentieth Century Context

Macleod's rejection of divine impassibility cannot be separated from his historical situation in late twentieth Western Christendom where denials of divine impassibility abounded.[18] By 1986, Ronald Goetz (1933-2006) could refer to the doctrine of divine passibility as the new orthodoxy.[19] However, as theologians wrestled with the question of impassibility, their conclusions were not binary. Rather, they occurred on a spectrum and the line between passibility and impassibility was often ambiguous. While some theologians were clear in their rejection of impassibility, other more Reformed theologians like John Stott (1921-2011), J. I. Packer (1926-2020), and D.A. Carson (1946-) continued to affirm impassibility but in such a way that their articulations of God's capacity to suffer were remarkably similar to that of Macleod.[20] The twentieth century shift in theology towards passibility may explain the surprising fact that although public accusations of Macleod's alleged heterodoxy abounded throughout his career, I have not found a single criticism of his view of impassibility from the twentieth century.[21]

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[17] Macleod, 'Impassibility (1).'

[18] For a summary of impassibility's critics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see J. K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926), 140-166. Mozley's work serves as an invaluable entry point into the debate. His research has been built upon by subsequent theologians on both sides. Important twentieth-century critics who precede Macleod include Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R. A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974); Kazoh Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1965); and Quick, *Doctrines of the Creed*, 122-7, 184-7.

[19] Ronald Goetz, 'The Suffering God: The Rise of a New Orthodoxy,' *The Christian Century* 103, no. 13 (1986): 385.

[20] See John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1989), 329-334; J. I. Packer, 'Theism for Our Time,' in *God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to Dr. D. B. Knox,* ed. Peter T. O'Brien and David G. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Lancer Books, 1986), 16; D.A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?: Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2006), 163-7.

[21] Nor did Macleod ever hide the fact that his views on impassibility represented a challenge to the traditional formulation. Macleod, *Behold Your God*, revised and expanded edition. (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1995), 31. One proof that there was at least some positive attention given to divine impassibility within late twentieth-

This research also recognizes the resurgence of interest among Reformed scholars in defending Reformed orthodoxy and with it the traditional view of impassibility in the early twenty-first century. Such a retrieval is evident in such magisterial works as Muller's four-volume work *Post-Reformation Dogmatics.*[22] As Bruce McCormack has reluctantly admitted, 'Divine impassibility has made a comeback, and has done so with a vengeance. Good news for defenders of that ancient doctrine; not so good for those of us who consider that idea to be a pagan one in its origins and incommensurable with the God of the Bible!'[23]

One key goal of this research is to identify the specific points of convergence and divergence between Macleod and his tradition on the question of divine passibility and their significance. It is erroneous to think that the statement, 'Macleod rejects divine impassibility' is a proposition sufficiently clear enough to require no further thought. This would be to leave Macleod indistinguishable from Jürgen Moltmann and even advocates of Process Theology. It would also fail to appreciate the lengths to which Macleod goes to locate his argument for divine passibility within his prior commitment to Reformed theology. This research examines the different loci which either inform or are informed by Macleod's understanding of divine passibility. For instance, Macleod argues that the doctrine of propitiation hinges upon the belief that the cross as an historical, contingent event can affect God by satisfying his divine anger.[24] In this suggestion and elsewhere, what becomes clear is that divine passibility has a crucial place in Macleod's theology.

Thesis Outline

The outline of this thesis is as follows: Chapter One will offer a brief biography of Macleod's life and indicate some of the key developments in Macleod's thought. Chapter Two

century Free Church was a sermon by the well-known Free Church minister Murdo Macaulay (1907-2001) published by Macleod himself in the *Monthly Record*. Murdo Macaulay, 'The Trial of Faith,' *MR*, March 1981, 56.

[22] Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520-1725* 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003).

[23] Bruce McCormack, *The Humility of the Eternal Son* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 9.

[24] Donald Macleod, *Christ Crucified* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 130-4.

shows that Macleod's divergence from his tradition's view of divine passibility must be understood as one expression of a broader set of doctrinal and hermeneutical concerns he had about the doctrine of God in historic Reformed theology.[25] This chapter also shows how, critiques notwithstanding, Macleod still relies heavily on this tradition for his own formulations. Beginning with this wider view of Macleod's doctrine of God allows us to make important qualifications about what exactly Macleod means when he says that God can suffer.

Each subsequent chapter of this work (Chapters 3-7) will explore a different locus of Macleod's thought which either *informs* or is *informed by* his rejection of divine impassibility, or both. The first of these (Chapter Three) is Macleod's doctrine of the image of God. For Macleod, the image of God is the sum of the resemblances which exist between God and man.[26] This definition structures much of his theological anthropology and ethics and Macleod also uses it to understand aspects of the triune God. For instance, he argues that if human emotions like anger and pity are part of the image of God (and Macleod asserts that they are) then the proper interpretation of anthropomorphisms in Scripture is to say that they represent analogous emotions in God—divine emotions of which our own emotions are but finite reflections. But what are divine 'emotions' and how can God move from one emotion to another if he lives outside of time? This chapter shows how Macleod tries to resolve the paradoxes that his own view creates. Chapter Four builds upon the theme of the image of God by showing specifically how Macleod uses Christ's incarnation as an interpretive key to understand divine emotions.

Chapter Five explores the relationship between divine passibility and Macleod's concept of *anomia* (or lawlessness). *Anomia* is one of several biblical terms for sin, but in Macleod's work it also represents more broadly the negation of what should occur in a normally functioning universe. This doctrine may be the most novel aspect of Macleod's rejection of divine impassibility. He does not argue that sin as *anomia* has made an impassible God passible *per se*,

[25] These concerns are most evident in the chapter 'The Doctrine of God in Christian Discussion,' in Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 223-39.
[26] Donald Macleod, *A Faith to Live By* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2010), 95.

but he does use the doctrine to distance himself from his chief interlocutor on divine impassibility, Jürgen Moltmann (1926-), who he says treats pain in God as too inevitable.[27] As this chapter will show, Macleod seems to have developed his doctrine of *anomia* independent of the question of divine impassibility, and yet in his later writings he uses it to describe the paradox of the God who both suffers and yet is eternally blessed.

In the final two chapters (6 and 7) we explore the relationship between Macleod's doctrine of divine passibility and his homiletics and public theology, respectively. Chapter 6 shows how Macleod preached the doctrine of divine passibility and suggests a dogmatic logic to explain why his homiletical presentation of God's suffering often differed substantially from his writings and lectures. Lastly, in Chapter 7 we demonstrate how Macleod's affirmation of divine passibility is built into the framework of public ethics evident in his journalistic writings. These latter chapters reflect a key assumption of this thesis which is that a proper understanding of Macleod's thought requires attention not only to his strictly theological writings but also to his journalism and his preaching.[28]

Conclusion

It is too soon to say how Macleod's own views on divine passibility will live on in the Free Church of Scotland and wider Reformed communities in the coming decades. Macleod wrote in 2019, 'It is devoutly to be hoped that all churches will leave divine impassibility an open question.'[29] What is more certain, however, is that the history of the Free Church and Reformed Theology in twentieth century Scotland cannot be told without reference to the influence of the theology of Donald Macleod and the theology of Donald Macleod cannot be properly understood apart from his assertion that central to the gospel message is a God who, even in his divinity, suffers.

[27] Donald Macleod, 'The Christology of Jürgen Moltmann,' *Themelios* 24, no. 2 (February 1999), 43.
[28] To this, recorded lectures could also be added, which are referenced throughout this work.
[29] Donald Macleod, 'The Significance of the Westminster Confession of Faith,' in *The History of Scottish Theology: Volume II* ed. David Fergusson and Mark W. Elliott (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 7.

Chapter 1 – 'Scotland's Outstanding, if Controversial Theologian'

A key task of the present thesis is to situate Donald Macleod's life and thought historically. This chapter will offer a brief biography of Macleod's life with a particular emphasis upon his writings. This is not the most exhaustive biography of Macleod to date, but it is original in at least two ways.[1] First, unlike earlier synopses, this chapter proposes to cover every major period of Macleod's life.[2] Secondly, its particular emphasis will be on Macleod's own writings as they relate to the key events of his life. With an emphasis upon both life and thought, the sources of this chapter are varied. The biographical data from earlier accounts form the backbone of the narrative and their details have been corroborated where necessary. To consider Macleod's own thought, I also draw from across his corpus including books, lectures, sermons, and articles. This biography suggests a periodization of Macleod's life that aligns with some of the major transitions of his career: A Gael and a Free Churchman (1940-1964), Preacher (1964-1977), Editor and Professor (1977-1990), Columnist in Conflict (1990-1999), and Principal and Retirement (2000-2023). What this chapter will show is that Macleod's career has been marked by a broad commitment to Westminster Federalism and the Free Church of Scotland. In doing so, however, he has also challenged what it means to identify faithfully with them.

Early Life: A Gael and a Free Churchman (1940-1964)

Youth

Donald Macleod was born in the village of Ness on the Isle of Lewis on 24th November 1940 to Donald Macleod (1910-1986) and Alice Thompson (1912-1997).[3] Most of his childhood

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[1] Four sources provide the most useful, if partial, biographies: *Freumhan*, produced by Angus MacKay, Corran Media and MG Alba, 2009; John Macleod, 'Logic on fire: the life and career of Donald Macleod,' in *The People's Theologian: Writings in Honour of Donald Macleod*, eds. Iain D. Campbell and Malcolm Maclean (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2011), 15-51; Fraser MacDonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre in the Free Church of Scotland, 1981-2000,' *Northern Scotland* 20 (2000):125-149; Donald Macleod, *The Living Past* (Stornoway: Acair, 2006). The last of these is a semi-autobiographical work.

[2] John Macleod's biography of his father has made retracing the details of Macleod's life far easier, but it lacks almost any reference to the controversies that surrounded Macleod in the 1990s. This omission is helpfully supplemented by Fraser MacDonald's work which focuses specifically on the controversies surrounding Macleod from 1980-2000.

[3] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 16.

was spent in the community of Newmarket on the outskirts of Stornoway where his father was a joiner. Around the time of his birth, the elder Donald was one of the many Lewismen who made up a disproportionate amount of the Navy reserves serving in the war—a commitment which, Macleod says, 'had little to do with patriotism, but much to do with poverty.'[4] Macleod's was a Gaelic-speaking, working-class, religious home.

The Macleod family worshipped in the Free Church of Scotland, and it was this denomination and its history that would shape the rest of Macleod's life. The twentieth century Free Church of Scotland had two birth narratives, both of which shaped the institution and Macleod's understanding of it. The Free Church was first born with the Disruption of 1843 when a large minority of ministers and congregations left the Establishment Church over issues of ecclesiastical power and patronage and founded the Free Church of Scotland.[5] Throughout the nineteenth century, it was one of the largest and most influential ecclesiastical bodies in the country.[6] The Free Church of the twentieth century into which Macleod was born considered itself to be proud and true inheritor of the nineteenth century Free Church and its leading figures like Thomas Chalmers (1780-1847), William Cunningham (1805-1861)[7] and Thomas Guthrie (1803-1873).

However, the Free Church as Macleod knew it was also the product of a far smaller schism which played a no less important role in defining its identity. In 1900, a group of twenty-six ministers and around 40,000 members and adherents chose not to join the rest of the Free Church when they joined with the United Presbyterian Church to form the United Free Church

[4] Donald Macleod, 'The House My Father Built,' *The Scottish Review* 23 (Autumn 2000), https://www.scottishreview.net//DonaldMacLeodAugust17a.html.
[5] Ian J. Shaw, 'Presbyterians in Britain and Europe,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Presbyterianism*, eds. Gary Scott Smith and P.C. Kemeny (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 128.
[6] By the 1850s, the Free Church had weekly attendances of over 500,000 and virtually matched the influence of the establishment church. By comparison, the total population of Scotland was around three million. Shaw, 'Presbyterians in Britain and Europe,' 129.
[7] Macleod has argued that William Cunningham was Scotland's greatest theologian and one of the most significant influences in his own thought. Donald Macleod, 'Scotland's Greatest Theologian,' *MR*, March 1990, 51-53.

of Scotland.[8] They considered the union of the two groups 'a betrayal of unreserved commitment to the Westminster Confession and the vision of an Established Church recognized by the state.'[9] Standing apart from the union, they remained the Free Church of Scotland.[10] Compared to the nineteenth century Free Church, the post-1900 Free Church in the mid-twentieth century was comparatively small but its influence was still strong on Lewis when Macleod was born. Its distinctives included a strict adherence to the Westminster Confession, the use of exclusive psalmody in public worship, and a conspicuously strong emphasis on Sabbath adherence.[11] The Macleod family worshipped at Stornoway Free Church where Kenneth Macrae (1883-1964) was minister. Macrae was an important figure in the twentieth century Free Church and represented the most conservative elements of the denomination.[12]

In later life, Macleod reflected positively on his childhood and on the religious community that shaped him. In one public conversation recorded in his son's biography, Macleod said,

> I was brought up in a Christian home and that home was always full of visitors who were for the most part, believing Christians. I am profoundly thankful to God for that experience because my early years are linked in my memory with many hours of what I can only call the most edifying entertainment. Many of the men who came to the house had been on active war service. They were, from every point of view, men's men: men of courage, men of experience and men of integrity. They were also endlessly kind to children; men possessed of a keen sense of humour; men of enormous intelligence and wit; above all, men who loved to argue about and to discuss the truth of God. It was my privilege to sit, sometimes for hours, as these men (and women) described the way God had led them… From my earliest years I wanted to make these my people.[13]

Though Macleod's portrait of mid-twentieth-century life on Lewis often strikes an idyllic tone, both the island and Macleod's own family were also formed through tragedy. Two events

[8] 'The Highland Churches Today,' in *The Church in the Highlands*, ed. James Kirk (Edinburgh: Scottish Church History Society, 1998), 147.
[9] Shaw, 'Presbyterians in Britain and Europe,' 132.
[10] The Free Church that continued into the twentieth century is often referred to in literature as the post-1900 Free Church to recognize the major shifts in the Free Church that occurred that year.
[11] The Free Church has often been labelled 'Sabbatarian' but in surveying the *Monthly Record* from 1977-1900, this term is largely seen as derogatory.
[12] MacDonald describes Macrae and R. A. Finlayson (1895-1989), Macleod's future professor of systematic theology, as representing the 'ultra-orthodox' and the 'moderate' elements within the Free Church, respectively. MacDonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre,' 127. At least in later life, Macleod's own sympathies would be with Finlayson.
[13] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 19.

in particular gave the island life into which Macleod was born an inescapable sense of grief. The first of these was the 1919 *Iolaire* disaster. On January 1 of that year the yacht called the *HMY Iolaire* was carrying hundreds of islanders home victorious from the First World War. Just a few hundred yards from the joyful homecoming that awaited in the port of Stornoway, the ship sunk, taking with it over 200 soldiers to their death. Macleod writes about the impact the *Iolaire* had on his youth:

> The *Iolaire* was everywhere, not simply in the storytelling but in every social occasion. Even in the 1940s and 50s it was impossible to have any kind of conversation without either 'He was lost on the *Iolaire*' or 'Her father (or husband) was lost on the *Iolaire*' or 'He was on the *Iolaire* and never got over it'…the indirect effects were everywhere in the widowed women, fatherless children and lonely, lovely women whose fiancés had perished on the Beasts of Holm. Lewis collapsed into unassuaged grief and leaderless, fatalistic villages.[14]

A second major tragedy that hung over the island was the mass migration of the 1920s when hundreds of islanders sailed for North America looking to escape the scarcity of work and hope that the islands offered. The symbol of this sorrow was the ship, the *Metagama*. Macleod recalled,

> I spoke to an old lady, once, who remembered watching as the *Metagama* disappeared over the horizon carrying her friends to exile and oblivion. 'Did many of the young men go?' I asked. 'They all went,' she said: matter-of-factly. It is difficult today to imagine the impact: difficult even to believe it. Between the *Iolaire* and the emigrant ships Lewis lost, in the space of four years, 1,000 men and women in their twenties.[15]

Given the numerous historical events and cultural phenomenon that must have shaped Macleod's youth, why mention these? On the one hand, they deserve mention because they really were two of the most defining aspects of early and mid-twentieth-century life on Lewis. More specifically, though, given that this thesis is also about questions of theodicy and divine suffering, it is not unreasonable to wonder what biographical events might have set the context for such

[14] Macleod, *The Living Past*, 84. Donald Macleod's son, John, went on to write an historic account of the *Iolaire* disaster. John Macleod, *When I Heard the Bell: The Loss of the Iolaire* (Edinburgh: Birlinn Limited, 2010).
[15] Donald Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, June 21, 1996. Jim Wilkie writes that in a 12-month period during 1923-4 around 800 young men and women in Lewis emigrated to Canada. *Metagama: A Journey from Lewis to the New World* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2001), 47.

questions in Macleod's own thought.[16] Macleod was raised on an island which, in a very real sense, remained for decades stricken with grief. Macleod never uses these events to explain his own position on divine impassibility but their reoccurrence in his writings on issues of poverty, migration, and injustice shows that they were not unimportant—nor were personal trials faced by the Macleod family in the 1940s and 50s.

In March of 1940, the same year Macleod was born, his parents lost a 15-month-old daughter to meningitis.[17] The elder Donald Macleod learned of his daughter's death through telegram while on military service in Portsmouth and could not attend the funeral. John Macleod goes on to say that in 1956, 'a painful permanent end' came to Macleod's youth when his mother was hospitalized for tuberculosis and his father dealt with life-threatening asthma. From then on, John Macleod writes, 'my father all but ran the household—nursing the baby, preparing meals, laundering clothes.'[18] In spite of all this, Macleod seems to have thrived as a student. He gained entry into the Nicolson Institute in Stornoway in 1952 and continued there until he left for university in 1958.[19]

Higher Education

In 1958, Macleod's world shifted southwards to the University of Glasgow where he eventually earned an M.A. degree in English and History.[20] His official coursework notwithstanding, Macleod said often that the primary intellectual challenge of university for him was the question of God's existence. 'I was always inclined to the sudden thought. One day the thought came to me "God doesn't exist." Rather than passing, it lodged. I ran into a theological black hole and spent three years in an atheistic morass. I found it a very depressing time. The moment it becomes true that God doesn't exist, all hope, all meaning goes. There is no

[16] Some of the most prominent proponents of divine passibility were those most affected by the tragedies of the Second World War. See, for instance Moltmann, *The Crucified God* and Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*.
[17] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 16.
[18] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 16.
[19] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 19.
[20] *Free Church College Matriculation Records*.

coherence. Without God, there is no order.'[21] What he said kept him in Christianity during that season was involvement in his local church, Partick Highland Free Church, and hours spent in the university library reading theologians like J. Gresham Machen and John Calvin.[22] Towards the end of his time at university Macleod made a public profession of faith at Partick Highland (probably in April 1960) and ultimately decided to pursue ministry at the Free Church College in Edinburgh.[23]

Macleod graduated from the University of Glasgow in the spring of 1961 and enrolled in the Free Church College that same autumn. Of the thirteen students enrolled that year, he was the youngest.[24] The goal of the Free Church College was to train ministers. Its priorities were driven not primarily by academics but by the needs of the church.[25] Sitting under Professor R. A. Finlayson (1895-1989), who Macleod says made the most 'significant post-War contribution' to theology at the Free Church College, he would have received a thoroughly orthodox introduction to the Reformed faith. Finlayson's typical class was to follow Louis Berkof's *Manual of Reformed Dogmatics* in year one and James Orr's *Progress of Dogma* in the second.[26]

In 1996, Macleod wrote a brief history of the post-1900 Free Church College between 1900 and 1970 which offers an insight into how he understood the institution that educated him and particularly its weaknesses.[27] In it, he argued that the academic prowess of the Free Church College was often hindered by the need to please its most conservative critics who would have

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[21] Catherine Deveney, 'A Church Divided,' *Scotland on Sunday*, March 14, 1999.
[22] Deveney, 'A Church Divided' and 'Logic on fire,' 21.
[23] 'Logic on fire,' 22. In the Free Church, this self-identification is made visible by participating in the Communion Service. Macleod says he was encouraged by the minister at Partick Highland, Malcolm Morrison (1894-1987) to enter into the ministry.
[24] *Free Church of Scotland Matriculation Records*. On average, the other students were ten years older than Macleod. Incidentally, five of the students including Macleod reported that they could speak Gaelic.
[25] Donald Macleod, 'The Free Church College 1900-1970,' in *Disruption to Diversity: Edinburgh Divinity 1846-1996* eds. D.F. Wright and Gary D. Badcock (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 229.
[26] Macleod, 'The Free Church College,' 235.
[27] Macleod, 'The Free Church College,' 235.

seen any engagement with contemporary literature as heterodoxy.[28] His comments on John Macleod's (1872-1948) corpus illustrate the critique:

> In the end the output is disappointing; and much of what there is is merely antiquarian. This may have been because he felt he had nothing new to say. He was conservative by temperament and by conviction and probably thought the last word had been spoken (at least for his generation) by Cunningham, Kennedy and the great doctors of Princeton. Besides, he was a cult figure in the Free Church; and he was as such because he adhered so reassuringly to a past which both he and his admirers venerated. The Church, particularly the laity, trusted him implicitly, and the last thing they wanted from him was the expression of new ideas. One searches John Macleod's writings in vain for a single risky opinion.[29]

Macleod goes on to say that John Macleod's unwillingness to engage with 'unsound' literature (Wrede, Schweitzer, Bultmann, etc.) left him unable to reach the theological heights of the very men he admired like Warfield and Machen.[30] Though John Macleod was gone by the time Donald Macleod arrived at the Free Church College in 1961, he writes as if the older Macleod was emblematic of a rigid conservatism that dominated the Free Church College even in his own time. Of course, these judgements are all made retrospectively some thirty years later. The younger Macleod may have found the academic situation there altogether satisfying.

We can easily piece together the various courses and instructors Macleod took at the College. What is less evident is how Macleod's own views were developing during this time. There is one intriguing anecdote from these years which is suggestive of some of the themes that would dominate Macleod's public theology later in life. In 1962, Macleod spent the summer on

[28] Macleod, 'The Free Church College,' 223. Terms like 'conservative' and 'orthodoxy' are relative, and these definitions shifted over time within the Free Church. In the first half of the twentieth century, Macleod says that for some Scottish, conservative Presbyterians, orthodoxy included beliefs that became far less prevalent in the Free Church, such as holding 'that it was fatal for the authority of Scripture to question the authenticity of the longer ending of Mark and the Johannine Comma.' Macleod, 'The Free Church College,' 228.
[29] Cunningham and Kennedy are William Cunningham and John Kennedy of Dingwall (1818-1884). Macleod, 'The Free Church College,' 232.
[30] Macleod, 'The Free Church College,' 233. There is an important hint in these comments about the influence that the former Westminster Theological Seminary professor John Murray (1898-1975) may have had on Macleod's early theological development. Macleod said it was Murray who suggested to him John Macleod had 'committed intellectual suicide. Here was a brilliant Classics student who could have done some outstanding work in New Testament studies. But that would have meant immersing himself in the world of Wrede and Schweitzer, Bultmann and Dodd, and Macleod had no stomach for that.' Donald Macleod could not have been older than thirty-four at the time of this conversation. Did he decide then that he would never be guilty of the same mistake?

placement preaching in Assynt, a Gaelic-speaking community in the western Highlands.[31] There, he received an altogether different education. He recollects in *The Living Past*:

> Within hours of reaching Assynt I was introduced to the Clearances (a concept I had never met in Lewis); to the Vesteys, the detested local landlords; and to the story of the suffering of previous generations driven from their fertile inland holdings on to the very edge of the Atlantic and forced to live on the limpets they could gather from rocks: rocks pounded even in summer by ferocious seas.'[32]

How significant the revelation of the Clearances and the injustices of the Highlands was to Macleod at the age of twenty-one is unclear, but these events would reappear often in his later writings—so too would the stinging sense of injustice he felt at not being told in full the tragedies of his people until he was already a man.[33]

Preacher (1964-1977)

Kilmallie & Partick Highland Free Church

In the Spring of 1964, Macleod graduated from the Free Church College, passed his examinations in the Free Presbytery of Glasgow, and waited for a ministerial call.[34] 'The other students got a call quite quickly but I wasn't even thirty years old, which maybe wasn't in my favor. I was the last student on our year to get a call.'[35] Finally, the call did come from Kilmallie Free Church, a congregation situated just north of Fort William in the town of Corpach, and Macleod was ordained on 5th November 1964. He was twenty-three.[36]

There is little record of what Macleod's ministry was like during his six years in Corpach. John Macleod records that he preached three times each Sunday including an afternoon service in Gaelic.[37] In addition to his responsibilities at Kilmallie, he also had ministerial responsibilities

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[31] Macleod 'Logic on Fire', 25.
[32] Macleod, *The Living Past*, 73. This anecdote also appears with some further thoughts on the Clearances in Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, September 16, 1994.
[33] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' September 16, 1994.
[34] In the Free Church of Scotland, it is the prerogative of local congregations to seek out and extend a call to a ministerial candidate. The process is almost completely out of the hands of ministerial candidates. This peculiarity originates in the founding Free Church principle that the power of calling a minister belongs entirely in the hands of the local congregation.
[35] *Freumhan*, 20:10.
[36] *Freumhan*, 20:10.
[37] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 27.

for smaller local churches and congregants in the area, keeping regular services at places like 'Kinlochiel, on the road to Mallaig; at Blaich in Ardgour, and at Trislaig, across Loch Linnhe from Fort William itself.'[38] During his time at Kilmallie, the church grew, helped in part by an economic boom that coincided with his arrival. In 1966, the Corpach Pulp Mill opened just down the road from the church bringing hundreds of jobs to the area.[39] As the church and community grew, so did Macleod's own family. Macleod married Mary MacLean in January 1965 and they had three sons: John (b. 1966), Murdo (b. 1967), and Angus (b. 1970).[40]

The final year of Macleod's time in Corpach opened with tragedy when his younger brother, Angus, was found dead from a drug overdose. John Macleod notes that this was an especially difficult time for his father. 'His brother, troubled and brittle, had been a frequent visitor to Corpach.'[41] In a rare public comment on his brother's death, Macleod wrote,

> Angus, my brother, was inside his caravan and no one else could get in. Not a big deal, in the overall scheme of things, but Angus (aged 28) was a self-destructive alcoholic. My father broke in and found him dead. There was no point in asking questions which would never bring him back. Such crises [along with the death of his 15-month-old daughter] my father faced with equanimity, doing what had to be done, hiding the scars, seeking no comfort, putting the past behind him and moving on to the next chapter.[42]

Macleod himself began a new chapter in 1970 by accepting a call to serve as the minister at Partick Highland Free Church, the same congregation he had attended at university. Partick Highland was largely a combination of Gaelic-speaking Highlands and Islands families who had moved south for work and university students.[43] When Macleod arrived, the morning service, the afternoon service, and the midweek prayer meetings were entirely in Gaelic. Only the Sunday

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[38] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 28.
[39] *Freumhan*, 20:45.
[40] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 26.
[41] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 32.
[42] Macleod, 'The House My Father Built.' Macleod went on to write frequently on the problem of alcoholism, particularly in the Highlands. See, 'Drink and the Kaiser: In That Order,' *MR*, January 1978, 3-5; 'Focus: New tract on the Bible and drunkenness,' *MR,* March 1978, 58; 'Three Centuries of British drinking,' *MR*, October 1978, 198; 'Focus: New measures on alcoholism,' *MR*, January 1979, 12; 'Comhairle nan Eilean and the mysteries of alcoholism,' *MR*, November 1979, 212; 'Alcoholism in the Western Isles,' MR, February 1980, 30; 'Focus: Alcoholism in the Islands,' *MR*, January 1983, 12; 'Focus: Ex cathedra statements on alcoholism,' *MR*, May 1986, 112-3.
[43] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 33.

evening service was in English.[44] He would eventually push for more English services but by most other measures the church reflected the Free Church culture of the day. Macleod wore a clerical collar his entire time in Glasgow and as for women's attire, 'it was made plain that any woman who professed faith wore a head-covering in public worship.'[45] Macleod would go on to serve here as a local minister here until 1978.

Preacher - Theologian

Macleod's work as a minister is crucial to understanding his later work as a theologian. In these early years, Macleod considered himself first and foremost a preacher and after leaving the pastorate in his late thirties, he never stopped looking at theology through that lens. 'The theological process does not exist for itself,' Macleod would later write in 1986, 'It exists only as a preparation for preaching. If it does not issue in proclamation, it is an abortion, or a still-birth… If our theology (or any detail in it) is not preachable, its claim to being a theology at all is exceedingly doubtful.'[46] This principles shapes Macleod's own theological process and it is what accounts for an often-remarkable continuity in content between his sermons, lectures, and theological writings.

The homiletical context that seems to have shaped Macleod's theology the most was the Free Church Communion Seasons.[47] Communion Seasons were typically a five-day event running from Thursday to Monday.[48] There was preaching on most or all of the days but the

[44] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 34.
[45] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 36. Macleod later would later spurn both norms. In 1989 he told a gathering of ministers in rather colorful language that his conscience would never again allow him to don the collar. He said, 'I am not prepared anymore to reinforce the idea that here is a witch doctor in the Christian era who can change bread into God. And I would disobey any requirement laid down in that particular connection.' Donald Macleod, 'What I Should Like to Say to Conservative Evangelicals in the Church of Scotland 1,' address to *The Crieff Fellowship*, 1989.
[46] Donald Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology,' in *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Samuel T. Logan, Jr. (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1986), 246.
[47] John Macleod writes that his father's giftedness as preacher led to many invitations to serve as junior minister at Communion Seasons. He also attributes this to Macleod's growing confidence preaching in Gaelic. Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 29.
[48] Donald Macleod, 'The Feill: The Lord's Supper as Feast,' *Theology in Scotland* 15, no. 2 (Autumn 2008), 7-8. Macleod dates the emergence of this tradition to the seventeenth century. Despite its significance to the Free Church, it is not a practice exclusive to that denomination. See Donald Meek, 'Communion Seasons,' in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, David F. Wright, David C. Lachman, and Donald E. Meek (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 200.

climax of the weekend was the 'Action Sermon' given before Communion on the Sabbath.[49] Describing the Communion service and the action sermon, Macleod writes, 'The psalms which were sung, the scriptures which were read and the sermon which was preached were all designed to evoke *eucharist* [thanksgiving] by reminding the congregation of what Christ had done for them on the cross of Calvary.'[50] Action sermons 'glean from the text every detail it can yield as to the sufferings of Christ; and they bring home the gleanings in a language that often glows with passionate, epigrammatic eloquence.'[51]

In a 2010 post-lecture Q&A when one of Macleod's students asked him who had inspired him the most on the issue of divine passibility he responded,

> I think, to be quite frank, it was my preaching that influenced me. I know that eventually I came across Moltmann and so on—*The Crucified God*—way back in the seventies. But by that time my mind was quite clear on it… As I was preaching in my own culture Communion sermons on Sunday mornings which are heuristic sermons and you're reflecting on the Atonement. It seemed to me all the time that I was being pushed in that direction by John 3:16 and the story of Abraham and Isaac, Romans 8:32, John 4, all of which I've used in Communion contexts. And it was these texts, I think, the emphasis on the cost to God the Father which pushed me in these directions…I've been drawn more than most men to the cross, I suppose, as a homiletical subject and I think that as a consequence I've been subject to cross-influenced things. I hope.[52]

The Banner of Truth

An unrelated benefit of Free Church Communion Seasons is that through them Macleod met and was able to develop a relationship with Professor John Murray (1898-1975) of Westminster Theological Seminary.[53] In addition to being a valuable mentor, Murray played a key role in introducing Macleod to the Banner of Truth Trust and its people.[54] In 1967 Macleod

[49]Macleod, 'The Feill,' 9.
[50] Macleod, 'The Feill,' 9.
[51] Macleod, 'The Feill,' 10.
[52] Donald Macleod, 'Divine Impassibility (2),' Systematic Theology 101 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, December 1, 2010).
[53] Murray had recently retired from Westminster and moved back to Scotland. Macleod writes, 'Professor Murray, newly returned from America, was naturally much in demand [at Communion Services] and we spent several memorable weekends together. The conversations begun on these occasions were frequently continued by correspondence and although he must have found the interrogations interesting, he replied assiduously.' 'John Murray: A Book Review and Some Letters,' *MR*, March 1983, 52.
[54] The Banner of Truth Trust was 'a recently founded charity to promote the Reformed doctrine and re-publish significant Reformed literature.' Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 30.

began writing for the *Banner of Truth* magazine and was made an associate editor in 1968.[55] It is here that we get the clearest picture of his theological interests during the 1960s and 1970s. For instance, we can already see in his first article, 'Neglected Aspects of the Cross,' the seeds of what will become a career-long interest.[56] The articles in the *Banner* – ten of which were published before Macleod turned thirty – show a young theologian steeped in the Scottish Reformed tradition and able to restate and defend it deftly.

One of the primary tasks that Macleod set for himself in his *Banner* articles was to defend the Westminster Confession and its doctrines against those who saw it as either doctrinally erroneous or hopelessly outdated.[57] He criticized other denominations whose 'terms of subscription have been so relaxed so that the commitment is no longer to the whole doctrine of the Confession but only so much of it as one deems fundamental or essential.'[58] Macleod argued, commitment to our creeds (including the Confession) 'must be total and cordial.'[59] He granted that the wording of the Confession can be imbalanced and new theological controversies will eventually render it (and any historic confession) obsolete but he himself proposed no error whatsoever.[60]

This is not to say that Macleod's approach always reflected the conservatism of his audience. He stirred an early controversy in the *Banner* by pointing out the faults of the A.V. translation of the Bible and showed an openness to other translations. His article received

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[55] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 31.
[56] The article's subheadings included 'Its Horror' and 'Its Ugliness.' Donald Macleod, 'Neglected Aspects of the Cross,' *The Banner of Truth* 48 (May/June 1967), 9-11, 21.
[57] See for instance, 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (1),' *The Banner of Truth* 51 (November/December 1967), 9-13; 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (2),' *The Banner of Truth* 53 (February 1968), 15-26; 'The Westminster Confession Today,' *The Banner of Truth* 101 (February 1972), 15-26; 'Federal Theology: an oppressive legalism?' *The Banner of Truth* 125 (February 1974), 21-28.
[58] Macleod 'The Westminster Confession Today,' 15.
[59] Macleod, 'The Westminster Confession Today,' 26. One could infer from a brief comment in 1977 that by then, Macleod was at least willing to jettison Confession's assertion that the Pope is the Antichrist. Donald Macleod, 'Letters to the Editor,' *MR*, September 1977, 143.
[60] Macleod, 'The Westminster Confession Today,' 26.

strongly-worded replies and the suspicion that followed Macleod for holding this position lasted decades.[61]

Macleod emphasized the Confession's statement on Christian liberty, which he would later use as an apologetic for some of his own more controversial political and cultural stances.[62] He also used this doctrine to challenge many of the long-held conservative, evangelical traditions of his day. He wrote,

> There are many rules and prohibitions which have no Biblical authority but are so firmly embedded in the evangelical tradition that many Christians are emotionally unable to distinguish them from the will of God. They forbid—to mention a few examples—the use of alcoholic liquor, participation in many forms of recreation, certain modes of dress and even membership of political parties. Stern, negative attitudes on these and associated questions are too often almost constitutive of evangelicalism.[63]

The Confession, he says, 'delineates the whole of his [a Christian's] theological commitment; and equally the whole of his freedom.'[64]

In later years, Macleod's commitment to the Confession would become no less vocal, but it did become more nuanced. In a 1998 article, Macleod suggests the possibility of subscribing to every *doctrine* of the Confession without endorsing every *statement* therein, writing that, 'many of us [in the Free Church] believe that our current relation to the Confession leaves us total freedom to challenge such long-standing theological assumptions as divine impassibility.'[65]

Editor and Professor (1977-2000)

The end of the 1970s marked three important transitions in Macleod's career. First, in May 1977 the Free Church of Scotland General Assembly elected Donald Macleod to serve as the new editor of the *Monthly Record*.[66] Then in the following General Assembly of 1978, he was

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[61] Donald Macleod, 'The Bible and Textual Criticism,' *The Banner of Truth* 105 (June 1972), 11-18. He later published a defense of the original article. See, Macleod, 'The Bible and Textual Criticism,' *The Banner of Truth* 111 (December 1972), 12-26.

[62] 'God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.' *WCF* 20.2.

[63] Donald Macleod, 'Liberty of Conscience,' *The Banner of Truth* 94-95 (July/August 1971), 3.

[64] Macleod, 'The Westminster Confession Today,' 18.

[65] 'The Highland churches today,' 149-50. In the same way, Macleod would affirm that the Pope is not the head of the Church while denying the Confession's assertion that the Pope is the antichrist.

[66] The vote was a tie between Donald Macleod and Fergus MacDonald, minister of Cumbernauld Free Church. The tie was broken by the acting moderator. G. N. M. Collins, 'Reporting the General Assembly 1977.' *MR,* June 1977,

elected to serve as the professor of Systematic Theology at the Free Church College.[67] For a brief time, Macleod was a local minister, an editor, and a professor, but ultimately (and reluctantly) he relinquished his role at Partick Highland and the family moved to Edinburgh in March of 1980.[68] This third transition away from the pastorate was the most bitter for Macleod but he continued to preach regularly across Scotland.

The *Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland* (*MR*) is the is the denomination's official magazine, publishing a range of content including theological essays, international religious news, missional reports, editorials, and sermons.[69] Macleod saw his editorship from 1977 to 1990 as a calling and in it he produced some of his best-known work.[70] Space does not afford the opportunity to consider Macleod's *Monthly Record* commentaries in-depth but two aspects of his writing help provide the context for later developments in his biography: his commentaries on the Free Church and on politics.

Free Church Commentary

Macleod's first article, 'Peculiar People,' was emblematic of his observations about the Free Church. In it, he highlights the distinctives of the denomination, several of which he argued were essential. For instance, the Free Church is 'peculiar' in its commitment to the Westminster Confession and to exclusive psalmody.[71] But not all its peculiarities are equally valuable. He

99. While Macleod is listed as the editor for the June *MR*, he credits Collins in the following issue of editing that month and providing the General Assembly reporting.

[67] Macleod succeeded James Mackintosh (1907-1996). 'Appointments to the Free Church College,' *MR*, July/August 1978, 153.

[68] The Free Church considered the College post a pastoral call and Macleod was not allowed to have two calls at once. John Macleod also suggests that his father's attempt to balance the three jobs at once became impossible. It is not clear when Macleod gave up preaching at Partick Highland because he also served there for a time as interim-moderator. Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 38.

[69] Iain D. Campbell (1963-2017) has provided the fullest overview to date on the Macleod's work in the *Monthly Record.* See Campbell, 'Editor of The Monthly Record,' in *The People's Theologian*: *Writings in Honour of Donald Macleod*, 61-6.

[70] Macleod said to an audience of pastors in 1982, 'If I have any calling, it is at the moment the journalistic calling.' Macleod, 'The Crucified God,' address to the Carey Conference, Swanwick, England, January 13, 1982.

[71] Later in the article Macleod laments that the Free Church and the Free Presbyterian Church exist since they shared all of these peculiarities. However, he largely blamed the Free Presbyterians for the continuing divide. 'The only danger [to union] is that the Free Presbyterian Church in its determination to be different will move further and further away from its Reformation heritage and deprive its ministers and members of that liberty in things indifferent which is one of the most precious legacies of our common past.' Donald Macleod, 'Peculiar People', *MR,* July/August 1977, 112.

writes that if the Free Church is to survive it must recognize the cultural barriers that it presents to unbelievers. 'We are in grave danger of finding ourselves in a situation where it is a condition of membership that we must be not only Christian believers but also Highlanders, at least by adoption.'[72] In a later article he is more specific:

> There is a clear distinction between what is Highland and what is Free Church; and the one can easily exist without the other. The insistence on a special fencing of the Lord's Table; giving baptism to the infants of mere adherents; having a collection plate at the door instead of taking an offering during the service; standing to pray and sitting to sing; placing a taboo on music and drama but not on tobacco or alcohol—it is none of these things that makes a Free Church. However meaningful and valid they may be in a particular context, we have no right to transport them to Glasgow and Edinburgh, London and North America, and insist that they are essential to confessional Christianity.[73]

Related to this problem for Macleod was that the Free Church had a myopic view of its theological inheritance. It rightly celebrated John Kennedy of Dingwall (1819-1884), but it could not see that the Free Church of the Disruption was much broader than Kennedy alone.[74] On the centenary of Kennedy's death, Macleod proposed a wider vision for who the Free Church should consider as its true fathers. He wrote, 'If we want to know what "the Fathers" taught, it is not enough to consult John Kennedy and Lachlan MacKenzie [1754-1819], great men of God though they undoubtedly were. We have to listen also to Tertullian, Athanasius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin and many others.'[75]

It was bold enough for Macleod to use the anniversary of John Kennedy's death to point beyond him, but Macleod goes further. He concluded by saying that the Free Church must avoid

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[72] Donald Macleod, 'Peculiar People,' 111.

[73] Donald Macleod, 'The Free Church and the Highlands,' *MR*, November 1980, 196. A foreboding letter to the editor was penned by Rev. Hugh Cartwright (1943-2011) in response:

> Like many others I appreciate the relevance and sagacity of much of the material coming from your pen, and the interest-provoking manner of your presentation. This, however, makes one regret all the more those occasions when statements are made which confuse if they do not mislead. At last I feel constrained to register a protest against what I think is your tendency to dismiss, as merely cultural and optional, certain customs which distinguish our practice from that of other more or less reformed Churches…

Hugh Cartwright, 'Letters to the Editor: The Free Church and the Highlands,' *MR*, January 1981, 20. Twenty years later, Cartwright would go on to become one Macleod's chief critics. In the late 1990s he left the Free Church to join the Free Presbyterian Church.

[74] Macleod, 'The Free Church and the Highlands,' *MR,* November 1980, 196.

[75] Donald Macleod, 'Our Fathers, Where Are They?' *MR*, May 1984, 100.

'the temptation to escape into the past. The constant reading of seventeenth and eighteenth century theology often reflects a Freudian death-wish—the longing to flee from the rigours of the present to the security of history.' For all that was admirable in Kennedy, Macleod said that Kennedy's singular weakness was his inability to challenge his own tradition when necessary. Contrary to Kennedy's example, Macleod argued that we must be willing at times 'to incur the displeasure of our own constituency':

> [Kennedy] accepted his own tradition as virtually definitive and final. As a result he was lauded and lionised by the only public whose opinion he valued. Maybe, as a Highlander, he needed that. Maybe we need it too—the reassurance that the clan agrees with us. But our need does not make it right. Kennedy's struggles ensured the survival of the Free Church, but part of the price was that the process of internal reform and development ceased because of the pressure of external threats. We acquired a siege mentality which saw all criticism as treachery and all innovation as heresy. For a hundred years our tradition ossified. Today, a new generation of Free Church people are asking new questions and proposing new initiatives. These may be the harbingers of new life or the onset of death-throes. The choice is our own. If we answer by remote, authoritarian edict we shall die. If we listen in love and offer real answers, we shall live.[76]

In no way should these ideas be interpreted as a wholesale rejection of the Scottish Reformed tradition on the part of Macleod. In fact, many have argued that his own retrieval of Scottish theology was one of his most significant contributions.[77] Nevertheless, these critiques reveal something of Macleod's vision for a renewed Free Church whose theological and cultural engagement would extend far beyond the narrow walls it had—in Macleod's mind—too often sheltered behind in the past.

Importantly, these comments also give us a glimpse into Macleod's own theological development. Compared to his writings in the *Banner of Truth,* Macleod's work in the 1980s and onwards reflects a growing acquaintance with both the Patristics and contemporary theology, even as the ideas of Westminster federalism remained the ballast of his theological framework. Iain D. Campbell rightly notes how Macleod used the *Monthly Record* to engage critically with contemporary theologians like John Hick (1922-2012), James Barr (1924-2006), and T. F.

[76] Macleod, 'Our Fathers Where Are They?' 101.
[77] Alex MacDonald 'Introduction,' in *The People's Theologian*, 8.

Torrance (1913-2007).[78] That contemporary engagement was not always adversarial. Take, for instance, Macleod's critical appropriation of Jürgen Moltmann. In 1982, Macleod published two consecutive articles entitled 'The Crucified God,' borrowing from Moltmann's 1974 work by the same name.[79] Macleod writes, 'some might think he [Moltmann] were better left unmentioned in our pure and august pages. The trouble is, we owe him not only the title of this article but a good deal of the theological stimulus besides it and it would be immoral to borrow without acknowledging our debt.'[80] For Macleod who had already made the atonement central to his thinking, Moltmann was a refreshing, if heterodox, conversation partner who saw the cross as essential to Christian dogmatics and ethics as he did.

Political Commentary

Macleod garnered the most attention in the *Monthly Record* for the political stances he took in his editorial 'Focus' column. Under his editorship, the magazine became 'required reading in the newsrooms of Scotland' but within the Free Church, that political commentary was not always welcome. [81] As Fraser MacDonald writes, 'Throughout his editorship of *The Monthly Record*, Donald Macleod pursued an increasingly radical agenda, using his 'Focus' column to make explicit his commitment to socialist politics.'[82] Macleod did not introduce political commentary into the *Monthly Record,* but his own political positions diverged significantly from that of his predecessors.[83] He recalled in one interview, 'I was responsible for dealing with public questions. The *Monthly Record* had always dealt with politics but had done so from a *Daily*

[78] See, for example, Donald Macleod, 'Atheists With an Interest in Religion,' *MR*, October 1977, 151-3; 'Fundamentalism Barred,' *MR*, December 1977, 191-3; 'Did Christ Have a Fallen Human Nature?' *MR*, March 1984, 51-3. This last critique does not mention Torrance explicitly but it received a strongly-worded reply from him in the following month's Letters to the Editor. T. F. Torrance, 'Letters to the Editor: Christ's human nature,' 114.
[79] Donald Macleod, 'The Crucified God (1),' *MR*, March 1982, 51-2; 'The Crucified God (2),' *MR*, April 1982, 75-7. These two essays were combined with minor editing and included as a single chapter in *From Glory to Golgotha*. See also, Moltmann, *The Crucified God*.
[80] Macleod, 'The Crucified God (1),' 51. In January of the same year, Macleod gave a sermon at the Carey Conference which largely follows the outline of the two articles, demonstrating the fluidity of Macleod's thought between sermon and writing.
[81] Wilson, 'Footnotes Columnist,' 56.
[82] Macleod, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre,' 129.
[83] Most recently, the magazine had been edited by J.W. Fraser (1973-1977) and G. N. M. Collins (1958-73).

Telegraph viewpoint. The *Monthly Record* used to criticize anybody who went on strike and the unions. The churches alienated these workers and I came to the conclusion that not only was it wrong but it was foolish.'[84]

In his columns, Macleod covered all the major political and cultural issues of his day, but his most conspicuous antagonist was the Thatcher Government whose dates (1979-1990) overlapped almost perfectly with his own editorship. Macleod was a critic of the Thatcher government almost from the start and as the years wore on his critiques became much more pointed.[85] When Mrs. Thatcher came to speak at the Church of Scotland General Assembly in 1988, Macleod's response was fierce. 'Pelagianism,' he wrote in the next *MR*, 'is the fatally flawed foundation of Thatcherism.'[86] He said that Thatcher wrongly assumes that if we let the wealthy do what they want with their money, they will naturally be generous, and that poverty is always a choice. His conclusion was this:

> The problem with Mrs Thatcher's visit to Scotland is that she always comes to teach, not to learn; to lecture, not to listen. Next time she should avoid triumphal entries to places of circumstance and go where she can see and hear and touch and smell the problems. Let her go for a walk in Wester Hailes (by no means the worst area in Scotland) at 11 o'clock on a Friday night (without publicity, but *with* escort). She would learn something of the resigned dignity of the poor; the simplistic folly of blaming it all on the parents; the soul-destroying, claustrophobic oppressiveness of a concrete jungle; and the pained confusion of divine image-bearers who have never had an answer to that most Scottish of all questions: What do you do?[87]

Political commentaries like this one are important in understanding Macleod's own biography in part because the controversies they elicited were one precursor to the Free Church conflicts of the 1990s that eventually led to a split in 2000.[88] What has received almost no attention, however, is the fact that Macleod's political commentaries are also firmly rooted in

[84] *Freumhan*, 30:50. The *Telegraph* is known for its right-leaning political stances. Asked if he was ever concerned about what he wrote, Macleod said, 'If I ever feared voicing my opinions, I would be afraid of that fear and humiliated by it, but it wouldn't stop me.' *Freumhan,* 33:25.
[85] For an early critique see Macleod, 'Government spending cuts: how much does a beggar need?' *MR*, December 1979, 234.
[86] Macleod, 'Mrs Thatcher and the Kingdom,' *MR*, June 1988, 130.
[87] Macleod, 'Mrs Thatcher and the Kingdom,' 131.
[88] MacDonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre, 127-32.

Macleod's own theological framework, one which he applies with remarkable consistency. It is a framework which, as Chapter Seven shows, is not unrelated to his views of divine passibility. Macleod's public theology is best understood as an application of his principle of 'seeing things from below.'[89] The phrase comes from a letter Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) wrote to a friend from prison in which he said that prison had taught him to see the events of world history from the perspective of the poor and the outsider.[90] In explaining his own appropriation of the principle, Macleod wrote:

> Christianity, in the words of the much-misunderstood Dietrich Bonhoeffer, must 'see things from below'. Its vantage-point is the stable at Bethlehem and the cross at Golgotha. Its natural branches are not the wise, the mighty and the noble, but the poor, the imprisoned and broken-hearted…the natural bias of Christianity is towards the lower end of the social scale and…its whole instinct is to protest relentlessly against that structured injustice which traps men and women not only in poverty but often in immorality and godlessness as well.[91]

Macleod argued that in the public sphere, the Christian must stand in solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, and the outcast. It must see the world through their eyes and make their causes its causes. This 'view from below' represented the confluence of a surprising number of influences including nineteenth century Free Church theologians like Thomas Chalmers and James Begg, Latin American Liberation theology, Dutch Neo-Calvinism, and the exegesis of a select number of New Testament texts (most notably Philippians 2:6-11).[92]

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[89] Donald Macleod, 'Seeing things from below,' *MR*, October 1984, 217. See also, 'The Christian and the State,' in *Social Issues and the Local Church,* ed. Ian Shaw (Bath: Evangelical Press of Wales, 1988), 71-4; *Freumhan*, 36:00.

[90] Bonhoeffer writes, 'We have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.' *Letters and Papers from Prison* ed. Eberhard Bethge (London: SCM Press, 1971), 17.

[91] Macleod, 'Seeing things from below,' 217.

[92] Macleod often emphasized Begg's and Chalmer's fight against poverty in nineteenth century and their willingness not only to help the poor but to advocate for political reform along those lines. See Donald Macleod, 'Thomas Chalmers: The Practical and the Pious,' *MR*, March 1986, 55-7. Similarly, Macleod showed a keen interest in the Kuyper's political engagement and used Kuyper's example to defend some of his own political positions. See, 'Politics and Spirituality,' *MR,* February 1987, 27-9. In a recent article, I have highlighted the parallels between Macleod's work and that of Latin American liberation theology. See, Hunter Nicholson, 'Donald Macleod: Free Church liberation theologian?'

Professor

While Macleod's work in the *Monthly Record* garnered the attention of the wider Free Church and beyond, his work as professor of systematic theology at the Free Church College was no less influential. In fact, it may be here more than anywhere that Macleod has left his most enduring mark on the theology of the Free Church. The Free Church College in Edinburgh (now Edinburgh Theological Seminary) is the only training seminary for Free Church candidates and for thirty-three years virtually every future Free Church minister sat under Macleod for their training in systematic theology. So widespread was the reach of his teaching that in 2011, John Macleod could write that only three ministers serving in the Free Church had not studied under Macleod.[93] Between his influence through the *Monthly Record* and the fact that all Free Church candidates were virtually required to sit under his teaching to pursue ordination, Macleod became one of the most (if not the most) influential figure of the post-1900 Free Church.

Macleod's involvement in the *Monthly Record*, his role at the Free Church College, and his preaching and teaching across the country goes some ways to explain why his publications were comparatively small during this period. His first book, *The Spirit of Promise,* was a collection of essays originally published in the *Monthly Record* which served as a cessationist apology against late twentieth-century charismatic influences within British evangelicalism.[94] A second small work entitled *Rome and Canterbury, a view from Geneva*, expressed growing concerns about the Anglican – Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) which sought to strengthen ecumenical ties between the Anglican and Roman Catholic Church.[95] However his most well-known book from this period was *Shared Life,* which was an exposition of the Trinity and its implications for the

[93] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 46.
[94] The most notable of these influences was Martyn Lloyd Jones (1889-1981). Donald Macleod, *The Spirit of Promise* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1986).
[95] Donald Macleod, *Rome and Canterbury, a view from Geneva* (Tain: Christian Focus Publications, 1989).

church and society.[96] Though written at a popular level, it demonstrates some of the key themes of Macleod's trinitarian theology.

Columnist in Conflict (1990-1999)

The West Highland Free Press

Macleod stepped down as editor at *The Monthly Record* in 1990. By 1993, he had found a new journalism role as a columnist at the *West Highland Free Press* (*WHFP*). The newspaper is known for its decidedly left-wing politics, which made it a natural fit for Macleod. Brian Wilson (1942-), a former minister in the Tony Blair government and the paper's co-founder admitted that 'it would be disingenuous to pretend that… Donald Macleod's espousal of the Labour cause at recent General Elections did not encourage the decision to invite him to write for the *Free Press*.'[97] Beyond this consideration, Macleod was also an attractive choice because Wilson called him 'by far the most literate and stimulating columnist writing in the Scottish press.'[98] Macleod's column was called 'Footnotes,' after his nickname, 'Donnie Foot.'[99]

Given the change in audience, there are subtle shifts in Macleod's style between the *WHFP* and the *Monthly Record.* In the *WHFP* Macleod is far more apologetic about the Christian faith even if that apology often takes the form of pointing to leaders to his theological right and left and in effect saying, 'These people do not represent my religion!' The hundreds of articles Macleod wrote between 1993 and 2014 offer a fascinating example of theology in the public square where Macleod continually sought to apply the tenets of his faith to the political issues of the day in a way was both comprehensible and attractive to his audience.

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[96] Donald Macleod, *Shared Life: The Trinity & The Fellowship of God's People* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 1994). The book was originally published by Christian Union in 1987. *Shared Life* reads as an expansion of the ideas Macleod lays out in his 1986 article, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity,' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 3, no. 1 (1985): 11-21.

[97] Brian Wilson, 'Footnotes Columnist in *The West Highland Free Press*,' in *The People's Theologian: Writings in Honour of Donald Macleod*, 56. Macleod had publicly endorsed the Western Isles Labour candidate in 1992. Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 41.

[98] Wilson, 'Footnotes Columnist,' 59.

[99] On the use of nicknames or bynames in the Western Isles, see Ellen Branwell, 'Community Bynames in the Western Isles' (paper presentation, Society for Name Studies in Britain and Ireland, Bristol, April 2006).

One example of this was Macleod's stance against the proposed Harris Superquarry. This project was expected to remove six hundred million tons of rocks over thirty years from the Isle of Harris.[100] Macleod interpreted the problem of the Superquarry through the lens of theology in a way that appealed far beyond the doors of the church. In one article, he ponders out loud what God could have to do with Roineabhal, the hill where the quarry would be built.

> Nothing, I suppose, except that he made it and that He is under the impression that He still owns it. Besides, I think He's rather proud of it, as you and I would be if we had sculpted Michelangelo's *David* or composed Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*… Roineabhal is part of His glory, and before we smash it, it would be courteous to ask Him if He has any objections. We are, after all, His tenants, and one day, beyond all hazards, He will insist on his own inquiry. That thought should always follow us fairly closely. Before we hang a man or start guddling about in the human gene-pool or hurl missiles at the people of Iraq or ship away the crust of the earth it would always be wise to check that we have the permission of the Great Landlord.[101]

As a result of commentaries like this and because of his standing in the Highlands and Islands, Macleod was often invited to speak publicly on similar issues from a theological perspective.[102]

Writing Through Trials

What is also clear from reading the 'Footnotes' during the 1990s is that Macleod himself unavoidably became one of the leading stories of that decade. Fraser MacDonald has written at length about the conflicts that surrounded Macleod in the 1990s and the way that it related to larger conflicts within the Free Church. We can only briefly allude to these events, but in doing so we can see some of Macleod's distinctive writing during this time.

The central event of Macleod's life during the 1990s was the widely publicized trial in April of 1996 where Macleod faced six charges of sexual assault from five different women.[103] Prior to the civil trial, the Free Church wrestled for several years about how to handle the

[100] Harry Barton, 'The Isle of Harris Superquarry: Concepts of the Environment and Sustainability,' *Environmental Values* 5, no. 2 (May 1996): 99.
[101] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, October 25, 1996.
[102] See for instance, the report of a speech Macleod delivered at the Scottish Crofter's Union before Prince Charles. Donald Macleod, 'We sing today not the landlord's song…', *The Crofter*, May 1993. See also Donald Macleod, 'Land Reform and Human Values,' in *Understanding Land Reform in Scotland: Report of the Conference of 6 March 1988* ed. Robin Callander and Andy Wightman (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh, 1998), 52-4; Alastair McIntosh, 'Public Inquiry on the Proposed Harris Superquarry: Witness on the Theological Considerations concerning Superquarrying and the Integrity of Creation,' *Journal of Law and Religion* 11, no. 2 (1994-1995), 783-4.
[103] MacDonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre,' 134.

allegations. The 1994 and 1995 General Assemblies of the Free Church of Scotland were both presented with allegations of misconduct against Macleod and both assemblies dismissed the charges, though not without dissent. The conclusive decision of the 1995 GA was that the Training and Ministry Committee had investigated the charges and that there was found 'no evidence capable of proving in the Courts of the Church censurable conduct on the part of the Rev. Professor Donald Macleod.'[104]

Nonetheless, the allegations were passed on to Lothian and Borders police and the case went to trial in April 1996. Crucially, Macleod's defense team argued that these accusations were the result of a wider conspiracy by his enemies to discredit him. The trial lasted for two months, making regular fodder for national news coverage, and the court eventually declared Macleod not guilty on all charges. 'The acquittal was accompanied by an unprecedented 90-minute speech by [Sherriff John] Horsburgh who concluded that the women had lied in the witness box to further the ends of Macleod's critics.'[105]

From a legal perspective, Macleod was vindicated, and the court's ruling offered what many hoped would be a conclusion to the years-long controversy. In reality, Sheriff Horsburgh's verdict actually heightened tensions within the Free Church because as he asserted Macleod's innocence, he also accused other ministers and leaders *by name* of conspiring to condemn an innocent man. Over the next four years tensions within the Free Church escalated to a breaking point until January 19, 2000, when a group of ministers, largely dissatisfied that no actions had been taken against Macleod (both in regards to his personal life and his theology), left the Free Church to form the Free Church of Scotland (Continuing).[106] The name was an indication that

[104] *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland convened at Edinburgh May 1995* (Edinburgh: Free Church of Scotland, 1995), 57-8. At both the level of the Training and Ministry Committee which investigated the charges and the General Assembly, decisions about the charges were not unanimous. See MacDonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre,' 132-4.
[105] MacDonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre,' 134. In the quote, Sheriff Hornsburgh references the fact that in the Scottish legal system, it would have been possible for Macleod to receive a verdict of 'not proven' rather than the 'not guilty' verdict which he did receive.
[106] MacDonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre,' 142. John Keddie has recently written an historical account of the division in 2000 which is sympathetic towards the Free Church (Continuing) in *A Divided Church: An Account of the Division of the Free Church of Scotland* (Kirkhill: Scottish Reformed Heritage Publications, 2018).

though this group was leaving the official Free Church, they considered themselves the true inheritors of the Free Church's heritage.

What complicates the history of this period as it relates to Macleod is that his personal life and his theology were on trial at the very same time. For example, four months after Macleod was acquitted in civil court, the Training of Ministry Committee considered investigating him for heresy related to his lax views on exclusive psalmody.[107]

To some of the more conservative members within the Free Church, Macleod represented a challenge to the orthodoxy of the denomination on so many different issues that he began to symbolize a larger perceived shift within the Free Church towards liberalism. Many of these concerns were highlighted in a speech given by Angus Smith (1938-2019) during the period in which Macleod's civil trial was also ongoing.[108] Smith was the long-time minister of Cross Free Church in Lewis and Macleod's key opponent during the 1990s.[109] In an hour-long address, Smith offered a list of ways in which certain Free Church leaders threatened the church. Macleod is never mentioned by name but Smith's reference to the danger that one single charismatic leader can have on a denomination made his target clear.

'How important it is,' Smith told his audience, 'that church magazines are not in the hands of those who will subvert with their teaching.'[110] There was at present, he suggested, a clear attack on Highland Evangelicalism. 'There are some who sneer at it as something inferior—those who say that they are superior and that they have a gospel which is "loving" and "caring" and "helps vulnerable people."' Smith said that some men now ignore God's teachings on judgement and Hell and focus more on humanitarian efforts than the gospel.[111] He also warned

[107] MacDonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre,' 135.
[108] Adding to the public intrigue of Smith's antagonism was the fact that he and Macleod were related by marriage.
[109] Angus Smith, 'The Relevance of James Begg's Convictions for Today,' address, James Begg Society, May 17, 1996, http://nesherchristianresources.org/JBS/publications/audio.html. MacDonald has argued when Smith was Moderator of the Free Church General Assembly ten years before, he used his Moderator's Address to make an implicit attack on Macleod. Macdonald, 'Scenes of Ecclesiastical Theatre,' 130.
[110] Smith, 'The Relevance of James Begg.'
[111] Compare this criticism to Macleod's comments two years earlier in the *WHFP*: 'I am constantly amazed when I hear young men preach. The bad news they cram into their preaching is quite staggering. They regale us with endless statistics designed to prove in what a dark and cloudy day we live…[but] the Church's specialty is neither gloom or

about the danger of feminism (particularly the idea of female eldership), the growth of Roman Catholicism in Scotland, and the move away from exclusive psalmody and from the Authorized Version of the Bible.[112] He closed by highlighting ecclesiastical problems within the Free Church, many of which revolved around the outsized influence of the Edinburgh Presbytery (where all Free Church professors were members).

As the outcry against Macleod from those who shared Smith's concerns grew, so did the intensity of Macleod's responses in his 'Footnotes'. Prior to the trial, Macleod made little to no reference to the assault allegations against himself, but he wrote regularly against those who accused him of heterodoxy. In the same month of his trial, he wrote about the allegations of his liberalism:

> Well I'm not going to deny the charge. The illiberalism which has so long plagued the Highlands has turned me in to a raving liberal. I believe, for example, in liberty of thought and freedom of expression. I hold my own views firmly and reserve the right to express them uninhibitedly. I insist on the right of others to do the same, be they Muslims, Marxists, Creation Scientists or the Wee-est-of-all-Frees. I deplore censorship, official secret acts, heresy sniffers and gaggers of all species; and I have no respect for men who, under a guise of communicating with the world, are in fact only trying to impress their friends.[113]

Would Macleod have made similar statements in the 1980s? Perhaps, but there does seem to be a discernible shift in his theology in the 1990s. The most evident example of this is probably on issues of women's leadership in the church. As late as 1989, Macleod was adamant: 'There is no doubt as to what the Bible says about the ordination of women. In every instance where it faces the issue, it forbids it. How can evangelicals set that aside?'[114]

His position seemed to have softened by May of 1996 when, in a *WHFP* column, Macleod reopened (or at the very least laid the groundwork for reopening) that question:

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doom; neither towering moral prescription nor threats of Hell. Her specialty is that she, alone among earthly institutions, has good news: God is love, God took our nature; God understands our pain; God forgives our sin; God works everything together for good.' Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, May 27, 1994.

[112] The Free Church in the twentieth century was marked by an acute fear of Catholic encroachment in Scotland. See, for example, William Macleod, *"Steadfast in the Faith": The Witness and Principles of the Free Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: The Publications Committee of the Free Church of Scotland, 1943), 72-3. Many viewed Macleod's public engagement with Catholic leaders as a betrayal of the Free Church witness against Catholicism.

[113] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, June 7, 1996.

[114] Donald Macleod, 'Women and war,' *MR*, March 1989, 61.

> Neither the clergy nor the structures of the Free Church have caught up with the social revolution which has thrown women into prominence in all walks of life…. Today, Free Church women are head teachers, university lecturers, clinical psychologists, directors of social work, medical consultants, financial directors, glider pilots and mountaineers… In their ordinary work, they are accustomed to admiration and respect. In the church they are nobodies. Their views are disregarded… Their contribution is not even invited. It hurts; and it hurts not because they want power but because…they see men botching tasks they could do with their eyes shut. They are not inferior, and nothing in the world will ever convince them that they are. I have heard this dismissed as feminism. That is too convenient. Feminism is a legitimate protest of the human spirit against centuries of discrimination and oppression. Too often churchmen assume that the only thing the bible says about women is that they should keep silent. That is a travesty…Women, equally with men, are equipped to serve. The church has to reckon with these realities and make grateful use of women's brains, women's organizational skills and women's emotional stamina and powers of empathy.'[115]

The next year Macleod would write, 'Today, they [women] should not have to claim a place or plead for a ministry in the church. It is theirs by right. They should simply get on with it. Seeking permission merely gives boys of all ages a chance to be awkward.'[116] His view towards women was one way in which Macleod distinguished himself from his more conservative opponents. The cause for his shift is not obvious but throughout the rest of his career, Macleod's endorsement of women's ordination only became more explicit.[117]

Nowhere does one sense the conflicts of the 1990s and the theological issues that revolved around them in Macleod's writing more evidently than in the single article he wrote directly addressing his exoneration in the sexual assault trial. In an intensely personal and highly polemical column entitled 'Better the heresy that loves than the orthodoxy that hates,' Macleod positioned his own trial within a number of larger narratives of injustice in Presbyterianism and in Scotland as a whole. He called those who conspired against him English Neo-Puritans who were 'determined to reform the church (or other people's church) even if that means blowing it to smithereens.' He continued,

> Men of this kind pursue the illusion of a church comprising none but the truly converted and a ministry comprising none but the truly Reformed. Emphatically Separatist, their war-cry is 'Guilt by association!' and their most potent weapon is ecclesiastical blackmail: 'We cannot continue to be associated with you unless you expel Donald Macleod!' These

[115] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, May 3, 1996.
[116] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, April 4, 1997.
[117] Macleod explicitly endorses women's ordination in 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, November 30, 2012.

> men were once my friends… That was my mistake. Today, I have nothing in common with them. Even where our beliefs coincide, I hold these beliefs in a different way, for different reasons and for different purposes…to clear their own names and vindicate their own brand of churchmanship these men would gladly have seen me go to prison. Let that be their epitaph. Henceforth, I shall be happier to walk with the heresy that loves than with the orthodoxy that hates…
>
> [As for the involvement of those in the Free Church,] what was done to me did not come from the spirit of Thomas Chalmers, Robert McCheyne and other great figures of Scottish Evangelicalism…This movement never had any respect for Thomas Chalmers. It deplored his support for Catholic Emancipation, dismissed him as "uncouth worldly" and was always contemptuous of the lower attainments and laxer standards of the church in the south [of Scotland]. Profoundly censorious and judgmental, it prided itself on its ability to identify hypocrites and its zeal against apostasy. Every spiritual phenomenon, from the Pope to the "New International Version", came under its self-righteous lash. I was never part of this; but I was culpably blind to the inroads which it was making into the Free Church…
> I know what kind of church I dream of: one that lives in the gospels; one where individuals are more important than the institution, and love more important than theological propositions; one where the worship takes account of the incarnation and sings the name of Jesus; one without membership lists from which power-crazy men can erase my name; one where as many decisions as possible are taken at the local level; one where forms of worship and administration are tailored to the needs of evangelicalism; one which is always hearing the cry of the poor and the groan of the speechless.[118]

For his opponents, articles like this confirmed their worst suspicions about Macleod's theology. He was a dangerous liberalizing force within the Free Church. However, it is important here to recognize one of the complexities of interpreting Macleod's thought across his corpus. Depending on what medium of communication in which one approaches Macleod, one walks away with a very different impression of the man. On the pages of the *Monthly Record* and the *West Highland Free Press* Macleod was openly political and his attention was largely driven by contemporary events. Much of his work was undergirded by his theology but the depth of that theology did not lie on the surface. Whereas if one were acquainted with Macleod exclusively through his books—as would have almost certainly been the case for Macleod's international audience—one would have no idea why he was so controversial in his own context.

Indeed, the controversies of the 1990s should not obscure the consistency of the rest of his work, especially in the classroom and in his theological writings. Macleod continued to teach

[118] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, July 5, 1996.

courses at the Free Church College throughout the decade. He also published three important books: *Behold Your God*, *A Faith to Live By*, and *The Person of Christ*. The first of these was largely a collection of earlier articles Macleod had written for the *Monthly Record* and elsewhere. *A Faith to Live By* was a summary of Christian doctrine written at a popular level, mostly based on public lectures he had given in the early 1990s.

Finally, in 1998, he published *The Person of Christ*. This was his most comprehensive work of theology to date. It is here that we find the fullest expression of Macleod's Christology. The book is organized as a twentieth-century exposition of Nicene and Chalcedonian Christology. There is little to no explicit reference to divine passibility, and yet as this thesis will show, Macleod's articulation of Christological doctrines such as *kenosis* and *homoousios* are key assumptions in his argument for passibility.

We cannot say with any certainty how Macleod's civil trial impacted the rest of his career and what opportunities that otherwise may have been opened to him were shut over the suspicions surrounding him. A 1999 in-depth piece on Macleod in *Scotland on Sunday* summed up the pain of that question well. Catherine Deveney wrote of Macleod,

> He would like to lead the [Free Church] college [as Principal] but does not believe it likely. His influence in the church seems at an end. 'I've come to the point where I can't change anything. I'm disqualified…I'm not asking for reparation. I just want the rest of my life back. The trouble is, there is not much of the rest of my life left.'…There is a sense of waste surrounding Macleod, of potential that withered on the vine. Becoming Principal is his last chance at influencing the future direction of the Church. But he could so easily slip now into the cold comfort of 'the-best-they-never-had' category.[119]

In the event, Macleod was indeed elected as Principal of the Free Church College in 1999.[120] Between his new role at the College and the Free Church split in the following year, a new chapter opened for Macleod.

[119] Deveney, 'A Church Divided.'
[120] Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 48.

Principal and Retirement (2000-2023)

In the years after the 2000 split within the Free Church, Macleod continued to do much of what he had always done: teach, write, and preach, though now there was the added responsibility of Principal of the Free Church College. As a columnist, Macleod continued to write for the *West Highland Free Press* until 2014.[121] Beginning in 2021, Macleod began writing for the *Stornoway Gazette*, another regional paper based in Lewis and now edited by Brian Wilson. His final article column was published on April 20, 2023, one month before his passing. With that, he ended a near continuous discourse with the public on current events for forty-five years.[122]

Ecclesiastical Reform

As Principal, Macleod brought about some of the most important reforms at the Free Church College since its founding. Most notably he helped achieve accreditation of its Bachelor of Theology program through the University of Glasgow in 2001. Initially, Macleod had worked closely with the University of Edinburgh for the same purpose, but its divinity faculty rejected the proposal at the last minute. Macleod asserted in a *Monthly Record* article that what ultimately persuaded Edinburgh's faculty against the proposal was professor Larry Hurtado's negative 'experience of right-wing seminaries in North America.'[123] In the article, Macleod showed a clear frustration, but he himself had foreseen the inherent tension in the union years before. In 1996, he wrote, 'As the seminary of the Free Church it [the Free Church College] has to defer to the sensibilities of the most vociferous conservative elements in the denomination. As an institution seeking academic accreditation it has to conform to the criteria laid down by the liberal-humanist establishment. It is difficult to see how we can accommodate both sets of prejudices.'[124] In any

[121] Macleod's departure from the paper was controversial and was widely reported in the news. 'Founding editor fired as columnist by the West Highland Free Press,' *The Guardian*, July 10, 2015.
[122] Macleod also had a website (donaldmacleod.org.uk) where he posted pieces with varying levels of frequency from 2011 until 2022.
[123] Donald Macleod, 'University Annuls Accreditation Agreement,' *MR*, April 2000, 76.
[124] Macleod, 'The Free Church College,' 237.

event, accreditation was finally secured, and the academic reputation of the College increased with it.[125]

The wider landscape of the Free Church after 2000 was also more conducive to many of the changes for which Macleod had long pushed. Less than fifteen years after words like heresy were used to describe Macleod's openness to hymn singing, the Free Church held a Plenary General Assembly which voted to permit the use of musical instruments and 'uninspired' songs.[126] Macleod's reasons for challenging exclusive psalmody had as much to do with issues of church unity as it did with psalmody itself. He did not think exclusive psalmody was mandated by Scripture, but he pushed for more openness of worship for reasons that went beyond that specific question. In a candid Q&A with his students after a lecture, Macleod located the central issue in sectarianism and church unity.

> One of my concerns about this whole area is that I'm very suspicious and ill at ease with whatever is sectarian. The Lord's Prayer is mainstream catholic Christianity. The [Apostle's] Creed is mainstream. The Psalter is mainstream. The great hymns are mainstream as well. The paraphrases are mainstream. And I just don't like being out of step with other Christians. I think that that that always raises alarm bells in my head. Why are we the only church that does things this way? That always bothers me… We should be as ecumenical as possible so that any Christian of any ethnic or international background will feel comfortable worshipping among us.[127]

However, one of the tensions of Macleod's thought post-2000 is that even as he argued for the removal of what he described as 'sectarian' in the church, he also maintained an acute aversion towards what he called 'modern evangelicalism.' He has written at length about the difficulty of defining the term evangelicalism, but he has frequently lamented its fruits:[128]

> The Free Church is under pressure to reinvent itself in the guise of evangelicalism. But they are two different things, Evangelicalism and Protestantism. Although I want the church to carry on reforming itself I want it to maintain its identity as a Protestant and Presbyterian church. It bothers me that some of the younger members of the Free

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125 Unrelated to the accreditation, Macleod was also appointed visiting professor at the University of Glasgow in 1999. Macleod, 'Logic on fire,' 49.

126 That is, songs whose texts were not found in Scripture. 'Act I – Act anent Public Worship,' *Acts of the Plenary General Assembly of November 2010* (Edinburgh: Free Church of Scotland, 2010).

127 Donald Macleod, 'Alexander Henderson Q&A,' (class lecture, Scottish Church History, Free Church College, Edinburgh, circa 2005). He makes similar comments in 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, January 13, 2006.

128 Macleod wrote at length about the definition of evangelicalism with Robert Letham: 'Is Evangelicalism Christian?' *Evangelical Quarterly* 67, no. 1 (1995): 3-33.

> Church wouldn't want to associate themselves with John Knox. We no longer glory and delight in Protestantism.[129]

Elsewhere Macleod gives a litany of modern evangelicalism's encroachment on the Free Church:

> Repeated concessions on 'things that don't matter' will one day completely change our identity. By the time we have praise-bands, responses, leadership teams, dedication services, god-parents, junior churches and ministers trained by apprenticeships rather than educated by a rigorous theological curriculum, we'll disappear in a shallow Evangelical mainstream clever enough to avoid heresy, but only at the price of diplomatic silence on the greatest mysteries of the Christian faith.[130]

It is perhaps surprising that the Macleod of the 1980s and 1990s pushed so hard against the conservative traditions of his day while in his later years, he was so concerned about the Free Church losing its identity. How can we make sense of this? First it is important to note that both of these strands have always been present in Macleod. In his earlier writings, Macleod was always adamant that the Free Church should hold onto its distinctive heritage. Where he often differed with some of his contemporaries was on what that heritage actually included. We also must keep in mind that the Free Church to which Macleod spoke in the twentieth century and the one which he addressed in the twenty-first century were very different entities—separated by a significant schism in 2000 and (from a Free Church perspective) a radical shift in its view of worship. We might go so far as to suggest that the Free Church changed as much between 2000 and 2020 as it did in the entire twentieth century. In other words, Macleod's critiques may have changed in part because the church that he spoke to was a different church.[131]

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[129] *Freumhan*, 51:40.

[130] Donald Macleod, 'Should Presbyterians Have Dedication Services?' *donaldmacleod.org*, August 10, 2017. Evangelicalism is also a frequent target in Macleod's recent work, *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, 31, 38, 132.

[131] One useful paradigm for making sense of Macleod's shifting concerns about the Free Church is what Jürgen Moltmann calls the *identity-involvement dilemma*. 'That is 'the more theology and the church attempt to become relevant to the problems of the present day, the more deeply they are drawn into the crisis of their own Christian identity. The more they attempt to assert their identity in traditional dogmas, rights, and moral notions, the more irrelevant and unbelievable they become.' Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 7. Macleod never cites Moltmann's paradigm, but it does seem implicit in some of his work. For instance, Macleod writes, 'As for my own church, the question is whether, for the sake of relevance, it must give up its Calvinist identity and allow itself to be assimilated into Evangelicalism.' Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP* December 14, 2012.

Later Writings

What of Macleod's dogmatic concerns in the latter years of his career? Here, Macleod's bibliography can be misleading. Two of the books Macleod published in 2002 and 2003, *From Glory to Golgotha* and *Priorities for the Church*, were mostly a repackaging of essays Macleod had published more than a decade earlier in the *Monthly Record.* In the last ten years of his life, however, Macleod published four works which reflected some of the central careers of his life. The first was in 2014 with the release of *Christ Crucified,* a work on the atonement. Reflecting on the importance of the cross to his own theology, Macleod says in his Preface, 'if I may paraphrase the dying words of John Knox, this is where I first cast my anchor; though the surrounding theological seas have always had their own fascinations it is the rock that really matters. I owe it everything, and all that remains now is to see it from within the veil.'[132] The book is largely an exposition and defense of penal substitutionary atonement, though Macleod manages to weave into it many of the other themes that have concerned him in his career including the Trinity and social justice. In 2020, Macleod released *Compel Them to Come In*, a shorter work about the free offer of the gospel, and *Therefore the Truth I Speak.*[133] This latter work was largely a consolidation of church history lectures Macleod had given years earlier on sixteenth and seventeenth century Scottish Reformed theology. It will be followed later in 2023 by the posthumous publication of a similar work covering the eighteenth century, entitled *From the Marrow Men to the Moderates*.[134] The last book published during Macleod's lifetime (and most personal work of theology) was *Faith Undaunted.*[135] In the years since 2000, Macleod also published more academic articles and contributed more chapters to larger works than any time previously in his career, many of which touched upon the doctrine of God and divine passibility.

[132] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 9.
[133] Donald Macleod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak: Scottish Theology, 1500-1700* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2020).
[134] Donald Macleod, *From the Marrow Men to the Moderates: Scottish Theology 1700-1800* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2023). I am grateful to Christian Focus Publications for providing a copy of this work prior to its release.
[135] Donald Macleod, *Faith Undaunted: Embracing Faith and Knowledge in a Post-Truth Era* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2022).

In surveying Macleod's theological development, it is legitimate to suggest that the cross was its fulcrum. When one returns to Macleod's first article in the *Banner of Truth*, 'Neglected Aspects of the Cross,' the resonances with *Christ Crucified* are surprising. It is as if Macleod sets out at twenty-six years old to explore the significance of the cross and does not publish his concluding thoughts on the topic until half a century later. That emphasis on the cross includes a number of other commitments which, as this research will show, includes the passibility of God.

Conclusion

Donald Macleod passed away on May 21, 2023. A remembrance service was held for him at St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland just across the street from Edinburgh Theological Seminary. Several days later, his body was laid to rest in Ness, the place where he was born. While more of Macleod's unpublished writings may yet find their way into print in the coming years, his death marks the end of a distinguished career that began over sixty years ago at Kilmallie Free Church. What this chapter has shown is that while Macleod's career was marked by a broad commitment to Westminster Federalism and the Free Church of Scotland, he has also challenged what it means to identify faithfully with them. In the following chapter, we carry forward this argument by focusing specifical upon Macleod's doctrine of God and showing the ways in which he both appropriates and challenges the Reformed orthodox approach to this locus.

Chapter 2 – 'Reconsidering the Divine Attributes'

Throughout his career Donald Macleod has situated himself as a proponent and inheritor of Westminster Federalist Reformed theology and the much wider body of seventeenth century Reformed orthodoxy out of which Westminster Federalism developed.[1] Even so, he has argued that those like himself who are the inheritors of Reformed orthodoxy have the responsibility of taking a scalpel to aspects of that tradition's doctrine of God which, Macleod has argued, have no basis in biblical revelation. In the introduction to his work, *Behold Your God,* Macleod describes his position like this: 'I write from the standpoint of Protestant orthodoxy, but very much regret the way that the spirit of Scholasticism clung to discussions of the doctrine of God long after it was banished from other areas of theology. Over against this I have tried to reflect the specifically biblical approach to the divine attributes; and also to do justice to the fact that Christ is the supreme revelation of God.'[2] The relevance to the present research of this critical approach to his own tradition's doctrine of God is that these wider critiques become some of the explicit doctrinal bases upon which he builds many of his arguments for divine passibility.

In order to provide a theological context for Macleod's proposals related to divine passibility, this chapter outlines Macleod's broader criticisms of Reformed orthodoxy,

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[1] In using the term Reformed orthodoxy, I rely upon the definition provided by Willem van Asselt and Pieter L. Rouwendal in 'Introduction: What is Reformed Scholasticism?', in *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, trans. Albert Gootjes (Grand Rapids: Reformed Heritage Books, 2011), 12. They use orthodoxy to refer to 'a period in the history of theology that stretches from the sixteenth century into the eighteenth century.' Reformed orthodoxy refers to 'the stream within orthodoxy connected to the Reformed confessions.' In speaking of Macleod's defense or critique of Reformed orthodoxy then, we speak of the theological content of the Reformed orthodox tradition. Admittedly, that traditional is not monolithic. In his *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, Richard Muller has shown its diversity not only in terms of geography but also in identifying three distinct phases of development: early orthodoxy (1565-1640), high orthodoxy (1640-1725), and late orthodoxy (post-1725). See Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology*, 30-32. Nonetheless, there is a continuity in this tradition which renders the term Reformed orthodoxy useful. In defining the terms 'scholastic' and 'scholasticism' in this chapter I take a more deductive approach because of their varied use in twentieth century Reformed theology and in Macleod's own thought. I show that Macleod's understanding of the term 'scholasticism' shifts over time.

[2] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 7. One premise of this chapter is that Macleod's suspicions of scholasticism contributed to his articulation of divine passibility. However, it is helpful to recognize that a critical attitude towards scholasticism does not necessitate a rejection of divine impassibility. Macleod's theological hero, William Cunningham, is at points highly critical of scholasticism both as an historical phenomenon and as a methodology. Indeed, one finds in Macleod many of the same concerns that were earlier articulated by Cunningham, who Macleod referred to as 'my first mentor in theology.' Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, February 16, 2001. Perhaps reading Cunningham's views on scholasticism was a key influence in Macleod's initial antagonism. See William Cunningham, *Historical Theology: Volume I* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1870), 413-25.

particularly its doctrine of God. The high point of that criticism came in 1990 with the release of *Behold Your God*. Its introduction (which appears as the final chapter in the revised 1995 edition) is the fullest critique Macleod ever provides of Reformed orthodoxy's doctrine of God.[3] However, the ideas in this chapter do not appear in Macleod's corpus *de novo*. They reflect concerns that had been taking shape in Macleod's writings for more than a decade. Moreover, they are apparent in Macleod's writings well into the twenty-first century.

To what extent others might consider Macleod 'faithful' to Reformed orthodoxy given his own critiques (and his downstream rejection of divine impassibility) is beyond the scope of this research. It is, however, important to recognize that Macleod positions his own critiques as targeted challenges to a broader tradition which he otherwise tries to embody. In this way he distinguishes himself from older Scottish Reformed contemporaries like J. B. Torrance and T. F. Torrance who in their critiques largely sought to distance themselves from Reformed orthodoxy. Macleod's goal was to critique Westminster Federalism in order to ensure its continued usefulness and relevance. In this way, he sought to be a *constructive* inheritor of the Westminster stream of Scottish Reformed theology.

Apologist for the 'so-called Scholastics'

For much of his career, Macleod's criticisms of Reformed orthodoxy's doctrine of God were closely linked with the charge of 'scholasticism' which he also brought against Reformed orthodoxy. This is most evident in the final chapter of *Behold Your God* where he describes all his critiques of Reformed orthodoxy in terms of scholasticism. In the wider scope of his work, that criticism is in some ways surprising because at the very same time historically that Macleod was bringing charges of scholasticism against his own tradition, he was also very sensitive to that same charge when it was brought by those standing outside of the Westminster Federalist tradition—from Scottish theologians like J. B. Torrance and T. F. Torrance. In fact, his earliest

[3] Macleod hints that the decision to move the chapter to the end of the new edition was because it was 'slightly more technical' than the rest of the book. Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 7.

publications in both the *Banner of Truth* and the *Monthly Record* show that from the very beginning of his career Macleod was (and remained) critical of the charge of 'scholasticism' insofar as it was used in the late twentieth-century to dismiss Reformed orthodoxy and, by association, those (like Macleod) who espoused many of its dogmas.

The common twentieth-century criticism of Reformed orthodoxy as being too scholastic (or simply 'scholastic') was one feature of a critique which came to be known by many as 'Calvin against the Calvinists'.[4] In short, the claim was that many of John Calvin's theological inheritors, in their effort to systematize the theology of he and other Reformers, actually betrayed his legacy.[5] The generations that came after Calvin (particularly in the seventeenth century) were accused of having returned to the very kind of scholasticism and arid, doctrinal precision that theologians like Calvin had eschewed in their own works.[6] Scholasticism in this sense was a descriptive term referring both to methodology and content but it often carried a pejorative connotation.[7] Some of the most maligned of the Reformed orthodox doctrines were limited atonement and the covenant of works. These were seen by critics of Reformed orthodoxy as

[4] This was the title of an oft cited essay by Basil Hall in *John Calvin: A Collection of Distinguished Essays*, ed. Gervase Duffield (Grand Rapids: 1966): 19-37.

[5] The most notable (and most criticized) of these inheritors was Theodore Beza (1519-1605), but in the Scottish context Robert Rollock (1555-1599), Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661), David Dickson (1583-1663), and James Durham (1622-1658) were also targets. Macleod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, 360. In 1983, Macleod lists a number of contemporary works espousing the 'Calvin versus the Calvinist' critique, all of which he challenges. See Macleod, 'The Westminster Confession Today,' *MR*, February 1983, 27. They include R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); T. F. Torrance, *The School of Faith*: *The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clark & Co., 1959): xi-cxxvi; Holmes Ralson III, *John Calvin versus the Westminster Confession* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1972); John H. Leith, *An Introduction to the Reformed Tradition* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977); J. B. Torrance, 'The Contribution of McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23, no. 1 (August 1973): 295-311.

[6] Hence J. B. Torrance can group Mediaeval Catholicism and 'scholastic Calvinism' together for sharing similarly legalistic errors. J. B. Torrance, 'The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics and Its Legacy,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34, no. 3: 239. For a contemporary response to these critiques and their methodology, see Muller, 'Was Calvin a Calvinist?' in *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012): 51-69.

[7] It was assumed by some critics that scholastic methodology shaped doctrinal content for the worse. T. F. Torrance, for instance, describes the Westminster Shorter and Larger catechisms as works of 'Protestant schoolmen' distinguished by 'precise definition and careful distinctions'—a methodological choice (with important philosophical and logical presuppositions) which in his opinion made it 'inevitable that the human thought-forms, theological thought-forms, thus produced should come to exercise an unduly powerful influence over against the lively Word of God, and even to create a hardened and authoritative tradition which tended to control the interpretation of the Holy Scripture, and to inhibit advance in Biblical theology.' *The School of Faith*, xlix-l.

introducing both an unwanted legalism into Reformed theology along with a doctrine of election which, taken to its logical conclusion, curtailed the free offer of the gospel.[8]

The debate over the relationship between Calvin and his followers might sound inconsequential outside of the academy but in twentieth-century Scotland it was the grounds for an existential crisis within Reformed churches. Part of what made it so consequential not only to the academy but also to wider church life in Scotland was its implications for the place of the Westminster Confession in the Church of Scotland and other Scottish Reformed churches which were formally bound by the doctrines of the Confession. For theologians like J. B. Torrance and T. F. Torrance the Confession was emblematic of and enshrined into church polity the allegedly scholastic theology of the seventeenth century with its unfaithfulness to the Reformation's rediscovery of the gospel.[9] Thus, many in the Church of Scotland in particular thought that the path towards ecclesial health necessitated the removal of the Confession as a governing standard.[10] A secondary implication of this was that any church (such as the Free Church of Scotland) which proudly clung to the Confession was in danger of all the scholastic perversions that belonged to Reformed orthodoxy.

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[8] J. B. Torrance held this view. Over against what he saw as the constrained gospel of Westminster federalism, he writes, 'If there is one feature of the Christian Gospel we need to recover in Scotland today, it is the unconditional freeness of grace, which alone can give us joy and peace and motivate us to great endeavour.' Torrance, 'The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology,' 239.

[9] In these discussions, Westminster Federal theology was often directly equated with Scholastic theology. In one article, J. B. Torrance includes a diagram entitled 'Federal Theology (Scholastic Calvinism),' beneath which he clarifies, '(e.g., Westminster Confession and Documents).' Torrance, 'The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology,' 242.

[10] Consequently, there was an effort within the Church of Scotland to remove the Westminster Confession as a subordinate standard and instead place it alongside the Apostle's and Nicene Creeds and the Scots Confession as an historic statement of faith. See Finlay A. J. Macdonald, 'The Westminster Confession: Unfinished business', *Theology in Scotland* 23, no. 2 (2016): 12. One effect of this change would have been that ordinands would no longer have had to make a formal commitment to the Confession. In reality, by 1971 most leaders in the Church of Scotland had already lost faith in the Confession. Macdonald notes that in that year, over 80% of kirk sessions voted to remove the Confession as a subordinate standard. Macdonald, 'The Westminster Confession,' 14. The Church of Scotland's Panel on Doctrine had foreshadowed such a vote with its report in 1969 which said in part, 'The fuller confessional statements of the post-Reformation era suffer still more markedly from the over-precision and unduly legalistic thinking of their day, which led men who drafted them to be dogmatic about mysteries which are beyond the comprehension of finite and sinful creatures.' Macdonald, 'The Westminster Confession,' 12. Macdonald argues that the reason why the Kirk did not remove the Confession as a subordinate standard in 1971 was because they thought it important to first approve another sort of statement of faith. Macdonald, 'The Westminster Confession,' 15. Thus, the Westminster Confession remained a subordinate standard within the Church of Scotland for the rest of the century, though many saw this as a formality with no practical power. Macdonald's article provides a useful overview of the Church of Scotland's relationship to the confession from the seventeenth to the twenty-first centuries.

It was against this backdrop that in late 1967 and early 1968 a twenty-seven-year-old Macleod, then serving as the minister of Kilmallie Free Church, published two consecutive articles in the *Banner of Truth* entitled 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism.'[11] His arguments across the two articles are wide-ranging and tightly argued, but what is most relevant here are his responses to the charges of scholasticism – that 'later Calvinism [i.e. Reformed orthodoxy] is more harsh, because more coldly logical, than earlier' and that the Westminster Confession in particular was 'a strait-waistcoat for eager souls who believed that personal religion was of greater importance than the niceties of correct dogmatic definition.'[12] On the whole, Macleod simply disagreed. In particular, he refutes the notion that the kind of doctrinal precision found in the Confession is indicative of a lack of heart or doxology. He writes, 'It is difficult to see why accuracy of statement and clarity in arrangement should be regarded as vicious in a theological document – or why it is a virtue that an ecclesiastical symbol should be eclectic.'[13]

Macleod is even defensive about the Confession's doctrine of God. First, he argues that 'the governing conception [of the Confession] is not the sovereignty of God, but the character of God, as revealed in Scripture.' Central to that character is love. 'Due place is given to the divine compassion – "most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin."'[14]

Moreover, he argues that the Confession's doctrine of God is more Biblical than scholastic:

> The whole presentation [of the doctrine of God in the Confession] is anything but scholastic. There is no attempt at a scientific classification of the divine attributes – 'a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty, most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute;' and much of the enumeration consists of words and phrases carried over directly from Scripture – 'working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous

[11] 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (1),' *The Banner of Truth*, 51 (November/December 1967): 9-13; 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (2),' *The Banner of Truth*, 53 (February 1968): 15-26.
[12] Macleod, 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (1),' 11. The former critique is a paraphrase. The latter is a direct quote from J. H. S. Burleigh's (1894-1985) *A Church History of Scotland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1960), 328.
[13] Macleod, 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (1), 11.
[14] Macleod, 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (1),' 11. Cf. *WCF*, II.i.

> will', 'the rewarder of them that diligently seek him,' 'Of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things.'[15]

The dominant note of the article is that the Calvin versus the Calvinist critique of Reformed orthodoxy is unfounded, particularly as it relates to the Confession. There was, from Macleod's perspective, no clear demarcation to be drawn between Federal theology and Calvin's theology. To the extent that there was development from the Reformation to seventeenth century Reformed orthodoxy, that development was natural and healthy.

> Is it in the least damaging to the reputation of the Westminster Confession that it does not exactly reproduce the theology of 1520 or 1560? It is not in ill-humour that we ask, How many in Edinburgh were preaching the theology of 1860 – the theology of William Cunningham – in 1946? The issue is not whether Reformed theology was static in the interval between Calvin and Westminster. It was not. But if the Word of God affords material for answering the questions which the later Calvinism enunciated, then the progress and development are simply evidence of the vitality of Reformed theology in that age.[16]

In the midst of his apology, however, Macleod makes a subtle but telling theological move—one which goes almost unnoticed, but which is crucial to understanding his theological development. The way that Macleod defends the Westminster tradition is not by defending the concept of scholasticism but by proving that the Confession is largely free of it. Notice the key qualifications he makes about the wider Reformed orthodox tradition in the same article:

> Some concessions may readily be made to the views of [T. F.] Torrance and Burleigh.[17] An unwise dogmatism did indeed creep into Calvinism – immediate as against mediate imputation of sin, creationism as against traducianism, an uncritical commitment to determinism. So too did an unwise intellectualism – for example the Federal Theology of 'The Sum of Saving Knowledge,' too intricate, too contractual and too commercial. But it may be affirmed, quite categorically, that none of these excesses find a place in the Westminster Confession.[18]

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[15] *WCF*, II.i,ii. Macleod, 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (1)', 11. Macleod's defense of the theology proper in Westminster federalism continued as the attacks against it by the Torrance's and others continued. See, for instance, Macleod's 1983 response to J. B. Torrance's assertion that Westminster federalism makes justice more essential to God's being than mercy. 'God, Righteousness and Retribution' in *MR*, April 1983, 76.

[16] Macleod, 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (1)', 11.

[17] Torrance is cited describing the *Confession* as 'an amalgam of Aristotelian logic and the Reformed faith.' 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (1),' 10. Cf. Torrance's Introduction in Robert Bruce, *The Mystery of the Lord's Supper: Sermons on the Sacraments Preached in the Kirk of Edinburgh in A.D. 1589 by Robert Bruce*, ed. And trans. Thomas F. Torrance (London: James Clarke, 1958): 21.

[18] 'Misunderstandings of Calvinism (1),' 11. It may be possible to read back into this critique a similar one made by Macleod some fifty years later. Dickson, he says, was guilty of 'reading into the divine covenant all the details of contracts as they were practiced in the burgeoning commercial world of the seventeenth century' rather than relying on the various biblical notions of covenant relationships which included friendship, marriage, and various types of diplomatic treaties. Macleod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, 370-1. Dickson's language is certainly commercial. Speaking

In effect, Macleod defends the Westminster Confession from the charges of scholasticism not by defending the concept of scholasticism but by arguing that the Confession is free of it. He concedes that scholastic tendencies were evident in the works of Reformed orthodox theologians like David Dickson and that these tendencies did lead to theological questions which were often far afield from the central concerns of Scripture (though he does not in his earlier writings go so far as to suggest that their scholasticism led to erroneous conclusions).[19] On the whole, however, he argues that such scholastic tendencies are central neither to the work of Reformed orthodoxy nor the Confession. The clear implication was that if Reformed orthodoxy really were scholastic, it would be problematic. This is probably one reason why Macleod sometimes referred to the Reformed orthodox tradition as 'so-called Protestant Scholasticism.'[20] Later in this chapter, we show that Macleod's approach to this problem in the last years of his life shifted significantly and he approached the concept of scholasticism much more appreciatively. What remained consistent, however, across his corpus was the argument that the Calvin versus the Calvinists critique was unfounded. In that, Macleod would place himself firmly on the side of those who were often pejoratively labelled as scholastics.

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of the covenant of redemption he writes, 'In this Bargain or Agreement the Scripture importeth clearly a Selling and a Buying of the Elect. The Seller of the Elect is God; the Buyer is God Incarnate; the Persons bought are the Church of the Elect; the Price is the Blood of God, to wit, the Blood of Christ, who is God and Man in one Person.' David Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1697), 38. Even so, Macleod argues that the problem with Dickson (as with much historical Federal theology) was not one of substance but of presentation.

[19] In a more recent essay on the doctrine of original sin, Macleod gives a detailed rehearsal of the debates over imputation and creationism versus traducianism. He then concedes, 'such discussions, will, no doubt, continue, though with little hope of final agreement. The questions are too esoteric and the data too limited.' What matters today, he concluded, are our responses to the challenges that modern anthropology and biblical exegesis poses to the doctrine of original sin: 'We must address these contemporary challenges as matters of urgency.' Macleod, 'Original Sin in Reformed Theology,' in *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives* eds. Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves (Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2014), 146.

[20]Macleod, 'The Westminster Confession Today, *MR*, February 1983, 27. It is also helpful to recognize that in Macleod's context, the term 'scholastic' was not specific to the seventeenth century. In 1986, Macleod laments that a recently published book dismissed William Cunningham as an 'archetypal Scholastic Calvinist', accusing Cunningham of being 'more concerned to preserve the Five Points than to communicate the gospel.' He defends Cunningham by saying that he was in fact willing to criticize both Calvin and 'the prominence of the distinctives of Calvinism in seventeenth century theology.' Macleod, 'Thomas Chalmers: The Practical and the Pious,' 56.

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Critic of Scholasticism

What we have shown thus far is that from his earliest publications, Macleod clearly sought to defend the Westminster Federalist stream of Reformed orthodoxy from pejorative claims of scholasticism, even defending aspects of the doctrine of God implicit in that tradition's covenantal system. Granted, that defense was not by means of defending the idea of scholasticism but by claiming that Reformed orthodoxy was not nearly so guilty of it as some claimed. Even so, it is also clear that as early as the late 1970s, Macleod had already begun to articulate his own concern that in several key areas, the Westminster federalist tradition had been and was still too heavily influenced by scholasticism (as Macleod understood it). Indeed, a survey of Macleod's earlier writings makes plain that the charge of 'scholasticism' which he so clearly set forth with *Behold Your God* in 1990 signified not the introduction of new ideas in Macleod's thought, but rather their collation.

In comments made in a 1977 *Monthly Record* article, we see some of the earliest hints of his concerns about his own tradition's theological development:

> We have been too ready to applaud Charles Hodge's boast in connection with his career at Princeton: 'No new idea ever originated in this Seminary.' While it is essential to engage in defending the great doctrines of the past it is not enough. Not only must these doctrines themselves be re-possessed in the phraseology of each generation but the tradition itself must be looked at critically. Certain words and phrases—like the Romish *merit*—must go. Dubious fundamentalist mythologies—like that on guidance—must be carefully scrutinised. The kind of detached, scholastic method found in Hodge's *Outlines of Theology* must be repudiated.[21] The doctrine of the divine attributes must be freed from bogus philosophical constraints and rooted firmly in biblical theology.[22] Above all, we must harness for theology and preaching the gains of the prodigious exegetical labours of the last 100 years. Every book, every sentence, every little word, has been minutely examined and we know as never before the precise meaning of the Spirit's utterances in

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[21] In 1984, Macleod wrote a marginally more positive review of A.A. Hodge's *Outlines of Theology* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1866), while commending Hodge's *Evangelical Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1976). '[*Outlines of Theology*] is still probably the best compendium of Reformed dogmatics. It is, however, rather scholastic in presentation and, taken by itself, could easily give a false impression of both Calvinistic theology and A. A. Hodge. It is a work of reference, not a model for "doing" theology. Those who want to see the younger Hodge at his best should peruse his *Evangelical Theology…'* Macleod, 'Banner of Truth Reprints,' *MR*, March 1984, 69. For Macleod's views on 'guidance' see, Macleod, 'Questions of Guidance,' *MR*, January and February 1985, 3-4, 27-29.

[22] As we will see, Macleod related this critique closely with his understanding of scholasticism.

Scripture. By contrast, the labour of gathering up the conclusions into a harmonious whole of biblical theology has scarcely begun within evangelicalism.[23]

Brief though these comments may be, we will see that Macleod's concerns about 'philosophical constraints' on the doctrine of God and 'detached, scholastic method' are some of the very same critiques that Macleod will use to describe his own divergence from his tradition's position on divine impassibility.

Another more implicit critique of his tradition came six months later when Macleod reviewed a translated portion of Herman Bavinck's writings on the doctrine of God (released by the Banner of Truth Trust). On the one hand, he endorsed it as 'the most thorough-going statement of the doctrine of God available in English from a Reformed point of view and is particularly strong on the historical and philosophical aspects of the subject.' He then offered a subtle critique, 'It is less satisfying as an exegetical study—indeed there is virtually no exegesis—but this reflects a weakness not so much on Bavinck's part as on the part of the Reformed tradition in general, which retained too uncritically the categories and methodology of scholasticism when reflecting on theology proper.'[24]

At a minimum, comments like these indicate that more than a decade later when Macleod published *Behold Your God* and positioned it as a response to the weaknesses he saw in his own tradition's theology proper, this did not correspond to a major shift in his thinking, at least not a shift that happened in 1990. *Behold Your God* represented concerns he had been writing about at least since the 1970s. What were those concerns?

[23] Macleod, 'Fundamentalism Barred,' 192. Macleod made similar comments about the need for the church to 'learn or re-learn to do its theologizing, its reflection upon the doctrine of God, entirely under the control of Scripture in a 1977 address for the Banner of Truth. See, Macleod, 'The Doctrine of God (1),' address to Banner of Truth Minister's Conference, 1977.

[24] Macleod, 'Reviews: The Doctrine of God by Herman Bavinck.' *MR*, June 1978, 126. Just above this review is another for G.C. Berkouwer's *The Church* where Macleod complains that there is 'too much quotation from contemporary theologians (almost exclusively continental) and too little exegesis.' The common theme is the need for dogmatics to show a more explicit grounding in exegesis.

The Scholastic Critique in Behold Your God

Macleod's book *Behold Your God* is not a comprehensive treatment of the doctrine of God and to the extent that Macleod himself was skeptical of aspects of his own tradition's theology proper, he never provides an exhaustive alternative. Rather, the book is a compilation of twenty-three short articles dating back at least to 1979.[25] By his own acknowledgement, what unifies the chapters (and their relevance to the present research) is that they represent Macleod's attempt at a 'specifically biblical approach to the divine attributes' over against the elements of his own tradition with which he takes issue. Many of the chapters contain various critiques of his tradition's doctrine of God (if implicit), it is not until the final chapter, 'The Doctrine of God in Christian Discussion,' that Macleod systematically lays out his concerns about protestant orthodoxy's doctrine of God.[26] Though brief, the chapter is critical to understanding his own perspective and the wider context in which he rejects divine impassibility.[27] In what follows, we trace the major critiques that Macleod lays out against his tradition's doctrine of God and locate them in the larger context of his corpus. In doing so we seek to move beyond the question 'what were Macleod's critiques' and towards the more elusive question 'how did Macleod's critiques shape his own doctrine of God?'

There is a of course a third question which is no less important: To what extent are Macleod's critiques of his own tradition legitimate? To answer that question in any meaningful way would be to write a different thesis than the present one. The present aim is to interpret Macleod in the light of his critiques of Reformed orthodoxy. In this approach, we treat the elements of Reformed orthodoxy which Macleod critiques as a foil that comes to define Macleod's own theological project. The goal of studying these critiques then is primarily to

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[25] More than half the articles are revised republications of *Monthly Record* pieces. The earliest chapter, 'Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,' was published as two separate essays in the November and December 1979 editions of the *Monthly Record*, 203-5, 227-8.
[26] *Behold Your God*, 223-39.
[27] Recordings of Macleod's Systematic Theology 101 lectures show that in 2011, he was still using this chapter to outline his critiques of the Reformed doctrine of God. Macleod, 'Attributes of God,' Systematic Theology 101 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, November 4, 2010).

illuminate the dogmatic scaffolding Macleod uses to support his own theology proper and ultimately his rejection of divine impassibility. [28]

A Positive Case for Scholasticism

While Macleod's assessment of scholasticism in his chapter, 'The Doctrine of God in Christian Discussion' is largely negative, he opens by warning against an uncritical pejorative use of the term.[29] He praises the Scholastics' attempt to make clear statements about God's revelation of himself in Scripture. 'Scripture,' he writes, 'provides more material for propositional theology than many modern scholars are prepared to admit. The scholastics may sometimes have given the impression that they knew what God has for breakfast, but at least they felt confident that God has shared with man a significant amount of what He knows about Himself.'[30] Moreover, he admits that much of what he and others have found distasteful in scholastic theology—'its speculative tendencies, its use of negative concepts and its a priori assumption that God cannot suffer'—existed in Christian theology long before the Scholastics: 'Above all, it was the Fathers, not the Scholastics, who introduced the idea of the impassibility of God.'[31]

As for those things which Macleod considered to be true trademarks of scholasticism, he praises the *triplex via* as a thoroughly biblical method of contemplating God.[32] He also warns

[28] I credit this idea that criticisms of scholasticism can be revelatory of the one making the critique to Richard Muller's reference to an unpublished dissertation by Armand Aimee LaVallee who argues that Calvin's critiques of scholasticism 'were very much "the reversed image" of Calvin, very much a rhetorical foil for Calvin's positive exposition of the teachings of the Reformation.' Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 40. See Armand Aime, LaVallee, 'Calvin's Criticism of Scholastic Theology,' (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1967).
[29] At times Macleod will group together the tradition of Scholasticism as it was found in both medieval and post-Reformation theologians, but the examples he references are almost exclusively protestant. In his introduction, he refers to the protestant elements of this stream as the 'so-called Protestant Scholastics whose work is brilliantly summarised in Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics*…and who, themselves, were drawing on mediaeval theologians, particularly Anselm and Aquinas.' Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 223. He will also criticize nineteenth century theologians like W.G.T. Shedd (1820-1894) with the assumption that they sometimes exhibit elements of Scholasticism. See Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 57-104.
[30] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 225.
[31] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 226.
[32] Macleod refers to these as (1) the way of negation, (2), the way of eminence, (3) and the way of causality. He cites biblical examples of each of these methods. Macleod also opens his lectures on the divine attributes with an explanation and affirmation of the *triplex via*.

against the charge that the Scholastics were 'too philosophical' as if the use of philosophy in itself was suspect:

> All theology…proceeds on certain assumptions; and these assumptions inevitably have a philosophical colouring. The Bible itself, for example, assumes (and never formally proves) the existence of God. Theologians such as Chalmers and Hodge assumed the maxims of the Common Sense school of Scottish Philosophy. Modern theology generally assumes the epistemology of Immanuel Kant and particular varieties of it are heavily indebted to Wittgenstein and Whitehead. All of us assume our own existence, the reliability of our senses (for example in reading the Scriptures), and the law of contradiction. Even those who protest most loudly against philosophy have to operate with a basic metaphysic.[33]

For Macleod, philosophy presents genuine challenges to theology with which the theologian must wrestle. Likewise, 'Theological (that is, biblical) material itself gives rise to philosophical questions such as the relation of God to time and space, the relation of divine sovereignty to human freedom and the relation of foreordination to causation.'[34] Thus, philosophy aids theology by requiring her to clarify her ideas.

These qualifications notwithstanding, when Macleod enters into his critiques of scholasticism, he shows little enthusiasm for the doctrine of God it produces. Paraphrasing Emil Brunner, he writes, 'Anyone who moves for the first time from the Bible into the world of scholastic theology does indeed find himself in an alien environment.'[35] He identifies four problems with Reformed scholastic theology insofar as it relates to the doctrine of God: (1) Its linguistic register, (2) its lack of proportion and balance, (3) its poor definitions, and (4) its overreliance upon philosophical preconceptions. In what follows, we summarize these critiques and show their role in Macleod's own dogmatic project. At the point of discussing the third critique, we will show how Macleod defines and exposits four divine attributes (love, righteousness, power/omnipotence, and presence/omnipresence) in a way that reflects his own critiques of Reformed orthodoxy.

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[33] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 228.
[34] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 229.
[35] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 229. Cf. Emil Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God*, trans. Olive Wyon (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949), 243-4.

The Linguistic Register

The first charge Macleod brings against scholasticism is that its linguistic register is aimed at the academy rather than the wider church. He writes,

> [The linguistic register] is largely non-biblical and highly Latinate: simplicity, aseity, immensity, unity, immutability, infinity, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, justice. The problem is not merely that these words, all derived from Latin, are not found in Scripture. What the language in fact betrays is that the discussion took place in the schools, for scholars: not in the church, for the people of God. Furthermore, it was divorced from biblical control. It was not an exposition of biblical concepts or a quest for biblical definitions.[36]

The significance of this particular critique is largely blunted by the fact that it is possible to find an example of every one of the above Latinate terms being used somewhere appreciatively in Macleod's corpus. Clearly Macleod has no opposition to Latin terminology in theology, *per se*. However, he seems to present the use of Latin language in theology as an indicator of a genuine concern of his, that Scholastic theology was carried out in the academy apart from the church and therefore it concerned itself with priorities and questions that did not reflect the priorities and questions of the church at large.[37] In other words, the Latin register largely indicates the existence of greater concerns that Macleod has which we explore below.

Lack of Biblical Proportion

The second and more substantial charge Macleod brings against his own tradition in relation to the doctrine of God is that at times it lacks biblical proportion and balance. Even where the theological propositions the Scholastics make about God are true, he argues, the theological imbalance becomes its own error. 'Medieval theologians', Macleod writes,

> were beguiled… by subtle questions relating to divine simplicity, power, knowledge and will. These were the subject of endless debate and hair-splitting distinctions (for example, between necessary knowledge, free knowledge and middle knowledge; or between *voluntas beneplaciti* and *voluntas signi;* and *voluntas decernens,* and *voluntas praecipiens*). The problem here is not the answers, but the questions. Scripture has no interest in them. They belong to a thought-world light years away from the Bible. By contrast, some of the most prominent biblical concepts scarcely appear at all in scholastic dogmatics. One

[36] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 230.
[37] Macleod's concern for theology in the vernacular is evidenced in his production of a Gaelic theological glossary which he made available to students at the Free Church College. Donald Macleod, 'Glossary of Gaelic Theological Terms.'

would never guess, reading Heppe, that the New Testament tells us that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8).[38]

These concerns are inextricably linked to Macleod's view of the relationship between theology and preaching which we discuss in Chapter Six. For Macleod, all theology worthy of the name must be preachable and if it is not relevant in the pulpit, its status as valid theology is suspect.[39] Ultimately, Macleod seems to view questions like those of necessary, free, and middle knowledge as so peripheral that they did not belong in serious theological discussion.

On the other hand, Macleod says that scholastic theology too often minimizes the significance of certain divine attributes which the Scriptures emphasize. Concerning the attribute of divine love he says that Reformed orthodoxy had largely been 'guilty of heresy by disproportion.' This was a problem that Macleod saw as continuing in Reformed theology from the seventeenth well into the nineteenth century. 'The *Shorter Catechism* does not mention love in its list of attributes (Answer 4) and there is no chapter on it either in Charnock or Bavinck. All of these subsume the divine love under the divine goodness. This does no justice whatever to the New Testament's emphasis. There, love is the supreme message of Calvary…, the source of our election and the very essence of God's nature.'[40] Macleod claimed that the categories and questions of theology must be more deeply connected to the central categories and questions of the Scriptures than they have been in scholasticism.

Poor Definitions

The most significant critique, and one that is most evident in Macleod's own writing is the poor definitions used by scholasticism. 'Even when attention was focused on specifically biblical attributes, the definitions offered were far from biblical.'[41] One of the challenges to

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[38] Macleod, Behold Your God, 230. Macleod calls Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics* a brilliant summary of Protestant scholasticism.
[39] 'The theological process does not exist for itself. It exits only as a preparation for preaching. If it does not issue in proclamation, it is an abortion, or a still-birth…If our theology (or any detail in it) is not preachable, its claim to being a theology at all is exceedingly doubtful.' Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology,' 246.
[40] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 231.
[41] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 231.

interpreting Macleod here is the ambiguity surrounding his use of the term 'biblical.' What are the criteria for a theological proposition being biblical or not? Macleod himself never answers that question directly. Rather, he defends his claim is by pointing to four divine attributes which he believes have been especially misrepresented by scholasticism: power, presence, righteousness, and love.[42] The overarching reason why these attributes are not defined 'biblically' in scholasticism according to Macleod seems to be that they do not adhere closely to the way these attributes are revealed in redemption. Even that statement, however, is too broad to give us a clear picture of where Macleod's critique really lies. The only way to see his larger criticism with these four attributes is by considering them separately. In what follows, we look at Macleod's criticism of the scholastic presentation of these doctrines. We also point to areas in *Behold Your God* and elsewhere where we can see Macleod trying to construct a more 'biblical' account of theology proper.

Interpreting the Divine Attributes

Omnipotence and Omnipresence

It is possible to speak of Macleod's criticisms of divine omnipotence and omnipresence together because they largely reflect the same concerns. According to Macleod, Reformed orthodoxy has correctly defined these ideas but has too often missed the Biblical emphases. Speaking of divine omnipotence, he writes,

> In Scripture, this attribute is related in the closest possible way to redemption. God shows his power in the cross, in the resurrection, in the new birth and in the preservation of His people. Later discussions became enmeshed in much more abstruse questions as to the nature of the possible, the distinction between absolute and ordained power and the relation between what God does do and what God could do.[43]

Such questions, Macleod responds 'are hardly pressing concerns to those facing the urgencies of the Christian life: "For me, to live is Christ".'[44] Rather than speaking about the divine attribute of omnipotence, Macleod entitles his chapter in *Behold Your God* divine power.

[42] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 231.
[43] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 232.
[44] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 232.

As with divine omnipotence, Macleod also criticizes the orthodox development of the doctrine of omnipresence because of its abstraction.

> The Bible is full of rich allusions to the presence of God and the same is true of the devotional literature of Christianity. But dogmatics ignored this almost completely and focused instead on an impersonal concept of omnipresence, seen as an aspect of divine immensity and defined as meaning that 'God is a sphere or circle whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere' (cited as 'a good expression' by Charnock)… The alienation between dogmatics and devotion could not have been more complete.[45]

The theme of presence was especially important across Macleod's work because of its pastoral relevance. In his chapter, 'The Presence of God,' Macleod develops the theme primarily in terms of the ways in which God is present in the world and the impact His presence has upon His people.[46] He does not leave out the notion of omnipresence but it is not the central focus of his discussion. In his lectures he explains his method: 'Biblically this is what matters—this almost spiritual sense of God's presence—not the abstract notion of his omnipresence but his spiritual presence and the special forms of his presence [i.e. the Shekinah, the incarnation, the *paraclete,* the *Parousia,* and the presence of God in glory].' These aspects of presence, he says, are 'much more pertinent to our discipleship than the abstract discussions on omnipresence which have monopolized the discourse in this area.'[47]

Another aspect of divine presence which Macleod reflects on and which he says has been largely ignored in dogmatics is the believer's experience of the loss of God's presence. How can we reconcile this human experience which is testified throughout Scriptures with the fact that God is omnipresent and promises never to forsake His children?[48] This is indicative of the kinds of pastoral concerns explicit in the Scriptures which Macleod thought should (at least in part) drive dogmatic development.[49]

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[45] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 232.
[46] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 83-92.
[47] Macleod, 'Attributes of God,' (class lecture).
[48] Macleod cites Is. 59:2; 40:27; 50:10; Ps. 22:1; 47:1. For his own work on this question, see *Behold Your God*, 85-7.
[49] It is perhaps no surprise that the Q&A's after Macleod's lecture on divine presence largely related to pastoral concerns, even if their solutions required dogmatic formulation. One student asked if a person can lose the sense of God's presence for their whole Christian experience. Another asked how Macleod would counsel someone who feels utterly God-forsaken. In questions like these, Macleod used his own pastoral experience and that of others in Christian history to speak to these problems.

Divine Righteousness

Macleod's critique of the common Reformed orthodox approach to divine righteousness was that in using the Latin term *iustitia*, the meaning of righteousness was skewed exclusively towards its retributive aspects. According to Macleod, scholasticism had 'focused on justice and retribution rather than on the fact that God's rectitude in covenant-keeping would lead Him to save and vindicate his people.'[50] W.G.T Shedd (1820-1894) errs, he claims, when he 'consistently speaks of justice rather than righteousness, subsumes it under holiness and concentrates throughout on the element of retribution.'[51] Calvin, on the other hand, was right to define righteousness as that 'by which the faithful are preserved and most benignantly cherished.'[52]

Macleod lays out his own doctrine of divine righteousness over two chapters that were originally two consecutive articles in the April and May 1983 *Monthly Record,* covering retributive and remunerative justice, respectively.[53] His concerns noted above notwithstanding, it is here more than in any other attribute that Macleod engages with seventeenth century Reformed theology and its own questions. Much of his work here actually represents an apology for older

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Partly because of the nature of the Free Church College as a training college for pastors, Macleod often used his lectures to speak about the pastoral calling and in ways that can tell us quite a bit about Macleod himself. An example of this can be seen in his advice to his students just after this discussion about feeling God-forsaken. Macleod, 'Attributes and Discussion,' Systematic Theology 101 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, November 5, 2010).

> You'll see for yourselves the principle laid down by Martin Luther that three things make a minister: study, prayer, and temptation (or trial). And the very fact that you've been called to be pastors means you'll be put through things that perhaps other believers might not be put through because you have to learn compassion on others. And you'll have to face the truth about yourselves in perhaps sometimes very disorientating ways and you'll be stretched sometimes to your limit because you have to be able to help others.
>
> [However,] It's not these things we dread. What we dread at the college here are those who leave us losing their zeal and becoming contented pastors in the sense that they're happy to draw their stipends and just see it all through to retirement. That is the most dreadful scenario imaginable, and it is not unfamiliar. So, I do hope that the light of your own passion for the gospel will continue to burn until the very end for you—that you will not become moderates. The trouble is that moderates are often deemed to be wise men. 'He was a moderate man.' And that often means he was a moderate who didn't have the passion to create any trouble—not that trouble's necessarily a good thing—but if it's a price you have to pay, you have to pay it.

[50] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 231.

[51] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 231. Clearly the assumption here is that Shedd in the nineteenth century stands in continuity with earlier post-Reformed theologians. He cites Bavinck as a nineteenth century example of someone who recognized the importance of remunerative righteousness.

[52] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 231. Cf. Calvin's *Institute*, 1.10.2.

[53] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 93-106. See original in 'God, Righteousness and Retribution,' *MR,* April 1983, 75-7; 'A Just God and a Saviour,' *MR,* May 1983, 99-100.

Reformed views of the righteousness of God which had come under attack in the Calvin versus the Calvinists debate and even earlier through the work of nineteenth century Scottish theologian John McLeod Campbell. This is the locus where Macleod makes the earlier defense against J. B. Torrance who criticized Reformed orthodoxy for making justice essential in God and mercy contingent or arbitrary. On this issue Macleod once again positions himself as an apologist for Reformed orthodoxy.

He was also particularly interested in the question of whether God's punishment of sin is discretionary or necessary. He argues the latter and positions himself historically as taking the side of John Owen over Samuel Rutherford. Subtle as it may appear, even on this topic, one suspects Macleod's affirmation of divine passibility is not far from view. In *Behold Your God,* Macleod simply states that sin cannot help but make God angry.[54] However, as we look to Macleod's lectures where he covers the very same material, he describes that anger analogously to human anger.

> [God] punishes sin by necessity of nature. He hates it. He recoils from it! The way we feel about Belsen or some other horrific atrocity is the way that God feels about all sin…God can't look upon sin—my sin, your sin, any sin—God deplores it. God is necessarily angry with it as you are angry with what you see as injustice. And you can't choose not to be angry when you see some young thug beating up an old woman. You can't *but* be angry with that…God is necessarily angry with it as you are angry with injustice.[55]

Crucially, we see here that Macleod understands divine anger not merely as an outward response to sin. God's outward disposition towards sin reflects the inward repulsion from sin analogous to human anger.

Divine Love

When it comes to divine love, Macleod takes issue not only with the way the Scholastics relegated it among the attributes but also with the way it is defined. One example he gives is Amandus Polanus (1561-1610) who defines God's love as 'the essential property or essence of

[54] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 95.
[55] Macleod, 'Righteousness of God (1).'

God, whereby delighting Himself in it He wishes it [the creature] the good which He approves.'[56] To this, Macleod responds, 'Maybe. But is this really the message of John 3:16?' It may be that what bothers Macleod about this definition is the sterility of the terminology. His concerns here could also reflect the suspicion that Scholastics sometimes defined God's love in a way that made it appear self-centered.[57] Elsewhere he writes,

> Sometimes the scholastics (including Reformed scholastics) suggest that God's most fundamental concern is self-love. Herman Hoeksema [1886-1965], for example, writes, 'God's absolute and pure Self-centredness is expressed and manifest especially in His love.' This is surely close to blasphemy. At the heart of love there is always *pros*: the turning of the face of the one toward the other. That is where the Son was: *pros ton theon*. And the relationship was mutual. He was His Father's delight.[58]

What is more informative than this single criticism is the way Macleod lays out his exposition of divine love in his chapter 'Love Divine, All Loves Excelling.'[59] He opens with the critique we have already noted that theologians have been wrong to subsume divine love under divine goodness, saying that divine love 'deserves prominence commensurate with the clarity with which it was revealed on Calvary, its special relevance to our redemption and, in its Christian form, its stupendous unexpectedness.'[60] He divides his exposition into two parts: the nature of divine love and its object. On its nature, he speaks of the meaning of the Greek term *agape* and then he discusses the 'divine self-giving on Calvary' as the 'supreme elucidation of *agape*.'[61]

For Macleod, a proper explication of the nature of divine love requires attention to the cost of the Father's love on Calvary in giving up His Son. If by 1979 Macleod was not yet prepared to deny divine impassibility, he was at least adamant that it must not prevent us from

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[56] Macleod references this quote as it appears in Heppe's *Reformed Dogmatics*, 95. See, Macleod, *Behold Your God,* 231. He mistakenly attributes it to Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706) rather than Amandus Polanus (1561-1610).
[57] This idea of centered-love should be differentiated from the love that the persons of the Trinity have for one another. For Macleod's exposition of the latter idea, see Macleod, *Shared Life*, 52-3; *A Faith to Live By*, 59-61.
[58] Macleod, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity,' 14.
[59] *Behold Your God*, 177-90. As we have already noted, the contents of this chapter date back to two essays Macleod published in the *Monthly Record* in 1979. We assume that given its re-publication in 1990, Macleod did not take much issue with what he had earlier said. There is also no substantive difference in the way Macleod teaches the love of God in his 2010 lectures over the course of two hours, though the content is slightly rearranged.
[60] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 178.
[61] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 180.

contemplating God's fatherly sorrow at the cross. Doing so, of course, requires an implicit rejection of impassibility.

> It is important to remember the cost to the father arising out of His love for the Son. How Abraham felt as he brought to the altar his son, his only son, whom he loved…These are but shadows of the cost to God, as the love of these fathers for their sons was but a faint reflection of God's love for His. We lose much if our doctrine of the impassibility of God obscures from us the implications of the depth of the Father's affection.[62]

Then, comparing God's reluctance to punish Christ to the reluctance He showed in punishing the Israelites in Hosea 11, Macleod wonders, 'With what hesitation and misgivings and reluctance and sorrow did such a God—who does not at any time afflict willingly and for whom judgement is a strange work—with what reluctance does He bruise His Son and awake His sword against His very fellow!'[63]

Macleod's work here helpfully illustrates how his Scholastic critique, his affirmation of divine passibility, and his understanding of the divine attributes are interrelated. For him the cross is the highest demonstration to humanity of divine love, and it must therefore be central to the dogmatic definition. Central to that divine love is the idea that the cross was a sacrificial act for the Father as well as the Son. It was costly to Him and Macleod argues that the presuppositions of scholasticism prevented this truth from maintaining its proper centrality in theology. Thus, for him, a biblically-driven doctrine of divine love requires a biblically-driven doctrine of divine passibility.

As for the objects of divine love, Macleod identifies three: divine love within the Trinity, divine love toward the world, and divine love toward the elect. When speaking of divine love within the Trinity, he clarifies his criticism of Hoeksema, arguing that even within God, love is never self-directed *per se*. 'The Father and the Son are not so distinct that they are two separate

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[62] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 183. In the original article, Macleod uses the term 'impassivity' rather than impassibility. Macleod, 'Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,' 205.
[63] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 183.

beings. But they are so distinct that the one is the object of the other's love. To each, the other is the beloved.'[64]

It is in discussing God's love for the world and for the elect that we see how Macleod tries to organize divine attributes to respond to the pastoral questions which arise from them.[65] He takes up questions like how can we say that God loves his enemies (which Macleod infers from Matt. 5:43-48) if he condemns the reprobate to Hell? Or, to what extent can we tell unbelievers from the pulpit that Christ has died for them?[66]

In answering these questions, we also see Macleod's penchant for paradox for the perceived sake of Scriptural faithfulness. The most explicit example of this is his assertion based on Matthew 5:43-48 that God loves the reprobate in the world. In his lectures a student asked him how we could say that God loves someone who is reprobate. Macleod responds,

> Well, I suppose I deflect the question. You know, you're asking a question of logic. What I'm saying is the Bible itself uses the word love in relation to the evil as well as to the good. We are told to love our enemies and in that way to be followers of our heavenly Father who himself loves those who are evil and gives them a share of the benefits of rain and sunshine, for example. So, it's a question of biblical usage. Does the Bible use this word? I can see your point… that if God loves them how can they go to Hell? You've got to ask the Bible that…God loves them to the extent that God gives them rain and sunshine and thereby both the time and the incentive to repent. God's longsuffering ought to lead us to repentance and the impenitent cannot claim, 'You never did us any good—never showed us any kindness' because God did show them kindness…[it] does not lead to their salvation but it does not mean that He didn't love them. It's a question of the Bible's own usage.[67]

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[64] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 185.

[65] That is not to say that Macleod found no pastoral applicability of inter-Trinitarian love. Much of his work *The Shared Life* is an exploration of how the love between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit models the love humans should reflect towards God and one another.

[66] It is worth noting that Macleod's lectures were structured around the immediate relevance of theology. This is exemplified in the prayer with which he opens his lecture on divine love. Macleod, 'Divine Love,' Systematic Theology 101 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, November 11, 2010).

> Oh Lord, we bless you for what you are and who you are and we bless you above all for the wonder of your love; that love which itself is eternal and unchangeable; that love within yourself that is the foundation of all other love and all other being. O Lord help us to understand as much as is within our human grasp and as much as is disclosed to us in your own Word and in your own actions – above all on the cross of Calvary. And help us Lord to become committed and effective heralds of the love of God to a world in which there is so much hatred and so much competition and so much human pride and so much lust for power. Enable us Lord to emulate the one who washed his disciples' feet and to accept our station in life and in your church – whatever that station may be – honored to be one of your creatures and to be one of your people. Hear us in our savior's name. Amen.

His opening prayers would often be similarly styled as preparatory contemplations on the topic at hand directed towards God.

[67] Macleod, 'Righteousness of God (1),' Systematic Theology 101 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, November 18, 2010).

Afterwards, when another student asks whether it is possible to say that God loves those who are in Hell, Macleod tentatively says no. In his explanation, he also rejects Augustine's argument that God loves those in Hell as creatures but hates them as sinners. 'We just don't have any encouragement to use that kind of language…I think it's better to focus on the Bible's own emphasis which is [that] the unmitigated anger of God is directed against them.'[68] It is not so much that Macleod here is making theological decisions contrary to logic (as he himself seems to suggest above). What we do see is that when Macleod becomes convinced that a concept like God's love towards the reprobate is explicit in Scripture, he is willing to accept the premise as a first principle which all further deductions must accept *prima facie*. He takes a similar posture towards God's capacity to suffer.

Divine Impassibility

In his discussion on the poor definitions of the divine attributes, Macleod only lists the four we have just named. However, we might also include God's impassibility in this discussion because Macleod hints at the possibility of predicating impassibility of God *if* the concept is bound with proper biblical restraints. He writes, 'The word *apatheia* does not occur in Scripture. If it is to remain in theological use we need to be careful that the idea it represents does not lead to distortion and suppression of biblical truth.'[69]

What is interesting is that though Macleod in his chapter finds the term impassibility or *apatheia* too misleading to be useful, he also shows sympathy to an essay by J.I. Packer where Packer recognizes the very same concerns about the traditional doctrine of impassibility. However, unlike Macleod, Packer's approach was not to dispatch the term but to redefine it. Packer writes that impassibility means 'simply that God's experiences do not come upon him as ours come upon us, for his are foreknown, willed and chosen by himself, and are not involuntary surprises forced on him from outside apart from his own decision, in the way that ours regularly

[68] Macleod, 'Righteousness of God (1).'
[69] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 235.

are.' Packer goes on to claim that unlike our grief, there is a chosenness of God's grief and distress' and that chosenness is at the heart of the meaning of impassibility.[70] Of course, in defining impassibility in this way, Packer, like Macleod, has really distanced himself from the traditional doctrine of divine impassibility, even if he uses the same terminology. Still there may be merit in Packer's approach. One of the consequences of the fact that Macleod (unlike Packer) largely abandons the language of *apatheia* or impassibility altogether is that he is left without a word to describe the several aspects of the traditional doctrine of divine impassibility which he would, in fact, affirm.

Philosophical Preconception

A final criticism, and the one which bears most directly on Macleod's doctrine of divine passibility is that the church has become over reliant on faulty philosophical preconceptions.

> Too often…philosophical preconceptions have kept the church from hearing what God is actually saying about himself in Scripture. This has been particularly true of the doctrine of the impassibility of God: what the Greek Fathers called his *apatheia*. Men began with the assumption of the absoluteness and immutability of God and went on to lay down the principle that He was passionless and incapable of suffering.[71]

Polemics aside, there is truth to the fact that in orthodox Reformed theology, the doctrine of impassibility is not an isolated theological claim. It presupposes a wider doctrine of immutability and, behind that, divine simplicity. From a logical perspective at least, it is difficult to see how one could deny divine impassibility without also denying these prior claims (at least as they have historically been articulated). The historic doctrine of divine immutability posits that there can be no change in God, including changes of emotional state. He cannot be joyful in one instant and sorrowful the next. Moreover, if God cannot change, then he also cannot be affected by an event outside of himself. This at least, is the orthodox Reformed position.

Macleod understood that rejecting impassibility must have implications for immutability, but he never denies immutability in the same way that he does impassibility. At times it appears

[70] Packer, 'Theism for Our Time,' 17.
[71] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 232.

as if he chooses to reject God's metaphysical immutability, opting instead to emphasize God's ethical immutability. For instance, he comments at one point on the significance of Exodus 3:15 saying, 'Jehovah means, "He will be". But what will He be? He will be as He was to their fathers. That is the core of his immutability. It is not a metaphysical, abstract immutability, but an irrevocable commitment to His people.'[72] This definition of immutability in terms of ethical consistency is not unusual across Macleod's corpus. Decades later he speaks of God as 'morally immutable.'[73] Based on what we have already seen, such an emphasis in Macleod is perhaps expected. He takes an historic Reformed orthodox doctrine and emphasizes its redemptive relevance even to the point of shifting the term's original meaning. An emphasis on ethical immutability also gives Macleod some metaphysical wiggle room to suggest that God can be affected by events outside of himself as passibility might require.

Even so, it would be an oversimplification to say that Macleod rejects all metaphysical notions of divine immutability. In a 1977 lecture on the doctrine of God at a Banner of Truth Conference, Macleod speaks of God's changelessness in ways which seem to tend towards a traditional understanding of metaphysical immutability: 'God's existence is self-originated…He is the un-begun God. He is the un-originated God. He is the unchanging God in whom there is no progress, there is no development, there is no mutation, there is no evolution, there is no growth. He is the being one, not the becoming one, not the growing one, not the developing one, but the one who is the same, the invariable yesterday, today, and forever.'[74] While Macleod often emphasizes God's ethical immutability, he also seems hesitant to abandon metaphysical immutability altogether. He would likely explain his emphasis on ethical immutability as one that reflects the Bible's own emphasis. In Chapter Three, we will see how Macleod tries to accommodate divine impassibility with a form of metaphysical immutability.

[72] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 50. Originally published as 'His Great Name,' *MR*, February 1980, 24. God's ethical immutability is highlighted across Macleod's major works.
[73] Macleod has noted a similar emphasis on God's ethical immutability in the work of H. R. Mackintosh. See Macleod, *Jesus is Lord: Christology Yesterday and Today* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2000), 111-12.
[74] Macleod, 'The Doctrine of God (1),' 1977.

There is one further aspect of Macleod's view of immutability which has an important bearing on his understanding of divine passibility. It seems that somewhere early in his theological development, Macleod became concerned that the doctrine of divine immutability could be understood in such a way that it might nullify the efficacy of the atonement. In the earliest recording I have collected of Macleod (1973), he locates this issue as central to the gospel proclamation.

> It is the great distinctive of evangelical Christianity that it proclaims and it contends for an objective atonement which affects not only humanity as spectators but which affects primarily God himself. It was upon God that the sacrifice and atonement of Christ in the first instance is terminated. It is God first of all who is affected. When I say affected, I am conscious of openness of the charge of inconsistency with the immutability of Jehovah. And yet the atonement *does* terminate on God. It is valid for *him*. But it changes not his nature. It changes not his purposes. It changes his procedure. It changes the relationship of God to man.[75]

This statement begs several theological questions which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter when more direct attention is given to the relationship between divine anger and the atonement. While it might be possible to understand this quote as an orthodox expression of immutability, it is important to see Macleod's willingness to challenge what he understands to be orthodox interpretations of the divine attributes when he disagrees with the philosophical preconceptions that undergird them.

What of the relationship between divine passibility and divine simplicity? While Macleod acknowledges divine simplicity, he never tries to reconcile the two emphases in his thought. In fact, he never seems to acknowledge that it might be inconsistent to affirm both passibility and simplicity. Because of this we can only speculate on his answer. In his recent essay on the greatness of God, Macleod recognizes that divine simplicity removes any notion of composition in God and that with such a view, 'each attribute characterises all the others.'[76] What would it mean for God's passibility then to characterize all other attributes? In some ways this is easier to conceptualize than in others. We have already seen how Macleod uses divine passibility to

[75] Macleod, 'Cursed for Us,' address, Banner of Truth Leicester Minister's Conference, Leicester, 1973.
[76] Macleod, 'The Greatness of God,' *Bulletin of the Scottish Evangelical Theological Society* 36, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 27.

illuminate both love and righteousness to some extent. What would seem to be more problematic is the notion of taking one aspect of God's passibility—such as divine sorrow—and saying that, given divine simplicity, God's sorrow is infinite, eternal, and unchanging. Macleod does seem aware of the problem of absolutizing pain in God and in the same essay in which he lays out his fullest explanation of divine simplicity he also cautions (as he does in several places) that divine suffering must always be understood as subsumed under divine blessedness. Speaking of God's blessedness as 'one eternal "moment" of blessedness,' he writes,

> This is one single moment of infinitely varied blessedness, as the triune God enjoys both the joys of the Land of the Trinity and the joys of his space-time creation. Even the doctrine of divine passibility, if we embrace it, must be set within this single moment of blessedness. The cost of the Father's love as expressed on Calvary was not a transient moment, but part of the one eternal 'moment' subsumed, we know not how, into his infinite blessedness.[77]

An Orthodox Turn

It is tempting to treat Macleod's work in *Behold Your God* as his most definitive statement on the doctrine of God. It well may be, but it is also important to recognize that Macleod's thinking on the divine attributes did not end with that book. In his more recent comments on the doctrine of God, there is a definitive shift in his attitude towards scholasticism which suggests that he no longer holds to some of the critiques he laid out in 1990. This is most apparent in his 2020 book *Therefore the Truth I Speak*. At one point Macleod discusses the criticisms which those like J. B. Torrance and T. F. Torrance have brought against Federal theology and its vision of Reformed orthodoxy. Much of what he says in response is similar to what he might have said to the Torrance's almost fifty years earlier. What is different, however, is the way in which he defends Reformed orthodoxy from the criticism of scholasticism.

Recall that in the twentieth century, Macleod defended his tradition from the charge of 'scholasticism' by claiming that the tradition was not so embedded in scholasticism as its critics claimed. In *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, Macleod does not declare Reformed orthodoxy innocent of

[77] Macleod, 'The Greatness of God,' 27.

Scholasticism. Rather he declares scholasticism innocent. He writes, 'we need to treat with considerable suspicion the widely prevailing practice of using "scholastic" as a pejorative term' because it refers to a method of theological discourse rather than a specific set of theological claims.[78] This is from the same Macleod who thirty years earlier laid the problems of Reformed orthodoxy's doctrine of God almost exclusively at the feet of scholastic influenced.

What changed? Situated historically, we can say that Macleod's thought here reflects a wider shift in Reformed theology towards an appreciation of the continuities between Medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation theology. Chief among contemporary theologians who have demonstrated these continuities is Richard Muller. In response to the twentieth-century accusation that Theodore Beza introduced 'a poisonous stream of scholasticism in Reformed theology,' Macleod says that Muller 'has worked tirelessly, and effectively, to demolish this myth: a myth which can survive only by divorcing from their historical context all the parties concerned.'[79]

To be clear, Macleod never needed to be convinced that Beza and Calvin were of the same convictions, and he frequently refers to the fact that his Scottish theological hero William Cunningham was putting that question to rest in the nineteenth century.[80] What is different here in Macleod's own argument is that all traces of scholasticism as a pejorative identifier are missing. In fact, Macleod seems to find comfort in the fact that so much of Reformed orthodoxy is prefigured in medieval theology because it points to its catholicity. Speaking of the usefulness for scholasticism in Reformed and post-Reformed theology, Macleod writes,

> That Beza used these 'honoured methods' [i.e. scholasticism] is undeniable, but the reason he used them was, precisely, that they were honoured. Recent scholarship has highlighted the fact that there was significant continuity as well as discontinuity between the Reformation and mediaeval Catholicism. It was always known that Calvin and his contemporaries among the Reformers were conversant with the theology of the Early

[78] Macleod, *Therefore, The Truth I Speak*, 81. Richard Muller discusses this distinction in detail (especially as it relates to interpreting John Calvin and his successors) in chapter three of *The Unaccommodated Calvin*, 39-61. On this topic Macleod also appreciatively cites Carl Trueman, and R. S. Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999).
[79] Macleod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, 361.
[80] William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862), 345-412.

> Fathers. What has become clearer is that much of their thinking was also in line with that of such Schoolmen as Thomas Aquinas and Peter the Lombard. From this point of view only a relatively small proportion of the *Institutes* reflects Calvin's 'own thought'. His doctrine of the Trinity, his Christology, his understanding of original sin and his doctrine of the atonement are all in line with a catholic tradition stretching back through the Scholastics to the great ecumenical creeds and to such figures as Irenaeus, Gregory of Nyssa, Chrysostom and Augustine.[81]

Macleod goes on to approach scholasticism from several different angles and where he does criticize medieval theology, he argues that post-Reformation scholasticism found a better path. For instance, he says that medieval theologians like Aquinas were far more indebted to Aristotle than later Reformed theologians. At the same time, he praises the Reformed theologians for their correct and more balanced use of 'the Philosopher.' He says that Aristotle's 'rhetoric and logic, and particularly his careful distinctions, were as useful to the Reformed academies as they were to the traditional *scholia*. This is why Calvin continued to use them, and this is why Beza followed suit, pressing Scholasticism into the service of the Reformation...'[82]

One sees a similar softening of animosity towards Reformed orthodox scholastic tendencies in a 2018 lecture he gave on the greatness of God. Recall that in *Behold Your God*, Macleod complains that seventeenth century theologians minimized the significance of the love of God by subsuming it under the doctrine of divine goodness. In his later lecture, Macleod defends the historic approach: 'In highlighting the goodness of God the Westminster divines had not the least intention of obscuring or downplaying the divine love, but they saw the divine goodness as the more comprehensive term. God is good through and through; and that goodness is infinite, eternal and unchangeable; wise, just, powerful and holy.'[83] This would seem to indicate that Macleod's growing appreciation for the scholastic tradition in post-Reformation orthodoxy also may have led to some growing appreciation of the methods and outcomes, even of this tradition's doctrine of God.

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81 Macleod, *Therefore, the Truth I Speak*, 362.
82 Macleod, *Therefore, the Truth I Speak*, 363. Cf. Macleod, 'The Significance of the Westminster Confession,' in *The History of Scottish Theology*, *Volume II*, 2-3.
83 Macleod, 'The Greatness of God,' 28.

Assuming that these evidences reflect a genuine shift in Macleod's thinking, it is difficult to say when this shift occurred. It may well have been a trickle of influence over several decades. After all, Macleod had been heavily invested in the scholarship surrounding the Calvin versus the Calvinists debate since the late 1960s.[84] Recordings of Macleod's 2010 lectures on the doctrine of God show that as late as that year Macleod was still teaching the criticisms he lays out in *Behold Your God* and in that lecture, he shows no indication of distancing himself from those critiques.[85] What we can say is that between 2010 and 2020, Macleod's views about scholasticism become far more positive than they were in earlier decades. This includes a greater appreciation both for the methodology and the specific doctrinal stances of post-Reformation Reformed orthodoxy.

It is all the more interesting therefore that despite this clear shift towards more orthodox views of the doctrine of God, Macleod remained a consistent proponent of divine passibility. In virtually every academic article and book that Macleod published after 2010 (including the ones where Macleod offers his new, more positive perspective of scholasticism in Reformed orthodoxy) he gave some form of affirmation of divine passibility.[86]

Conclusion

That Macleod's affirmation of divine passibility continued even in the context of what appears to be a far more positive assessment of the Reformed orthodox doctrine of God would

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[84] In a 2009 article on Amyraldianism, Macleod appreciatively references much of the literature that he would later cite to give a positive description of scholasticism (theologians like Richard Muller, Carl Trueman, and Paul Helm), but he does so only to make the general point that there is continuity between Calvin and his successors. Macleod, 'Amyraldus Redivivus: a review article,' *Evangelical Quarterly* 81.3 (2009), 211.

[85] In his in-class discussion Macleod does offer small hints that he is continuing to think through some of the issues involved. At one point he remarks, 'It's beginning to suggest itself to me that even Bavinck who is perhaps the master Reformed theologian in this particular domain [of the divine attributes] is very heavily influenced by Aquinas.' At the time, that was not necessarily a compliment. He tells his students: 'You can, for example, pick up Jim Packer's *Knowing God* and then go into Bavinck or even more into Aquinas and wonder, "Are these men discussing the same subject?" Because there is such a gap between the two kinds of approach. Fundamentally, the one is religious and feeds your soul and the other, at first sight anyway, does not feel religious and does not seem to feed your soul. These are generalizations but I think there is some truth in them.' Macleod, 'Attributes of God,' 2010.

[86] For some of Macleod's more recent comments see, Macleod, *Therefore the Truth I Speak*, 349; 'The Work of Christ Accomplished,' in *Christian Dogmatics: Reformed Theology for the Church Catholic*, eds. Michael Allen and Scott Swain, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), 247-8; 'The Work of Christ,' in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed, Matthew Barrett 371-2, 399; 'The Greatness of God,' 25. 'The Significance of the Westminster Confession' in *The History of Scottish Theology*, *Volume II*, 7; 'Does God have Feelings?' December 9, 2019, https://donaldmacleod.org.uk/dm/does-god-have-feelings/; *Christ Crucified*, 49-52.

seem to suggest the central place of divine passibility to Macleod's thought. It was for him one of the fundamental principles of Christian theology which becomes an *a priori* truth against which all further theological reflection must be judged and apart from which the message of the gospel becomes diluted.[87] Throughout his career, Macleod continued to posit that the doctrine of divine impassibility was one area of Reformed orthodoxy (and, as he rightly acknowledgeded, one area of the wider tradition of Christianity since the second century) which did not reflect the biblical witness. The criticisms we have laid out in this chapter are key to understanding Macleod's wider theological project and will reappear throughout the following chapters.

[87] In one of his most recent essays, Macleod calls the reality of divine suffering one of the 'key elements' of Scripture's revelation of God. 'If the crucifixion cost God the Father nothing, the Christian Eucharist loses much of its focus.' Macleod, 'The Significance of the Westminster Confession,' 7.

Chapter 3 – The Image of God and Passibility

> *If Calvary was painless for Him, we are not made in His image and he does not love with our love. When Abraham offered Isaac, there was pain… If things were different when God gave up His Son, then either he does not love His Son or His love is so radically different from ours as to be meaningless.*[1]

Donald Macleod's argument for divine passibility relies upon a particular understanding of the image of God that includes the capacity for emotions as one of its constitutive elements. He proposes that man has an emotional capacity because he bears the image of God who himself has a rich emotional life. In doing so, he assumes a meaningful, analogical continuity between these two realities. Human emotions like pity, joy, anger, and grief are imperfect reflections of similar realities in God.[2] This chapter shows the centrality of the image of God to Macleod's articulation of divine suffering.[3] To trace his thought we propose a dogmatic sketch of Macleod's doctrine of God in man. From this, we show how Macleod's understanding of the image of God relates to his understanding of divine emotions in God. We then look at several key passages in Scripture that Macleod uses to assert God's emotional suffering, the most important for Macleod being Scriptures related to the

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[1] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 237.

[2] I use the term 'emotions' throughout this thesis rather than 'passions' or 'affections' which have been more common synonyms in the historic Christian tradition. In part, this reflects Macleod's own preference though I am aware of the term's potential shortcomings. 'Emotion' as it is used today originated with Scottish philosopher Thomas Hume (1769-1850) who sought language to describe human psychology without religious connotations. Ironically, historian Thomas Dixon has shown that the Free Church leader Thomas Chalmers was instrumental in popularizing the word. The primary impact this has had on dogmatics is that where it was once possible to distinguish between passions, affections, and appetites as separate realities, these terms have now been subsumed into a single (and more ambiguous) concept. Rather than trying to translate Macleod's use of the term emotion back into the historical language of passions and affections—an effort I think which would unnecessarily complicate this research—I choose instead to define what Macleod means when he speaks of human and divine emotions. On the historic lexical transition from passions and affections to emotions see Thomas Dixon Jr., *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[3] The definition for divine impassibility that I provided in the introduction of this thesis indicates that divine passibility involves more than the capacity to experience pain. God is also passible if he can experience 'pleasure and pain caused by the action of another being' or if he can experience changing emotions within Himself. This chapter focuses primarily on negative emotions in God like sorrow and anger, but the same issues would apply to more positive affections like divine joy.

cross of Christ such as John 3:16 and Romans 8:32. In doing so, we also show how Macleod distinguishes himself from Reformed orthodox interpretations of anthropopathy in Scripture.[4]

Throughout his works, Macleod places a decided emphasis on the continuity between divine and human emotions. Behind these proposed continuities, however, lie less obvious but important dogmatic qualifications that Macleod employs in an attempt to safeguard other divine attributes including God's immutability. His emphasis on the continuity between human and divine emotions is not without apparent logical inconsistencies, nor does his work here stay within the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy. Macleod does not hide either of these facts or dismiss their importance. What we find in his more judicious dogmatic claims is a surprising lean towards some of the key tenants of Reformed orthodoxy and an attempt to deal with the logical paradoxes that his own position creates. First however, we must show the dogmatic link Macleod makes between divine emotions and human emotions through the doctrine of the image of God.

The Image of God

Even a cursory reading of Macleod's writings on the image of God makes clear that he works from within a largely Reformed orthodox framework of the doctrine.[5] Reformed theologians often speak of the image of God in a two-fold sense: there is a moral image and a natural image.[6] The moral image is man's original righteousness which he had at his creation. This moral image orientated man to God and it was completely lost with Adam's first sin.[7] However, the image of

[4] Some theologians (including Macleod at times) use the term anthropomorphism when speaking of what is more precisely called anthropopathism. The choice has little significance in the debate over passibility. Thomas Weinandy, for instance, is an advocate for impassibility and also generally uses the term anthropomorphism.
[5] Macleod's lengthiest written discussions of the image of God are 'God's Image in Man,' *Banner of Truth* 122 (November 1973): 6-14; Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 89-99; *Shared Life*, 58-67. This chapter will also reference recorded lectures from Macleod's Systematic Theology 102 course lectures on the image of God which were recorded in March 2011 at the Free Church College (now Edinburgh Theological Seminary).
[6] Within Reformed theology the terms describing these two elements vary. Alternatives include the 'natural and essential' image, the 'narrow and broad,' the 'actual and ontic,' and the 'formal and natural.' G. C. Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing, 1962), 38-52.
[7] Berkouwer, *Man: The Image of God*,' 39.

God is not erased from man altogether because the natural image remains. Because of his commitment to total depravity, Macleod takes the loss of the moral image for granted.[8] Nonetheless his writings also emphasize the importance of what remains in the natural image, however damaged by sin it might be. It is there in the natural image that we find man's capacity for a rich emotional life—a life which for Macleod points to an analogous reality in God.

In contextualizing Macleod's own work here, it is helpful to recognize that this positive use of the natural image was not universally accepted in the late-twentieth-century Free Church. Some thought an emphasis on the continuing image of God in man threatened the doctrine of total depravity. In the general assemblies of 1980 and 1985, two different ministers criticized the use (or overuse) of the idea that fallen man still retains God's image.[9] The tendency to downplay the ongoing presence of the image of God was expressed by John Kennedy (1818-1884), whose legacy loomed large over the post-1900 Free Church:

> All the image of God is effaced from the soul of fallen man. That temple is now an utter ruin. True there is some light—'the work of the law written in the heart,'—but like a lamp hung from the broken vault of a ruin, its flickering glimmer only makes more manifest the wreck on which it shines. True, there is a conscience still in that fallen soul, which seems as if it were a living thing amidst the dead; —the one survivor of those who once worshipped in that temple. It is there, and it speaks; but its cry, like the screech of the owl amidst the desolation of the ruin, only serves to make the place more dismal.[10]

[8] Macleod recognizes a distinction between absolute and total depravity. 'Absolute depravity means an absolute hostility to God as admits no progression or variation.' He rejects this notion, arguing that there are indeed variations among humans in terms of degrees of sinfulness. 'Not every prison is an Auschwiz (sic) nor every city a Sodom. Many men are capable of natural affection, fidelity and even of heroic self-sacrifice.' Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 159.
[9] See Macleod, 'The General Assembly 1980,' *MR*, July 1980, 144; John J. Murray, 'The General Assembly,' *MR,* July 1985, 158.
[10] John Kennedy, *Man's Relations to God: Traced in the Light of "the Present Truth"* (Edinburgh: John Maclaren, 1869), 42-3.

The Natural Image

Macleod defines the natural image in its broadest sense as 'that which distinguishes man from every other species.'[11] In doing so he reflects Calvin's own principle that 'the image of God extends to everything in which the nature of man surpasses that of all other species of animals.'[12] Such an open-ended definition invites speculation as to what are the various aspects of human nature that do distinguish man from the rest of creation, a point upon which the Reformed tradition has never reached a consensus (even if some aspects like the will and the intellect have been universally recognized).[13] Whatever particular elements do make up the natural image, they represent aspects of man which are analogous to something within God Himself.[14] For instance, Macleod writes of human freedom: 'Man possesses a vestigial freedom. God acts freely. He operates under no limitations or restraints. Nor is he subject to any coercion. He does according to his will. This freedom is an important element in his glory and at the same time an integral part of his image as borne by man.'[15] Thus, man's freedom is qualitatively different from God's and yet God made man with a clear continuity between his freedom and theirs.

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[11] Donald Macleod, 'Man in the Image of God (2),' (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, Marcy 29, 2011). In his lectures, Macleod quotes Ursinus who writes, 'There are some things in angels and men which bear a certain analogy and correspondence with what we find in God, who comprehends, in himself, all that is truly good.' Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Cincinnati: Elm Street Printing Company, 1888), 85.

[12] Calvin, *Instit.* 1.15.164.

[13] This lack of consensus over which attributes make up the image of God left G. C. Berkouwer to lament, 'We can hardly avoid an impression of a certain arbitrariness… when we consider the way in which the characteristics of man's essence [i.e. the natural image] are often described.' Berkouwer, *The image of God*, 40.

[14] In passing, it is interesting to note that Macleod fell out of favor with the term 'man' as a descriptor for humanity in these discussions. While the word appears frequently in his earlier writings, in 2011 he alerted his students to the danger of its use:

> You notice that the word 'man' [on the handout I have just give you] is in inverted commas because it is gender loaded and sexist and so therefore it's used with care. It's very hard to find an alternative word… so I've simply decided to put the word in inverted commas to alert you to the difficulty and to recommend that you always be aware of the danger of causing offense because today in modern English—and this is now standardized—man is the male of the species and it is not allowed to use it in a more comprehensive generic sense… [B]ear the difficulty in mind and work out your own policy on the matter.

Macleod, 'The Creation of Man.'

[15] Macleod, 'God's Image in Man,' 9.

In an early article (1973), Macleod suggested four elements that belong to the natural image: rationality, freedom, aesthetic sense, and community.[16] In his systematic theology lectures several decades later in 2011 he also included communication and self-consciousness.[17] Conspicuously missing in both iterations is any mention of emotions as a specific element of the image of God.[18] Even so, it is clear throughout Macleod's corpus that he understands emotions to be an integral part of the divine image. For instance, he writes, 'The pain and grief which we feel when confronted with inhumanity, deprivation and squalor must have its counterpart (and indeed its source) in the God whose image we bear.'[19]

Typically, Macleod speaks about emotions as if they are a subcategory of one or more elements of the natural image. For instance, he includes the capacity for love as an aspect of community/relationality and if the discussion of emotions in God in the following section are any indication, Macleod would likely locate emotions primary within the locus of rationality.[20] At other times he will simply write about emotions as a distinctive element of what it means to be humans in a way that implies he understands it to be part of the natural image. For instance, he writes in *A Faith to Live By*,

> Man is an emotional creature: a creature of feelings… To be human is to have feelings of joy, of sorrow, of fear and apprehension, of home, of elation and disappointment. To be human is to love and to need to be loved. These things are not weaknesses. They are what God conferred upon us when He made us souls. We are not meant to face bereavement with impassivity or stoicism… It is surely a very unfortunate part of our Western inheritance that we often find it so difficult to accept and to express our own emotions.[21]

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16 Macleod, 'God's Image in Man,' 6-14.

17 Macleod, 'Man in the Image of God (1),' Systematic Theology 102 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, March 28, 2011). Also essential to Macleod understanding of the natural image is that it implies a diversity and equality among image bearers. Macleod, *Shared Life*, 59-60.

18 Macleod does say in his lectures that the fall results in a loss of integrity in emotions, intellect, will, and affections. Macleod, 'Man in the Image of God (1).'

19 Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 237.

20 Macleod, 'Man in the Image of God (1).'

21 Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 92. Macleod does also recognize that our emotions at any given time can be dictated in part by our physical circumstances. For instance, he argues that there is nothing righteous about refusing medication for depression if the underlying problem is a chemical imbalance. Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 93.

Emotion in God

Clearly implied in the idea that emotions are a distinct aspect of God's image in man is the corollary that it must also be possible to predicate emotions of God (in some sense). Macleod does just this in his first significant article on the Trinity in 1985. The connection arises as Macleod discusses what is meant by saying that the Father, Son, and Spirit are three *persons*. Without making the connection explicitly, Macleod defines *person* in that context with many of the same elements he uses to describe the natural image of God in man.[22] It includes the notions of distinction, agency, relations, rationality, and personal properties.[23] It also includes (as a subset of rationality) emotions:

> I would suggest that when we speak of rationality as characterizing the divine persons, we are using it in the same sense as when, in Christology, we speak of Christ as having a *reasonable* soul. Here, the word is affirming, over against Apollinaris, the whole truth of the human psychology of Christ. Hence, *rationalis* means not simply intellect. It also means the affective and the emotional because these are part of the rationality that distinguishes us from *the thing* and *the animal*. When, for example, we speak of the Holy Spirit as a person, we are ascribing to Him thought, intellect, purposefulness, volition, affection and, above all, emotion. In so speaking, of course, one is conscious that in so much of our inherited theology there is no place in our concept of God for any kind of 'passion' …Obviously as I define *person* I am transgressing these parameters, because I do not see how they can be reconciled with the biblical picture. In the divine personalness of each of the hypostases there is a rationality which includes affection and emotion. The Spirit is grieved; and that is already something impossible for an abstraction or a mode.[24]

Of course, it is one thing to ascribe emotions to God and a different thing altogether to say what we mean when we do so. What does it mean for the persons of the Trinity to experience emotions? For Macleod, the starting assumption is that there is at least some continuity between our

[22] Donald Macleod, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity,' 12.
[23] Macleod, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity,' 12-16. By personal properties, Macleod refers to the Son being distinguished by eternal generation, the Spirit by proceeding from the Father and the Son, and the Father as one who neither 'begotten nor proceeds (He is ingenerate).'
[24] Macleod, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity,' 15. Macleod says more concisely in a lecture, 'Theism [contra deism and pantheism] is the idea that one person, namely God, possessed of intellect, will, and emotions made the universe, and we are made in his image.' Macleod, 'Doctrine of God,' Systematic Theology 101 (class lecture, the Free Church College, Edinburgh, October 29, 2010). In his work, *Shared Life*, Macleod writes of divine emotions as sitting at the heart of what it means for the Trinity to be *persons*: 'Above all, a person was what had feelings and was capable of love and affection.' Macleod, *Shared Life*, 36.

experience of emotions and God's. Like the other elements of the divine image (such as intellect, will, and community) there is at least enough continuity that our experience or knowledge of them in the human sphere gives us positive knowledge about them in the divine.

This would seem to create a logical problem (at least from a Reformed orthodox perspective) because attributing any continuity between human and divine emotions at all seems (at least *prima facie*) irreconcilable with other divine attributes. For instance, emotions as we experience them are temporary states occurring consecutively in time. That alone would seem to make emotions impossible for God if he is immutable. Moreover, negative emotions like grief would seem totally incompatible with the notion that God is eternally blessed such as immutability and (if we allow for negative emotions) God's eternal blessedness.

Divine Emotions – a Definition

Before assessing Macleod's approach to such logical challenges it is appropriate here to propose an initial definition for divine emotions as he understands them. According to Macleod, divine emotions are the eternal dispositions of the triune God towards creation and between the members of the Trinity. Importantly, these dispositions in God are logically distinct both from the divine will and the divine intellect yet they exist in complete accord with them. Divine emotions (including negative emotions such as grief) are analogous to human emotions, and our finite, incomplete conception of them can only be made with reference to our own experience.

However, two points of discontinuity between human and divine emotions are crucial. First, unlike human emotions which are always temporary, every emotion attributed to God is eternal. At least some of these emotions (like grief) can be called 'passions' in traditional theological sense of the term in that they indicate a change in God. Divine grief, for instance, is an eternal reality in God (in Macleod's understanding) and yet it is still a passion because of its contingency. Secondly, despite God's experience of negative emotions such as sorrow and pity, God remains eternally blessed.

The assumptions of this definition, such as the eternality of divine emotions, are not always explicit in the way Macleod writes and speaks of divine emotions throughout his corpus. In fact, he will make comments about God's feelings that seem completely contradictory to this definition. He will, for instance, sometimes portray God (especially in his sermons) as so overwhelmed by internal conflict and anguish that it is hard to imagine how He could be blessed in any sense at all. It is in these places that Macleod is most prone to misinterpretation. His overall tendency is to emphasize the continuity between divine and human emotion. In his more judicious comments, however, Macleod will offer crucial qualifications to his predication of emotions like grief, anger, and love to God, suggesting that God's experience of these feelings is rather different from man's.

The best way to understand Macleod's use of divine emotions and why he arrives at the conclusions about them that he does is to follow his own logic from exegesis to dogmatics. That direction—from specific biblical texts to dogmatics—is crucial to understanding his moves towards passibility. He argues that several passages in Scripture clearly reveal that God has divine emotions analogous to those of humans. In fact, he believes that the Scriptures testify to God's rich emotional life so clearly that divine passibility becomes a presupposition of any further dogmatic claims. It is probably too simplistic to say that for Macleod, other divine attributes like God's immutability and his simplicity must be interpreted in the light of divine emotions as if the former takes complete interpretive priority over the latter. It is probably more so the case that Macleod tries to give equal priority to God's emotional life (including suffering) as revealed in Scripture and also to God's immutability. He accepts them both as true which, as we will see, leads to unresolved paradoxes in his logic. Before we look at these paradoxes, however, we must first trace his exegetical logic.

The Sorrow of the Cross

Central to that logic is the idea that several New Testament writers (namely John and Paul) wrote about the event of the cross as if the grief of God the Father was essential to its

interpretation. In Chapter One, we saw that Macleod suggested once to his students that he first came to accept passibility as a result of his preaching at Free Church Communion Seasons where he labored over passages like John 3:16 and Romans 8:32. Verses like these, he reasoned, clearly implied a cost of redemption to God the Father.[25] In fact, that seemed to be the key message of such passages. In his writings, Macleod argues that behind these verses lies a clear allusion to Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 and the fatherly emotional pain that connects the events. He writes:

> [John 3:16], surely, implies that the Father bore, with the Son, the cost of our redemption? How, otherwise, could the cross be an exposition of *his* love? If he sacrificed his Son impassively, as a priest might sacrifice a pigeon, where is the sacrifice for *him*? And why does the New Testament so often express the relation between the Father and the Son in language reminiscent of Abraham sacrificing Isaac? Abraham was called to sacrifice his son, his only son, whom he loved (Gen. 22:2); God so loved the world that he gave *his* only Son (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9). Abraham did not spare his son, his only son (Gen. 22:16); God did not spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all (Rom. 8:32). In view of such echoes, we are surely justified in concluding that there was a continuity between the pain suffered by the human father and the pain suffered by the divine.[26]

Note that Macleod's argument here rests on (at least) two distinct assumptions. The first is that because Romans 8:32 and John 3:16 are allusions to Genesis 22, then we are intended by Paul and John, respectively, to posit an analogy between Abraham's (assumed) emotional pain at the prospect of losing his son and God's.[27] In other words, these passages teach that God grieved at Calvary and is therefore passible.

The second assumption is this: in making this analogy, the reader is expected to understand God's grief at the cross by reflecting upon what such a tragedy would mean to a human father. This step is epistemologically possible for Macleod because of the doctrine of the image of God and an understanding that emotions are part of that image. Therefore, our human experiences of emotions

[25] Macleod might have developed this idea in isolation, but the cost of the cross to God the Father was also a key argument made by other passibilists in the twentieth century. See Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, 90 and Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 243.
[26] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 50-1.
[27] Genesis 22 tells us nothing about Abraham's emotional state, but Macleod infers from God's language in verse two, 'your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love' that there is a clear emotional cost for Abraham.

and fatherhood are shadows of truer realities within God. He writes, 'The truth, surely, is that our creativity, anger and love are but pale shadows of his. We are images of him, not he an image of us.'[28] Indeed, for Macleod, God is the primary analogate and yet because we are made in his image we recognize, even in emotions, a continuity between the human and the divine.[29] That continuity also includes grief, so that Macleod can say of Christ's cry of dereliction at the cross that it 'would break any father's heart. And God's, too, if we are made in his image.'[30] Part of the reason passibility is so important to Macleod is because he believes divine sorrow is not a secondary implication of passages like John 3:16 and Romans 8:32. Divine sorrow, and more specifically the love exemplified in that sorrow, is these passages' central focus.

But, to return to a question raised earlier, what exactly can it mean for God to grieve? At times, Macleod's emotive language about the Father/Son relationship disguises the fact that he never intends to speak of human and divine sorrow univocally. He knows that in predicating Fatherhood to God (and the emotional bonds entailed therein), we must recognize important discontinuities between these realities in God and man. 'We can only conceive of Him and describe Him in terms of concepts and categories familiar from our own experience,' always recognizing and being humbled by the fact that analogical predication describes God neither 'exhaustively or even adequately.'[31] Indeed, the mere fact that God is incorporeal would seem to limit our comprehension of divine sorrow severely. After all, human experiences of sorrow manifest themselves in part (if not entirely) as a physical experience. This discontinuity led J. Todd Billings to argue that 'the notion of God-as-Spirit suffering in a nonbodily nonhuman way' is so abstract that it could not possibly

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[28] Macleod, *Christ Crucified,* 103.

[29] 'God is not a father and a judge in the same sense as he is a rock. He is a real judge and a real father. Indeed, as we have to keep reminding ourselves, it is *our* judging and *our* parenting which are metaphorical: poor shadows and images of the divine.' Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 119. While Macleod clearly works with a concept of analogy, he never provides a detailed explanation as to what analogy entails.

[30] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 52.

[31] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 39.

provide us comfort or solace in the midst of our own suffering. For Billings, only the sufferings of the incarnate Christ could have any meaning for us.[32] In other words, even if we could say that God grieves, can such an idea have any meaning to us at all?

Macleod himself admits that the precise nature of divine suffering is largely inaccessible to us, but he tries to evade its total abstraction by constantly asserting that whatever emotions like sorrow might mean as a divine reality, it cannot have *less* meaning than our own experience of it. God's sorrow cannot be *less* serious and *less* painful than our own even if it the gravity and nature of suffering is qualitatively different. In other words, however, ambiguous the analogy might be between human and divine suffering, Macleod is adamant that sorrow should not be attributed to God equivocally or metaphorically. This is because emotions (even negative one), like other aspects of the image of God find their ultimate reality in God. When we experience grief or anger, we reflect our Maker and the fact that we are made in his image.[33] The Father's love for the Son was qualitatively greater than that of Abraham and Isaac and therefore the loss was qualitatively more significant. 'There was a unique bond between the Father and the Son, arising from the fact that the

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[32] J. Todd Billings, 'Undying Love: In Our Suffering, We Find Comfort in God's Impassiblity,' *First Things*, December 2014.

[33] For Macleod, the analogous relationship between human and divine emotions validates divine passibility. However, some theologians within Macleod's Free Church context like nineteenth century professor George Smeaton seem to have understood a similar analogy between human and divine emotions without explicitly denying impassibility. Smeaton was adamant, for instance, that divine anger was not to be interpreted as an anthropomorphism. Speaking of divine anger, he writes,

> [T]here is no need to repudiate this biblical idea—because it has its analogue in man—or to call the wrath of God a mere anthropomorphism; for the Bible always speaks of God's attributes in words borrowed from human qualities, which indeed, with the due distinctions drawn between the Creator and creatures made in His image are common to both. What sort of excellence would it be in man, to be morally indifferent, and to have neither aversion nor anger at sin? In a word, the idea of divine wrath prompting retribution for moral disobedience, is involved in our very idea of God as a personal God and moral governor: it is inseparable from the fact of sin; it is presupposed in the atonement; and it must be carried with us into any conception which is formed of future retribution.

George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Atonement as Taught by the Apostles* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1870), 313. Smeaton here also seems to understand wrath in a way similar to Macleod in that wrath is not simply something God *does* in retribution for evil. It also describes a moral (and emotional?) response within God which drives him to act. More research is needed on the attribution of affections or emotions to God in nineteenth century Free Church theology. It may be that these theologians, while holding explicitly to divine impassibility, nonetheless prefigure the way Macleod himself speaks of divine emotions and passibility.

Son was uniquely lovable and the Father was uniquely affectionate. God could not have made a greater sacrifice.'[34]

Interpreting Anthropopathism

Macleod's attribution of passibility to God is not limited to the Cross and it perhaps comes as no surprise that Macleod would tend to interpret most anthropopathism in Scripture as divine emotions in God.[35] These emotions include pity (Is. 63:9; Ex. 3:7-8), compassion (Is. 54:8-9; Is. 49:15; Jer. 31:20), and even pleasure (Ps. 51:17; Eph 5:2; Lk. 15:7).[36] As we consider Macleod's interpretation of anthropopathism more broadly it is possible to see how he distinguishes himself from Reformed orthodoxy with his exegesis.

Comments he makes on Hosea 11:8-9 are indicative of his wider approach to anthropopathic texts.[37] He says of this passage in *Christ Crucified*, 'God is faced with the challenge of chastising Israel. She fully deserves it, but God hesitates: "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?" God is in turmoil… It is a picture of love in agony.'[38] In a sermon on the same text, Macleod describes the passage similarly, saying 'we have this marvelous picture of the heart of God churning and turning and this great conflict of emotions. "My compassions are heaving! And my compassions are in turmoil!"…This is a God whose heart is churning over in the intensity of emotion. That is the kind of God that he is…This God who feels deeply.'[39]

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[34] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 73.
[35] I use the term anthropopathism here and elsewhere to identify those passages in Scripture which have commonly been regarded as anthropopathism. No claim is being made as to how such statements should be interpreted.
[36] Donald Macleod, 'Does God Have Feelings?'
[37] 'How can I give you up, O E'phraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! How can I make you like Admah! How can I treat you like Zeboi'im! My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy E'phraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy.' Hosea 11:8-9 RSV. This passage is ideal to consider because we have a record of Macleod dealing with it both written and oral form.
[38] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 51.
[39] Macleod, 'Hosea 11,' sermon. Based on statements made in the sermon, it was probably delivered in Lewis sometime after 1980.

What is most striking about the way Macleod speaks of divine emotions in passages and sermons like these is the lack of qualifications. He is content to say that Hosea depicts God in turmoil. In the contexts from which the two quotes above come, Macleod never wrestles with the implications that asserting some kind of 'divine turmoil' might have for theology proper. Indeed, at times one can get the impression from his exegesis of anthropopathisms (particularly in his sermons) that Macleod attributes them to God almost univocally. Precisely because this is the impression he can sometimes give, it is important to read such passages in the light of key interpretive qualifications he makes elsewhere about what we mean when we speak of divine emotions and especially the pain that negative emotions involves.

A wider reading of Macleod's doctrine of God shows that even while he sometimes seems to reject impassibility in its entirety—as he does, for instance, when asserting that God experiences turmoil in Hosea 11—he actually affirms several important aspects of the doctrine. In *Behold Your God*, he endorses the following elements of impassibility:

> God does not suffer physically, because he has no body. Nor can He suffer internal distress. He cannot be the victim of mental conflict, or a prey to anxiety, discontent, envy, depression or any other neurosis. He can never lose His composure or show the symptoms of stress or agitation. Nor, again, can there be in God any merely passive suffering. He can never be a helpless victim, falling into pain or overtaken by it. Whatever occurs, occurs by his own arrangement and remains under His control. It is clear, too, that God cannot act under the influence of irrational passion.[40]

It can be jarring, then, to move from such measured words to the kinds of interpretive comments Macleod adds to passages like Hosea 11. They seem *prima facie* irreconcilable. For a heart to be in turmoil in *any* sense of the word, would it not necessitate some kind of anxiety, discontent, or 'mental conflict'? Macleod clearly intends to attribute real sorrow and pain in God in the way he interprets texts like Hosea and he even uses them to illuminate the sorrow of the Father at the cross.

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[40] We can also add to his qualifications the less discussed idea that 'the divine act of generation is passionless.' Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 31-2. Macleod would reiterate these qualifications some twenty-five years later in his 2011 lectures on impassibility.

In *Christ Crucified* he cites Hosea 11 as an analogue to the cross from the Father's perspective: 'If the prospect of disciplining his wayward people [in Hosea 11] caused God such angst, how could he have given up his Son to the cross with detachment and equanimity? Here, if anywhere, is love in agony.'[41]

This tension in Macleod's corpus between an attribution of genuine agony and sorrow to God and the desire to safeguard the doctrine of God from any suffering that might imply weakness or creatureliness seems to highlight Macleod's struggle to identify the continuities and discontinuities between divine and human suffering. His language varies so dramatically that at times he can sound like an extreme passibilist and at other times his definition of passibility seems to exclude the possibility of meaningful suffering altogether.

As to the latter, Macleod's qualifications around passibility at times seem to leave him very close to positions advocated by Thomas Weinandy, one of the foremost contemporary defenders of impassibility. Consider the way Weinandy attributes sorrow to God at one point in his book, *Does God Suffer?*

> While grief and sorrow are predicated of the Father metaphorically, in that such emotions do not imply that the Father underwent emotional changes of state or that he suffered some form of divine mental and emotional distress comparable to human beings, yet what is expressed within these metaphors is nonetheless absolutely true. The Father did grieve over what his incarnate Son had lost—his human well-being and life. He grieved, in love, over all that his Son suffered, physically and mentally, as man…His deep sorrow did not spring from or manifest suffering and loss within himself, but rather they sprang from, manifested, and expressed his completely beneficent, all-consuming, and perfect love for his son.[42]

There are surprising similarities here between the way Macleod and Weinandy speak of grief in God. Both men are willing to predicate sorrow of God *in some sense*. They both represent divine grief as having significant discontinuities from human grief (perhaps more than Macleod often

[41] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 52.
[42] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*, 228.

admits). Macleod would also affirm with Weinandy that emotions in God are eternal rather than consecutive experiences (though their formulations here would surely differ).[43]

Nonetheless there is real difference. Weinandy, following Thomas Aquinas, predicates emotions like grief and anger of God metaphorically rather than analogically. For instance, mercy and sorrow (which in humans would be passions), do not represent feelings analogous to what a human might feel in a similar situation. Instead, these emotional notions primarily describe God's actions. To put it rather crudely, when we predicate an emotion of God such as anger, it is not that God has a feeling in himself analogous to human anger. Rather, anger describes God's actions which reflect the kind of actions one might expect from a human who experiences righteous anger.

One of the challenges to conceptualizing impassibility is that if anthropopathy in Scripture merely tells us about God's actions, then the God behind those actions can be obscured to such an extent that predication of him seems altogether impossible. If all of the emotional ascriptions to God are just descriptions of actions, who is to say that God not more like a machine than a person? Weinandy himself seems cognizant of this possibility and tries to clarify that anthropopathy describes God's actions *and* his love. It is worth quoting his interaction with a quote of Aquinas on this point, one which he approves and yet says would benefit from additional comment. Aquinas writes,

> Mercy is especially attributed to God, as seen in its effects, but not as an affection of passion. In proof of which it must be considered that a person is said to be merciful (*misercoris*), as being, so to speak, sorrowful at heart (*miserum cor*); being affected with sorrow at the misery of another as though it were his own. Hence it follows that he endeavours to dispel the misery of this other as if it were his; and this is the effect of mercy. To sorrow, therefore, over the misery of others belongs not to God; but it does most properly belong to him to dispel that misery, whatever be the defect we call by that name. Now defects are not removed, except by the perfection of some kind of goodness; and the primary source of goodness is God.[44]

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[43] Macleod's position on this will be more evident later.
[44] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*, 165. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. English Dominican Province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1947), I, 21, 3.

Weinandy commends this description of how we can understand anthropopathy in terms of God's actions. At the same time, he says more must be said.

> I do not wish to deny any of what Aquinas here proposes. However, what Aquinas may fail to appreciate is that mercy arises out of the reality of God's love and so, while not a negative passion, gives expression to the reality of God's passionate love. Thus God may not sorrow over the misery of others in the sense that he experiences a negative passible state due to his own suffering, yet it [mercy] can reside in God, and reside in him in a more perfect state, because of the lack of suffering, as a positive facet of his perfectly actualized, and so completely altruistic, love.[45]

Here is probably as close as one can come for bridging the gap between Weinandy's impassibilist position and Macleod's passibilist one. Weinandy argues that beyond describing God's actions, anthropopathy tells us something positive about God's nature and his love. He grants the possibility of speaking of divine grief, compassion, and anger, so long as we remove all notions of pain and suffering from them.[46] And therein lies the one difference that irreconcilably divides Weinandy and Macleod. Weinandy seeks to affirm predications of sorrow, mercy, and grief about God while denying suffering altogether.[47] Macleod would likely say that when you do this, you remove what is at the very heart of what these words mean. Can sorrow without suffering be sorrow at all?[48]

For Macleod, the danger of Weinandy's position is a hermeneutical one: it risks denying what Macleod would call the plain meaning of a text. Though he never engages directly with Weinandy in print, this is an explicit critique he brings against his own Reformed orthodox tradition.[49] For

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[45] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*, 165.

[46] Weinandy writes elsewhere, 'God truly grieves over sin and actually is sorrowful over injustice not because he has lost some Good (which would imply a self-centered grief and sorrow) and so suffers, but rather because, in his love, he knows that the one he loves is suffering due to the absence of some Good. Sadness and grief do not spring form or manifest suffering within God, but rather they spring from, manifest and express the fulness of his completely altruistic, all-consuming and perfect love for his creatures.' Weinandy*, Does God Suffer?*, 164.

[47] At one point Weinandy hints at the possibility of predicating suffering God while still affirming impassibility. However, he does so hesitatingly because of the risk of 'confusion and misunderstanding.' 'Whatever valid aspects of suffering can be applied to God are equally, and probably better, situated within the attributes of his compassion, grief and sorrow.' Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*, 170.

[48] Hence, why Weinandy speaks of sorrow as a metaphor.

[49] It is unclear to what extent Macleod was familiar with the details of Weinandy's argument. He references him briefly in his 2011 impassibility lectures, telling his students,

> In the present theological time warp, we also find that there is still strenuous defending of impassibility in Reformed circles. For, example, in the case of Berkouwer, but also in the Roman Catholic stream with those

instance, he expresses frustration with Stephen Charnock (1628-1680) who dismisses the idea of grief, joy, anger, and repentance in God. Charnock writes,

> Because He is said to have anger and repentance we must not conclude him to have passions like us… Grief is not in God… we may understand those expressions of joy, and grief, and repentance to signify this much, that the things declared to be the objects of joy and grief and repentance are of that nature that if God were capable of our passions he would discover himself in such cases as we do.[50]

Macleod sees such a statement as a kind of attack on divine revelation insofar as it empties a biblical statement about God of its primary meaning so that the theologian finds himself seeking to explain away Scripture rather than interpreting its positive meaning. In the light of these concerns, Macleod offers the following approach.

> We need to treat 'the revelational status' of statements which refer to grief and repentance on the part of God as seriously as we do other biblical statements. Such language is indeed anthropomorphic. But then, the entire biblical representation of God is anthropomorphic (and validly so, because we are made in God's image) and those particular anthropomorphisms tell us as much about God's intention and attributes as do any others. In particular, they emphasize the personalness of God and the warmth of that personalness. The danger of all attempts to speak of God in pure language (that is, in language purer than Scripture) is that we may reduce Him to an inert, immobile, abstraction…From this point of view, John A.T. Robinson's *Honest to God* is, paradoxically, the logical terminus of Scholastic theology.[51]

The somewhat surprising comparison of Reformed orthodoxy to the far less orthodox Anglican theologian John Robinson (1919-1983) helps us to understand how some of Macleod's

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> such as Weinandy maintaining again this same position that, no, there cannot be in God any experience of pain and that, in fact, for God to suffer is not to make him a greater resource for us but in some way to diminish him—because we don't want a God who suffers but a God who overcomes pain.

Macleod, 'Impassibility (1)'.

[50] Stephen Charnock, *Discourses upon the Existence and Attributes of God* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1873), 216, quoted in Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 233.

[51] Macleod, *Behold Your God,* 235. In speaking about the 'revelational status' of Scripture, Macleod draws explicitly on J. I. Packer's essay, 'Theism for our Time' where Packer offers similar criticisms. Packer asks, 'What do we need to do to traditional theism to enable us to treat the revelational status of these statements [about grief and repentance] as seriously as we do the rest of the Bible's statements about God? In other words, how may we explain these statements about God's grief and repentance without seeming to explain them away?' James I. Packer, 'Theism for Our Time,' 15. While Macleod here says that we should take God's repentance seriously, he does not elaborate. In his lectures on impassibility, he suggests that divine repentance belongs to an interpretive category quite separate from all other anthropopathic ideas. '[Repentance] would seem to suggest that God changes his mind, and we would be inclined to believe that that is not possible. So we'd interpret the repentance metaphorically.' He goes on to say this would not be the case with emotions like anger, pity, and jealousy. Macleod, 'Impassibility (2).'

concerns related closely to the theological landscape of late-twentieth-century Britain. Robinson, in his popular 1963 work *Honest to God* called for a revolution in the way Christians speak about God. He argued that while the New Testament authors wrote as if God was 'up there,' most early Christians (including the authors themselves) understood that God being located in the sky was only a metaphor. Now we speak of a God who is metaphysically 'out there.' However, Robinson said we must even challenge the idea of a God who is 'out there' as if he were a 'sophisticated Old Man in the Sky.' 'We are reaching the point,' he wrote, 'at which the whole conception of a God—out there—is itself becoming more of a hindrance than a help.'[52]

In Macleod's narrative, Robinson's mistake was to look behind the language of Scripture to find a truer meaning. Reformed orthodoxy, in attempting the same in regard to anthropopathism, risks de-personalizing God just as Robinson did. This slippery slope argument may explain why Macleod's rhetoric against impassibility shows little appreciation for the nuances of the impassibilist position. Macleod often presents the impassibility debate as a debate between those who say that God has compassion and can suffer and those who say that God is unfeeling, unmoved, and unloving. This latter position, he seems to believe, is the logical terminus of the impassibilist position, though it is one that no impassibilist would affirm. No Reformed orthodox scholar would claim that because God is impassible he does not care about creation and humanity, but it seems Macleod really did think that this was the logical end of the historic view of divine impassibility.

The Anger of God

The discussion thus far might leave the impression that what Macleod wants to secure in his doctrine of divine passibility is only the fact of God's sorrow and the reality of a God who is moved

[52] John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 13, 15. In one piece, Macleod links the 'abstractionism' of Tillich, Bultmann, and Robinson as a newer expression of the Greek philosophical tradition which conceived of God 'in purely intellectualist, abstract terms…terms hopelessly inadequate to describe One who knows, who is jealous, who loves and who is provoked.' Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 40.

by the loss of His Son the pain he sees in the world. However, for virtually the whole of Macleod's career he has been equally intent on securing the reality of divine anger, another emotion which Macleod argues also implies divine passibility. The centrality of this claim to Macleod's work lies in his assertion that if we cannot attribute divine anger to God, the notion of the atonement as an act that truly satisfies the wrath (or anger) of God is threatened. Here again, to understand Macleod's specific concerns, it is important to recognize the twentieth-century context of his argument.

In 1932, C. H. Dodd (1884-1973) published *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* where he argued that the term 'propitiation' has no place in the New Testament because 'it suggests the placating of an angry God, and although this would be in accord with pagan usage, it is foreign to biblical usage.'[53] Dodd goes on to suggest that wrath in Pauline literature must be understood in impersonal terms. It is not something *in* God. Rather, it is the natural consequence of human sin. Therefore, the atonement does not propitiate God because there is no anger in God to be propitiated in the first place. The atonement merely expiates (or covers) our sins.[54] To put it another way, the atonement affects man, not God.

In subsequent years, there was a strong reaction against Dodd's proposal by conservative evangelicals. One of the most important responses that influenced Macleod came from Leon Morris (1914-2006). Along with a detailed exegetical critique, Morris argued that Dodd was unable to see that not all anger is 'irrational passion.' 'Even in human affairs,' Morris writes, 'such a thing as "righteous anger" is not unknown when some, at least, of the more unworthy elements are purged, and we catch a glimpse of a fiery zeal for the right which may be perfectly compatible with pure

[53] C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1932), 55. Dodd was by no means the first British theologian to reject the personal anger of God, but in the mid-twentieth century, his work became a primary target of the evangelical response.

[54] Dodd concludes, 'The idea of an angry God is a first attempt to rationalize the shuddering awe which men feel before the incalculable possibilities of appalling disaster inherent in life, but it is an attempt which breaks down as the rational element in religion advances. In the long run we cannot think with full consistency of God in terms of the highest human ideals of personality and yet attribute to Him the irrational passion of anger.' C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 24.

love.'[55] Morris, like Macleod, was hesitant to call God's anger a mere anthropomorphism. 'Granted that it [divine wrath] contains an element of anthropomorphic imagery, it yet points to a reality within the divine being which gives point and force to moral sanctions.'[56]

Several prominent British evangelicals including Macleod would follow Morris's lead in condemning Dodd's impersonal wrath.[57] Part of what drove their rejection of Dodd's thesis was the belief that penal substitutionary atonement theory (which they considered central to the Christian faith) only made sense if there was a personal anger in God that the atonement could appease. When Macleod gave his first address to the Banner of Truth Conference in 1973, the thirty-two-year-old clearly had Dodd in mind when he arrived at the topic of divine wrath his lecture entitled 'Cursed for Us.' He told the audience, 'There is a tremendous need for emphasis [today] upon the wrath. Only, in the light of current trends *never* call it *the wrath*. It is the wrath *of God*! It is personal! It is *He* who is angry!'[58] In the following decades, Dodd's idea of impersonal wrath reappears in Macleod's writing and lectures as a substantial threat to penal substitutionary atonement theory.[59]

In later years, Macleod would define anger (or wrath) as 'the calm, deliberate and proportionate way in which eternal and underlying holiness responds to sin. Because of what He is (morally immutable) He hates it, He condemns it and He opposes it as utterly repugnant and absolutely destructive. It is a new thing in God's world, but the holiness which is angered by it is no new thing.'[60] 'Anger,' He says, 'is not, strictly speaking, an attribute of God: not something he is in and of himself, but entirely relational.'[61] Unlike His love which is essential to his being, anger is contingent upon the existence of sin. God's response to sin with anger is analogous to the righteous

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[55] Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (London: The Tyndale Press, 1960), 181.
[56] Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross*, 185.
[57] See J. .I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2013), 204-6 and John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 103-5.
[58] Macleod, 'Cursed for Us,' address.
[59] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 136-46; 'Propitiation (2),' (class lecture at the Free Church College).
[60] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 133.
[61] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 132.

human response to sin. Because sin exists, there is anger in God. Much of what Macleod says here would be wholly in keeping with the Reformed orthodox tradition out of which Macleod writes, but Macleod diverges at the point of suggesting an emotional component to divine anger which is separate from the divine will and intellect.

Richard Muller shows in his *Post-Reformation Dogmatics* that Reformed orthodox theologians largely understood anger (along with its opposites of love, complacency, and gentleness) to be 'attributed to God "metaphorically" or by "anthropopathy," as belonging to him not "properly" but "improperly."'[62] Specific to divine anger, Muller says that this attribution to God in Scripture reveals 'the essential attribute of the *iustitia Dei* [justice of God], which, in the Reformed view, includes the vindicatory or punitive justice of God.'[63] Just as 'God's mighty hand' is an anthropomorphism for his omnipotence in action, so God's 'anger' is an anthropopathism for his divine justice which sometimes manifests itself in creation against sin.

Crucially, the Reformed orthodox definition of anger locates anger in the will. Anger is a metaphor both for the fact that God does not approve of sin and that he wills that sin be punished. Such a definition would be compatible with much of what Macleod writes, but not all. Unlike Muller's definition of divine anger, Macleod writes of divine anger (and all other emotions in God) as if they are logically distinct from the divine will. Here, reference to the image of God is helpful. Macleod's anthropology is such that one can logically separate the emotions, the will, and the intellect even if these elements in a human are meant to coordinate perfectly with one another. Macleod writes as though the same is true of God. God recognizes sin in creation (via the intellect)

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[62] Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Dogmatics Volume III*, 584.
[63] Muller, *Post-Reformation Dogmatics Volume III,* 585. Muller quotes Edward Leigh (1602-1671) who writes that justice is the attribute 'by which God in all things wills that which is just; or is the Attribute whereby God is just in and of himself, and exercises justice toward all creatures, and giveth everyone his due.' *Post-Reformation Dogmatics Volume III*, 481.

and he inevitably chooses to punish sin (via the will), but perfectly in coordination with his intellect and his will is an emotional component (i.e. anger).[64]

Clearly then, for Macleod the continuity between divine and human anger is much stronger than in Reformed orthodoxy. God punishes sin because it is just, and alongside that justice there is a real and personal revulsion against sin which is analogous to human revulsion. While Macleod never says this explicitly, it is reasonable to believe that a concern towards Reformed orthodox interpretations of anger from his perspective would be that if emotions like love and anger are really aspects of the divine will, they lose their correspondence to the human experience and become a way of explaining what God *does* but not the emotional component from which those actions flow. In other words, if anger only means that God punishes sin, then have we removed any capacity in God to experience righteous anger at injustice which is analogous to humans? The Reformed position has never been that since anger is not proper to God he does not care about injustice, but Macleod clearly suspects that this is its logical terminus.

Divine Anger and the Elect

Divine anger is perhaps the most important emotion to single out in order to grasp Macleod's dogmatic claims about divine emotions and passibility because of its particular challenge to divine immutability. The challenge is this: on the one hand, Macleod's Reformed background leads him to believe that God's elect are objects of his divine love from eternity. On the other hand, he argues that all Christians were at one point in time objects of God's wrath or anger. How can both be true? This question comes up in a recent critique Macleod makes of John Calvin's answer to that paradox.

[64] D.A. Carson makes a similar distinction when speaking of love: 'God's love is not so much a function of his will, as something that displays itself in perfect harmony with his will—and with his holiness, his purposes in redemption…and so forth.' *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000), 59

In the *Institutes*, Calvin presents the apparent contradiction about divine anger and love towards the elect. On the one hand, the Father eternally loves the elect and their sins are atoned for eternally. On the other hand, Paul speaks of believers at times as if they really were enemies with God.[65] Paul Helm (1940-) summarizes Calvin's solution like this: 'There is no change in God; he loves us from eternity. There is, however, a change in us, a change that occurs as by faith Christ's work is appropriated. The change is not from wrath to grace, but from our belief that we are under wrath to our belief that we are under grace'.[66]

As Calvin explains it in several places, the biblical notion of divine wrath towards believers is not literally true. Rather, it is meant to teach believers the wonder of God's divine mercy. After all, apart from Christ's saving atonement, they really would know the wrath of God. As it is however, this apparent shift in God from anger towards love is a perception and not in reality itself. Calvin explains, 'For as we conceive God to be angry, whenever he summons us to his tribunal, and shows us our sins; so also we conceive him to be placable, when he offers the hope of pardon.'[67] Macleod worries that such an interpretation secures eternal love at the cost of making the cross a mere metaphor. Speaking of Calvin's comments, Macleod writes,

> As these words make clear, the concepts of wrath and propitiation stand or fall together. If the one is but a manner of speaking, so is the other; and so, eventually, are all the key concepts of the doctrine of the atonement. Even the divine love will have to be demythologized as a mere anthropomorphism designed to accommodate our human finitude. Instead, surely, we must cling to the fact that our love is but a faint recollection of the divine and our anger against evil but a faint reflection of his.[68]

For Macleod, it is essential to the Christian message that even the elect are at some point the subject of divine anger and that there is a real propitiation of that divine anger.

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[65] John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.2 For example, Romans 5:10 and Ephesians 2:3.
[66] Paul Helm, *John Calvin's Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 395.
[67] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1986), 3:115.
[68] Donald Macleod, 'The Work of Christ,' 372.

The Eternality of Emotions

Macleod's suggestion that God can be both angry with the elect and propitiated towards them may allow him to take certain biblical passages more literally, but it creates obvious logical challenges which are not limited to divine anger. When one is prepared to argue that much anthropopathism in Scripture really does indicate emotions within God, how does God not become subject to time? Alternatively, if God's emotions are *not* bound by time, how can He ever be angry with his elect without also being eternally angry with them? Macleod was cognizant of these challenges and tries to offer a tentative solution.

First, he reasons that God's anger towards all human sin is a contingent and yet eternal reality. It is an eternal anger based on historic events. Likewise, the cross is a contingent historical event which has an eternal (and propitiating) effect upon God.[69] Therefore, God is eternally angry at the sins of his elect and his anger towards the sins of his elect is eternally propitiated by the cross of Christ. The goal of such an approach is to allow for the reality of both the wrath of God and the propitiation of that wrath in the cross.

A reasonable question in the light of that hypothesis is why, if the cross eternally propitiates sin, God could have ever been angry with the sins of his elect. Why not say that because Christ's atonement has an eternal effect, God was never provoked by the sins of his elect? This would be similar to Calvin's own reasoning. In a fascinating Q&A at the end of his lectures on impassibility, a student presented this question to Macleod. He responded,

> I think that the anger and the appeasement process are both there from eternity. God is eternally angry with sin and God is eternally being appeased with respect to sin. There is no doubt that we ourselves are born children of wrath…And yet we are also born under the

[69] Macleod, *Behold Your God*,' 37. 'Something may be contingent, and yet eternal. For example, God's anger is eternal and yet is a response to something temporal: human sin. The peace between God and his people is eternal, yet it is the consequence of the cross.' Interestingly, Macleod also argues here that part of God's blessedness is also founded in contingent, yet eternal realities: 'The blessedness of God, for example, is the result of such factors as the beauty of creation, the beauty of the Son and the glory of the Son's obedience. It may be said, therefore, that the blessedness is an effect [of contingent realities]. Yet it may also be said that the blessedness is eternal: an eternal blessedness resulting from such factors as those mentioned.' Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 36.

> covenant of the blood of Jesus from the moment of our birth. So you put your finger on what's yet another anomaly. How can God be eternally angry and eternally appeased at the same time? I need to reflect. I mean it is taking us to the edge. I'm pretty happy with the doctrine [of divine passibility] as a whole but some of these objections are testing and partly because they come from a different planet to the one I normally function on. These are philosophical objections as a whole.[70]

Despite the tentativeness (and humility) of Macleod's answer here, Macleod argued for this dual reality of divine anger and propitiation from at least 1973.[71] What is perhaps most surprising about his answer and about the way he handles this paradox is his tendency to seek to accommodate a form of metaphysical immutability. Throughout his career, Macleod emphasized God's immutability primarily as an ethical category. However, as he tries to argue for the reality of emotions in God, there is a tendency to preserve as much metaphysical immutability in God as he can.

This notion of eternal emotions must be read back into our understanding of Macleod's biblical hermeneutics, both in relation to the cross and to anthropopathy in general. He will not relinquish the idea that there is analogous continuity between divine and human emotions but the eternality of emotions in God represents a major point of discontinuity between human and divine. It is also a presupposition which is rarely, if ever, explicit in his exegesis. There is often more anthropomorphism in Macleod's hermeneutic than he admits.

The propositional meaning of Macleod's suggestion that creation can affect God is also ambiguous.[72] Even as he speaks of the cross as 'affecting' God's attitude towards man, like the traditional understanding of immutability Macleod does not believe that God's decretive will changes as a result of events in creation. It seems that he would also agree that God eternally

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[70] Macleod, 'Impassibility (2),' lecture.
[71] Macleod, 'Cursed for Us,' address.
[72] In his lectures, Macleod says, the 'God revealed to us and defined for us in the Bible is affected by events outside of himself…The most important evidence here is the cross of Calvary. That is an event outside of God. Are we saying that God is not affected by that? If so, then our whole evangelical doctrine has to be abandoned because that doctrine is about the objective dynamics of the atonement, but the affect of the atonement is primarily Godwards.' Macleod, 'Impassibility (1).'

decreed that the cross would inform His attitude towards His elect just as He eternally decreed that man's sin would evoke anger in himself. Macleod speaks of creation affecting God, but it is difficult to distinguish here between Macleod's position and the Reformed orthodox position in that both would agree that nothing external to God can change the decretive will of God. With such a firm view of God's decretive will, it is difficult to see how any event can logically affect Him. Where the difference is clear is in the idea that God can decree suffering for Himself.

Eternal Sufferer, Eternally Blessed

Probably the most challenging implication of Macleod's idea of eternal divine emotions is that it seems to eternalize suffering in God. Macleod recognizes yet another paradox here. God is eternally and perfectly blessed and yet he also suffers.[73] Again Macleod's solution is tentative, but he argues that somehow the divine pain is eternally integrated into the divine blessedness such that the eternal blessedness is never threatened. 'The divine pain and the divine blessedness are not symmetrical. The pain of Christ has as its outcome the glory of God the Father; the pain of the Father, the glory of the Son. In time, that is the *final* note: the tomb is empty. In eternity it is the *dominant* one. The pain is not simply transcended, it is assimilated into the blessedness of God.'[74]

A defender of Reformed orthodoxy might be heartened by Macleod's insistence on divine blessedness. In fact, Macleod's vision of the divine blessedness subsuming pain within itself seems in some ways to nullify his heartfelt appeals to the sorrow of God (and perhaps his whole doctrine of divine passibility). Can we really conceive of a God who eternally suffers by giving up His Son to the cross and yet is eternally serene without choosing either suffering or blessedness as the single and

[73] On God's blessedness, Macleod writes, 'Whatever the tensions and conflicts and commotions around Him, in Him—in the depths of his being—there is peace. …Around Him there is chaos: the constant threat and challenge of sin, darkness and meaninglessness. But he remains composed, the blessed God. Darkness does not imperil His Light nor Unreason endanger His Word. He abides sure, secure and serene…' Macleod, 'Worried Sick.' *MR*, December 1987, 261.
[74] Emphasis Macleod. Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 37.

absolute divine reality?[75] In his lectures, Macleod suggests several analogies to wrestle with this paradox. There is the fact, for instance, that 'when we ourselves reach the state of perfection, [we] will not be entirely forgetful of what things were like for us here or forgetful of what it cost God to save us because we shall have always in front of our vision the Lamb in the center of the throne.' In the same way, the pain of Calvary is never forgotten or left behind for God. It rather becomes (or eternally is) subsumed into the greater fact of God's blessedness. Hence with humans, blessedness is the final note while with God it is the dominant one. He also references the biblical metaphor of childbirth pains and the joy that follows. Macleod suggests that the pain exists in the joy and even becomes constitutive of the joy.[76]

Here again Weinandy offers a more orthodox answer to the same challenge: 'While, within his fully actualized love for his incarnate Son, the Father may have grieved over his Son's suffering and death, yet his pleasure and even joy over what the Son had accomplished completely relativizes and even overshadows his grief or sorrow.'[77] However, it is not so easy as to say that Macleod simply never to noticed that there was an orthodox alternative to this paradox that he might have found satisfactory. Macleod was adamant that because of the biblical witness, suffering must be maintained as a reality for God.

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[75] Indeed, just as Macleod will sometimes speak of divine pain without qualification, there are also times when he will speak about God's blessedness in a way that would seem to completely exclude pain in God. In a 1989 *Monthly Record* piece, he writes, 'God Himself is the *blessed* God (1 Tim. 1:11). He knows nothing of discontent, anxiety, sorrow, fear or any neurosis. He is an eternal fellowship of joy.' Macleod, 'Christian Joy,' *MR*, October 1989, 211.

[76] Macleod, 'Impassibility (2).' The limits to the analogy are obvious since the mother's reduced pain is explained in part by the physical process of hormonal release. Weinandy offers what would be a more orthodox answer to the same challenge: 'While, within his fully actualized love for his incarnate Son, the Father may have grieved over his Son's suffering and death, yet his pleasure and even joy over what the Son had accomplished completely relativizes and even overshadows his grief or sorrow.' Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*, 229. However, it is never so easy as to say that Macleod's mistake was never to realize that there was a satisfying and orthodox alternative to his own propositions that he never realized. Macleod was adamant that because of the biblical witness, suffering must be maintained as a reality for God.

[77] Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*, 229.

The Problem of Paradox

We have just pointed to two key paradoxes within Macleod's theological system. First, God is simultaneously angry with the sins of his people and propitiated towards them. Secondly, he is both eternally blessed and eternally suffering. In future chapters we add to this list of paradoxes that arise within his theological system. In Chapter Five, for instance, we show how Macleod understands sin as an impossibility that somehow *is*.

Macleod never shied away from the fact that paradox lay at the heart of some of his most deeply held theological convictions. Take for instance the opening comments he made at a 1983 Carey Conference lecture entitled 'The Crucified God.' The previous evening his lecture was on 'The Blessed God.' He told his audience:

> We tried last night to reflect together on the blessedness of God, and we saw that God's blessedness was God's happiness and God's composure, the absence of any kind of disturbance or commotion in the divine being…I want to reflect tonight on the suffering of God, what I might even be so bold as to designate by the title of 'The Crucified God.' And I'm not going to endeavor in any way to reconcile these two emphases. I don't feel in the least able to show how the fact of suffering can coexist with the fact of the blessedness of God. But I do want most emphatically to place the fact of divine suffering alongside the fact of the divine blessedness…[78]

In other words, Macleod embraces the paradox of a God who is both eternally blessed and eternally suffering. It is probably the most significant paradox in his work apart from his doctrine of *anomia* which we discuss in Chapter Five (and the two paradoxes are not unrelated). It is fair to ask why Macleod would be willing to uphold such a profound paradox rather than saying at this point (with a more traditionally Reformed orthodox approach) that the idea of a God who both suffers and is blessed is irrational. Part of the answer, as we have already seen, is that Macleod accepts the paradox because he believes it is forced upon him by the Biblical witness. He also suggests in

[78] Donald Macleod, 'The Crucified God,' lecture.

lectures and in his writings that the idea of paradox in theology proper is not a sign of poor theology. It is a necessity.

Take, for instance, the way he wrestles with the threeness and oneness of God in *A Faith to Live By*. He writes, 'How can three persons not be three individuals? We have to admit at once that the idea is counter-intuitive. We cannot visualise or imagine three persons as one being.'[79] In other words, the Trinity would seem to be a paradox. However, he will suggest here and elsewhere that it is only an apparent contradiction, one similar to the kinds of contradictions we find in modern physics:

> Such counter-intuitive concepts are by no means confined to theology or to the doctrine of the trinity. Modern physics abounds in counter-intuitive insights which we can express mathematically but could never put into words…How can light be both waves and bullet-like particles? Who can envisage a temperature of Absolute Zero or get her head round the idea of a four-dimensional universe (time being the fourth dimension)? These paradoxes relate to a world which, however vast, is nevertheless finite. If God's work stretches our imaginations (and our credulity) to the limit, it is hardly surprising that in our reflections on God Himself we so quickly find our reserves of language utterly exhausted.[80]

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[79] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 61. In his 1990 lectures to his students on the Trinity, Macleod raised this issue of paradox as a reality for both physics and theology:

> Tom Torrance in a [?] paper I heard him give this week at New College made [one] among many rather astonishing claims (*ex cathedra* claims I must say). He told us that he had been at a meeting with quantum physicists discussing some of those problems [in particle physics]. He told them that theologians had solved those problems long ago. The problems that they were now facing in particle physics were very similar to those involved in *perichoresis*…Now I put it to him afterwards that, in fact, we hadn't solved them. We had simply stated the question, but we had found no solution to the problem of how there can be multiple particles in the same place containing each other and yet independent. And [I told him] that we hadn't solved the *perichoresis* problem either, but we had formulated it.
>
> And the only advantage I can take from those [conversations]…frankly, is this: to remind ourselves that it isn't only theology that wrestles with mystery. Our physicists today are also on frontiers where neither imagination nor language are of any use to them and where they're simply working with mathematical formulae…but these men have no mental image of what those symbols actually mean. And I think that we are far too humble as theologians in this connection—that we tend to assume that we alone are talking gobbledygook. Whereas there's a lot of it talked, I think, in physics, and the gobbledygook is true! Paradoxically, it's true although it looks like gobbledygook! And I think we have to assert, in fact, that *omnia exeunt en mysterium* is a universal principle which applies to science in all its forms, not simply to theology but to physics and chemistry and all other form of human inquiry.

Macleod, 'Trinitarian religion and decrees,' Systematic Theology 101 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, February 8, 1990).

[80] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 60.

The way Macleod compares paradoxes in physics to theology proper is helpful to understanding how he can so willingly accept some of the logical paradoxes that the wider Reformed orthodox tradition eschews as fatal to notions of divine passibility. On the one hand, Macleod understands the concept of mystery in theology in such a way that the theologian must always be prepared (if the Biblical data require it) to accept contradictory theological ideas on the premise that the inability to reconcile such contradictions lies in our finitude. What is more, he believes that modern physics has shown that in all areas of science, including theology, paradoxes exist. In such a paradigm, divine suffering and divine blessedness are only *apparently* incompatible to us because of our finitude.[81]

Conclusion

It is easy to lose sight of the fact that what was proposed at the beginning of this chapter has largely been assumed by the end—that part of man's being made in the image of God is his capacity for emotions. This is in keeping with the way Macleod writes. Because man's emotional capacity reflects an analogous reality in God, Macleod finds no hesitation speaking about God in emotional terms as he would a man even as we have shown that behind such attributions is a far more qualified view of divine emotions than often sits on the surface. The continuity Macleod assumes between human and divine emotions set out in this chapter will remain important in the coming chapters even as we see that this is only one aspect of Macleod's much broader engagement with the doctrine of divine impassibility.

[81] As we will see in Chapter Six, a distinction may need to be made in Macleod's thought between theological concepts which are only apparently paradoxical and those that are contradictory in their very nature. Such may be the case with sin as *anomia*.

Chapter 4 – Christ as the Image of God and Passibility

'If Christ is not revelatory at the point of suffering, then he is not revelatory at all.'[1]

Donald Macleod writes in the preface to *Behold Your God*, 'If the book has one master idea, it is the sentiment once expressed by the late Archbishop Michael Ramsey: "God is Christlike and in him there is no un-Christlikeness at all."'[2] If that reflection has been a guiding principle for Macleod, then the doctrine underlying that principle has been Christ as the image of God. Throughout his career Macleod has used the idea of Christ as God's image to establish his theological priorities and at times push the bounds of orthodoxy within his own Scottish Reformed tradition. This latter tendency is most evident on the issue of divine passibility. For him, one application of Christ as God's image is that in Christ's suffering, we see God's suffering so that when, for instance, Christ weeps over Jerusalem he reveals God as one who grieves.

This chapter shows how Macleod's particular understanding of Christ as the image of God allows him to assert that Christ reveals to us a God who suffers in his divinity. To do so requires a brief reconstruction of Macleod's doctrine of Christ as God's image, paying special attention to the way he attempts to work constructively within a Chalcedonian Christology even as he challenges the doctrine of divine impassibility which the Council of Chalcedon explicitly affirms.[3] Then we will show two key ways Macleod uses the incarnation to posit divine suffering. The first is by arguing that the emotional life of Christ is reflective of God who experiences analogous emotional pain in Himself. Secondly, Macleod argues that in the light of the doctrines

[1] Macleod, 'The Crucified God,' (lecture, Carey Conference, 1983).

[2] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 8. Quoting Michael Ramsey, *God, Christ and the World* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 98. Ramsey's influence on Macleod was not limited to a quote. After Ramsey's death, Macleod called him 'probably the most theologically creative bishop of the century.' Macleod, 'Michael Ramsey: realism and the Transfiguration,' *MR*, May 1988, 109. One can see the influence of Ramsey's work, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1949), in Macleod's work on the doctrines of glory and transfiguration.

[3] 'The synod… expels from the company of the priests those who dare to say that the Godhead of the Only-begotten is passible.' *The Chalcedonian Definition of Faith*. Macleod writes, 'We have to admit at once that Chalcedon, the Formula, is explicitly opposed to the idea of divine passibility. Nevertheless, the overall Christology of Chalcedon is one which I think allows us to accommodate the idea of divine passibility.' Macleod, 'The Christology of Chalcedon,' in *The Only Hope – Jesus: Yesterday – Today – Forever*, ed. Mark Elliott and John L. McPake (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2001), 92. In highlighting Chalcedon in this chapter, we have not set aside the *Westminster Confession of Faith* as the confessional focus of this research. The *Westminster Confession* appropriates a Chalcedonian Christology.

of *homoousios* and *perichoresis*, one member of the Trinity cannot suffer without the other members of the Trinity being present and suffering with Him in their own way. Thus, Christ's incarnate suffering necessitates suffering in God.[4]

Christ as the Image of God

In order to posit the arguments Macleod makes for passibility with the doctrine of Christ as the divine image, we must first establish how Macleod understands that latter doctrine. In part the idea overlaps with man as the image of God—so much so that Macleod claims at one point that they have the same general meaning.[5] In this way, the incarnate Christ is the perfect expression of what it means to be a human in the image of God. At the same time, Macleod also understands Christ to be the *unique* image of God. This is the interest of the present chapter.

For Macleod, Christ as the image of God entails a kind of two-way revelation.[6] On the one hand, calling Christ the image of God means ascribing to him what can only be rightly ascribed to God—namely divinity and all that divinity entails. In this way the term, as we find it in passages like Col. 1:15, is meant to exalt Christ. Whatever is true of God is necessarily true of the person of Christ (even in His incarnation). At the same time, the fact that Christ is the image of God also means that what is true of Christ (even in His incarnation) tells us what it means to be God. This second principle is one that Macleod will obviously qualify. Unlike the incarnate Christ God does not have a body, and unlike the incarnate Christ God is not begotten of a woman. However, such qualifications do not negate the principle for Macleod. It is a principle which for him includes the idea that Christ as sufferer reveals to us that God also must suffer.

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[4] I recognize that the phrase 'suffering *in God*' is dangerously ambiguous. From the perspective of Reformed orthodoxy, such language might suggest a claim that suffering is a divine perfection necessary to God's being and somehow qualifying all other perfections. This is certainly not a claim that Macleod endorses, especially given his emphasis upon the contingency of divine suffering (see Chapter Five). I use the phrase (and others like it) in this research to point to Macleod's overall doctrine of passibility, the explanation of which is a goal of this thesis.

[5] Macleod writes, 'At the point of his origin, he [man] was modelled upon his Creator. The same general meaning attaches to this idea as is attached to that of Christ being the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15). It means that there are resemblances between God and man.' Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 95.

[6] This two-way revelation of Christ as the image of God is explicit in Macleod's writing. See Macleod, *Jesus is Lord*, 39-41.

Christ as the Image of God in Philippians 2:6-11

The focal point of Macleod's interpretation of Christ as the image of God rests primarily upon Philippians 2:6-11, a passage which, ironically, makes no mention of the term 'image' (εἰκὼν).[7] The reason he so willingly uses it to explain the concept of Christ as the image of God is because he believes that the phrase 'form of God' (μορφῇ θεοῦ) in Phil. 2:6 is more or less synonymous with the phrase 'image of God' (εἰκὼν θεοῦ), especially as it is used in a Christological passage like Col. 1:15. This linguistic connection has a theological value in that it allows Macleod to import the ideas he develops from Phil. 2:6-11 into his concept of Christ as the image of God.

Building upon the work of earlier twentieth-century New Testament scholarship, Macleod contends that the term μορφῇ (form) in the New Testament has a similar semantic meaning as the terms εἰκὼν (image) and δόξῃ (glory).[8] This argument gained traction in twentieth-century New Testament scholarship in part because of a growing consensus that the meaning of these terms in the New Testament should be deduced more so by their use in the LXX than their usage in classical Greek where 'image' is more closely associated with essence.[9]

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[7] Macleod's most extensive exposition of Philippians 2 was published as a series of three lectures in *The Humiliated and Exalted Lord: A Study of Philippians 2 and Christology*, ed. Ligon Duncan (Greenville: Reformed Academic Press, 1994).

[8] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 213. Discussion on the relationship between these three terms appears in the following works: Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 51-52; *The Person of Christ*, 212-217; *Jesus is Lord*, 22-41; *From Glory to Golgotha*, 2nd ed., 99-101. Macleod's chief interlocutor on the proper interpretation of Phil. 2 is Ralph Martin (1925-2013) who in his work *Carmen Christi* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967) offers an unparalleled summary of early twentieth century interpretations of the passage. Macleod makes frequent reference to Martin's work, though his own interpretation diverges from Martin's at multiple points. Probably the most substantive difference is over whether Christ's example is intended to be exemplary. Martin finds little biblical precedent for using the pre-incarnate Christ as an ethical example. Macleod disagrees and responds in *The Humiliated and Exalted Lord*, 2. For Martin's interpretation of μορφη, see *Carmen Christi*, 99-133. It is in the doctrine of Christ as the image of God more than anywhere else (except perhaps the atonement) where we see Macleod embodying his belief that theology at the turn of the twenty-first century must 'harness…the prodigious exegetical labours of the last hundred years.' Macleod, 'Fundamentalism Barred,' *MR*, December 1977, 192.

[9] Martin, *Carmen Christi*, 102. In the Scottish context, H. R. Mackintosh was one among many who followed J. B. Lightfoot's lead in asserting that μορφῇ related more closely to essence than appearance. H. R. Mackintosh, *The Doctrine of the Person of Jesus Christ,* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1912), 66-7. The connection between the glory, image, and form, taken to its furthest extent, might suggest that Christ as the form of God in Phil. 2:6 has the very same meaning as man in the image of God in Gen. 1:26, but Macleod rejects James D. G. Dunn's (1939-2020) assertion that Phil. 2 represents a kind of Last Adam Christology. He offers an extended criticism of Dunn's interpretation in *Jesus is Lord*, 30-9.

Drawing on these developments, Macleod argues that the terms μορφῆ, εἰκὼν, and δόξη primarily indicate appearance rather than essence. He writes, 'μορφῆ belongs to a group of words [i.e. εἰκὼν and δόξη] which describe God not as he is in himself but as he is to an observer.'[10] Appearance here does not merely mean visible to the human eye. It also refers to the kind of divine powers attributed to Christ in Col. 1:15-20 which would, in a sense, prove divinity. Macleod says of these verses, 'Paul is emphasizing the cosmic functions of Christ: he antedates creation; creation was made through him; it exists for him; all other existences… are totally dependent on him.'[11] Therefore, he reasons, the meaning of 'image' in Col. 1:15 'must have sufficient content to bear the weight of the context.'[12] Being in the image of God as Christ is described in Col. 1 is proof of underlying deity. To call Christ the image, form, or glory of God means first that Christ has all the beauty, majesty, and cosmic power of one who is God.[13] 'It is in Christ that the God who is hidden becomes visible. The image is a true representation of the divine being at the most profound level.'[14] With this exegetical backdrop in view, Macleod summarizes the meaning of the phrase 'the form of God' in Phil. 2:6 this way:

> [Christ] possessed all the majesty of deity, performed all its functions and enjoyed all its prerogatives. He was adored by his Father and worshipped by the angels. He was invulnerable to pain, frustration, and embarrassment. He existed in unclouded serenity. His supremacy was total, his satisfaction was complete, his blessedness perfect. Such a condition was not something he had secured by effort. It was the way things were, and always had been; and there was no reason why they should change.[15]

Such a view of Christ as the image of God not only highlights his dignity and majesty, but it sets the backdrop for the self-emptying of Phil. 2:7 and emphasizes the gravity of a second and seemingly paradoxical understanding of the image of God—one that is governed by the idea of *kenosis* and one that, for Macleod, makes space in principle for the notion that God suffers.

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[10] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 213. Macleod also includes in this group of synonyms the terms ὁμοίωμα (likeness) and σχῆμα, which in Phil. 2:7 the RSV translates as 'form.'
[11] Macleod, *Jesus Is Lord*, 24.
[12] Macleod, *Jesus is Lord*, 24.
[13] Macleod writes, 'The μορφῆ is not the essence, but it presupposes the essence.' *The Person of Christ*, 213.
[14] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 24.
[15] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 213.

Kenosis in Phil. 2:6-11

In interpreting the meaning of *kenosis* in Phil. 2:6-11, Macleod emphatically affirms what has been a key marker of the Reformed orthodox interpretation of this passage which is that in taking the form of a servant, Christ did not lay aside any aspect of his deity. He explicitly rejects any theory of Kenoticism that would involve the temporary loss of divine attributes.[16] Instead, he explains the transition from Christ in the form of God to Christ in the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7) in terms of appearance rather than essence. What happens in the incarnation is that Christ in becoming incarnate takes on the appearance of a servant while the form of God is hidden under that appearance (or form) of a servant. Here Macleod points to John Calvin's idea of the incarnation as a *krupsis* or veiling. Calvin, in his commentary on Phil. 2:7, writes, 'Christ, indeed, could not divest himself of Godhead, but he kept it concealed for a time, that it might not be seen, under the weakness of the flesh. Hence, he laid aside his glory in the view of men, not by lessening it, but by concealing it.'[17] For Macleod, only at the transfiguration do we see the glory of the incarnate Christ revealed. He describes this event as one which 'discloses…the glory eternally possessed by the Lord, and…the glory for which, as incarnate Mediator, he was

[16] Macleod's lecture on Kenoticism shows that when he speaks of Kenoticism he especially has in view the doctrine as it was held by Charles Gore (1853-1932) and later versions in Scotland with H. R. Mackintosh (1870-1936) and P. T. Forsyth (1884-1921). In a nod towards a more traditional view of the divine attributes, Macleod in his Christology lectures argues against Kenoticism in part because it suggests the possibility of separating divine attributes from the divine essence. He says of certain views of Kenoticism, 'It's as if God were an orange with various segments and one could detach one or two or three and still have something of the orange left. In actual fact, God's attributes are not segments or sections of areas of His being…[as if] he could renounce and surrender [one] and still remain God.' The truth, Macleod suggests, is that to lay aside any divine attribute would be to cease to be God. Macleod, 'Kenotic Theory (1),' Systematic Theology 102 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, circa 2011).

[17] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians,* trans. John Pringle (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1851), 56-7. Macleod also frequently refers to this concept as the divine *incognito*, mistakenly asserting that the term was used by Martin Luther. The quote below, which Macleod wrongly attributes to Luther in *The Person of Christ*, 217, was actually penned by Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) in *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 131. Kierkegaard writes, 'This… is the most profound incognito or the most impenetrable unrecognizability that is possible, because the contradiction between being God and being an individual human being is the greatest possible, the infinitely qualitative contradiction. But it is his will, his free decision, and therefore it is an omnipotently maintained incognito.' Kierkegaard's influence on Macleod here is even more interesting given how rarely Macleod cites him. On this theme of veiled divinity, Macleod also cites in the Scottish tradition Hugh Martin, *The Shadow of Calvary* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1983), 25-6.

destined.'[18] Again, in Macleod's reasoning, glory represents the external expression of underlying deity.

From this perspective, the form of God and the form of a servant would seem to be mutually exclusive realities, and indeed Macleod sometimes writes of these two ideas as if the latter's existence necessarily requires a veiling of the former. That veiling becomes most acute at the cross where, as Macleod writes, Christ 'buries his glory under veil after veil so that it is impossible for flesh and blood to recognize him. As he hangs on the cross, bleeding, battered, powerless and forsaken, the last thing he looks like is God. Indeed, he scarcely looks human… Everything about him says, "An atheist and a blasphemer!" At last, his identity is obscured even from himself.'[19] Macleod does not mean here that Christ forgot who he was. Rather, Christ on the cross had no tangible evidence that he really was the Son of God. He could cling to this fact by faith, but any outward sign that would verify that reality was wholly missing. The emphasis here on appearance for Macleod is crucial. From this perspective, what God does in Christ's incarnation—what He becomes—seems almost impossible because the form of a servant would seem so incongruous with his eternal glory.

At the same time, however, Macleod also posits that there must be a real continuity between 'the form of God' and 'the form of a servant' because the personal subject of Christ's pre-incarnate majesty and of his incarnate humiliation is the same. The fact that the pre-incarnate Christ who, being in the form of God, chose to take upon himself the form of a servant shows that service must be a part of the divine nature.[20] He writes, 'This Being in the *morphe* of God could not have emptied Himself unless that capability were part of his *morphe*.'[21] Or as he puts it elsewhere,

> This means at once that self-emptying, humiliation, incarnation, obedience and even crucifixion cannot be inconsistent with the form of God. They will seem to be and be deemed to be, much as Peter said to the Lord, 'Thou shalt never wash my feet', assuming

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[18] Macleod, *The Person of Christ,* 107.
[19] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 218.
[20] Granted, the choice to serve to the point of death is only conceivable in an incarnate human body.
[21] Macleod, *The Humiliated and Exalted Lord*, 12.

> that the form of God cannot co-exist with the form of a servant. But the fact of the incarnation shows very clearly that what God is, is not contradicted by humiliation, suffering and obedience…Indeed, it expresses his very heart.[22]

Thus, in one sense for Macleod Christ's *kenosis* hides the form of God from men. And yet, in what is perhaps a much more fundamental sense, the *kenosis* not only reveals God but modifies our understanding of Him. He is one who in his nature *as God* is willing to serve, even to the point of humiliation.

Kenosis and Divine Passibility

But how do these ideas of *kenosis* and Christ as the image of God bear upon the question of divine passibility? After all, much of what Macleod says about *kenosis* would not seem to necessitate passibility. An orthodox interpretation of Macleod's work on *kenosis* might be that Christ does indeed reveal to us that it is God's nature to love through service and even sacrifice, but that such sacrifice is located exclusively in Christ's incarnate flesh. God becomes a man *so that* he can suffer for his people. Even in Macleod's own work, the link between *kenosis* and passibility is not always evident. In his longest exposition of Christ as the image of God in *The Humiliated and Exalted Lord*, there is no explicit mention of the doctrine. Nonetheless, the logic of Macleod's work on *kenosis* is that within the idea of God as self-emptying servant lies the proof that he is capable of suffering. He explicitly connects *kenosis* with passibility in his chapter 'Can God Suffer?' writing,

> It is in the form of God that He [Christ] is moved by the needs of others, comes to share their condition and takes upon himself the death that they deserved. Just because we stress that the incarnation did not involve Christ laying aside the form of God, we have to insist that it was in the form of God that He served and obeyed and died. We cannot look at the final phase of his descent into the abyss and say, 'God has no experience of pain, or of dying.'[23]

Macleod writes these lines with the explicit intention of arguing for divine passibility which from a more Reformed orthodox perspective can be somewhat confusing. After all, it seems wholly possible to interpret these words in a way that can affirm impassibility. Is it not

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[22] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 51.
[23] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 34.

possible to say that God does indeed have experience of pain and dying (with the qualification that these experiences are limited to Christ's humanity)? This raises an important interpretive issue in understanding Macleod's own writings. On the one hand, we cannot avoid the suspicion at times that Macleod does not recognize the breadth of the impassibilist position. Macleod will at times caricature the position portraying a God that most impassibilists would themselves reject.[24] At the same time, it would be too simplistic to say that Macleod is really a closet impassibilist who never realized it. There is a danger trying to sort between comments in Macleod's theology proper and Christology which are consistent with divine impassibility and those which are not because that is simply not a framework that Macleod ever applied to his own thinking. Once Macleod is prepared to accept passibility in principle, it is easy to see a passibilist meaning in statements which others could just as easily interpret in an impassibilist framework.

That interpretive challenge should not obscure Macleod's point. For him, the *kenosis* of Phil. 2:6-11 establishes a principle (the details of which Macleod works out elsewhere) that it is part of God's glory to serve, even to the point of suffering. For Macleod that principle cannot be restricted to human nature. From an orthodox perspective, Christ becomes a man to take upon himself realities which he never by being simply divine. For Macleod, Christ's capacity to take upon himself human suffering is possible precisely because suffering has always been possible for him.

Christ as the Image of Emotional Suffering in God

If for Macleod the doctrine of *kenosis* points to the principle *that* Christ's suffering reflects God's suffering, Macleod shows *how* he understands that suffering by considering

[24] Macleod will often equate impassibility with indifference or lovelessness. For instance, in speaking of the implications of impassibility for the cross, he asks rhetorically, 'Does He [God] bruise Him with *apatheia*, turn his back on Him [Christ] effortlessly, curse Him with indifference? How then can the Son say, "How You loved Me, even on that cross!"?' 'Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 37. Similarly, Macleod writes of the New Testament's portrayal of God's passibility, 'God is revealed as One who is passionate in His love, loving the church as a husband loves his wife, extravagant in His devotion and tormented by her infidelities. These are all fundamentally important parts of the biblical portrait of God and quite irreconcilable with the view that He is emotionally inert.' Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 236. Ironically, impassibilists will often employ impassibility as a means of preserving divine love. Weinandy makes the claim, 'I believe a passible God is actually less personal, loving, dynamic and active than an impassible God.' Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*, 26.

specific instances in the life of Christ. Perhaps the best example of the way he relates Christ's suffering with God's is how he speaks of Christ weeping over Jerusalem.[25] So closely does he identify such emotional expressions in Christ with divine feelings that in one lecture on Christ as the revelation of God he says that this scene reveals to us 'Yahweh weeping over Jerusalem.'[26] In that revelation we see that God's desire for people to find salvation in Christ is such that he grieves when they do not.

This scene is especially important to Macleod because he considers it an impetus for evangelism. The preacher, he reasons, must be as passionate and emotionally concerned about the souls of people as God is and he must communicate God's own emotional investment in the gospel message. Macleod expressed these ideas clearly in 1977 at a Banner of Truth Conference. At one point in his lecture, he references Paul's statement in 2 Cor. 5:20 that Paul and his fellow apostles were ambassadors beseeching the world on behalf of Christ.[27] Macleod said to his audience:

> God does not simply offer. God pleads. And you remember that love for the world. He beheld the city and wept over it. He beheld the city and wailed over it. Have we ever told men that? Have we ever told ungodly men—told unbelievers? 'God beholds you and weeps over you.' Our Calvinism has become sub-Christian—it has become anti-Christian—if we are not prepared to do that…He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He weeps. And God does more. God pleads with them: 'As though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.' The pastor—the preacher—bends the knee. He supplicates. He pleads. He is involved. He is desperate that men would come. 'Turn ye! Turn ye! Why will ye die?' And are we then going further than God? Are we going further than Calvinism when we do that? No, says Paul.[28]

The way Macleod weaves together Old and New Testament passages in his speech is instructive. It shows, for instance, that he sees a clear continuity between Christ weeping over

[25] Cf. Lk. 19:41-44; Mt. 23:37-39.

[26] Macleod, 'The Names of God,' Systematic Theology 101 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, November 2, 2010). The wider context of that comment is that Macleod says that Christ is 'the revelation of *Yahwehness*—what it means to be the Being One.' He qualifies this by saying, 'I cannot say Yahweh is Jesus because Yahweh is triune. But still in their union what is predicable of Jesus is predicable of Yahweh.'

[27] 'So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.' 2 Cor. 5:20, RSV.

[28] Macleod, 'Doctrine of God (1),' address, Banner of Truth Leicester Minister's Conference, 1977. Cf. Ezek. 33:11; Lk. 19:41.

Jerusalem and God's call in Ezekiel for repentance. They are connected by the grief God has over sinners who will not turn to him. It seems that Macleod might argue that Christ's human sorrow and God's divine sorrow (both of which represent a form of pain) may not be identical but they are analogous, much like their love. The preacher must know that in his own pleading to sinners, he represents not only the pleadings of the incarnate Christ but the grief-stricken pleadings of God the Father.

These same ideas reappear over forty years later in his work, *Compel Them to Come In,* in a more expanded form.[29] Here Macleod emphasizes that even in Christ's incarnation, Christ does not speak or represent exclusively a human nature. When, for instance, Jesus looks over Jerusalem and says, 'How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were unwilling' (Matt. 23:37), Macleod writes,

> There is certainly humanity here. These were His own people, this was His city…But there is more here than the voice of humanity. No mere man could have offered to gather a whole nation under His wings. He speaks as the Messiah, as the Son of God, and although His glory is obscured by the veil of His humanity He is still the revelation of God, even to the extent that He can say that whoever has seen Him (or heard Him) has seen and heard the Father (John 14:9). In this lament, as in all else, He and the Father are one, otherwise Chris's status as God's last Word (Heb. 1:2) is dangerously undermined.[30]

He goes on to say that Christ's anguish was 'exactly that of the One who had cried through His prophet, Hosea, "How can I give you up, Ephraim?... All my compassion is aroused" (Hos. 11:8).'[31]

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[29] See Chapter Four: 'The Free Offer and Divine Sincerity' in *Compel them to Come In: Calvinism and the Free Offer of the Gospel* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2020), 71-80. The issue of the free offer of the gospel is a key theme across Macleod's corpus, owing in part to his own twentieth-century Scottish Reformed context. Contemporary Scottish theologians like T. F. Torrance argued that the doctrine of limited atonement, a key idea tenet of Westminster federalism, removed the impetus for missions and evangelism. See, for instance, Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 249. Macleod responded that while such 'Hyper Calvinism' did exist in England, 'the free offer of the gospel was never question in Scotland' during the time of Scottish orthodoxy. Even so, Macleod suggest anecdotally that limited atonement in his own context had at times a 'distorting effect on the formulation of the gospel offer.' Macleod, 'Dr T. F. Torrance and Scottish Theology: a Review Article,' *Evangelical Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (2000): 57-8; 63. Ironically, Macleod's assertion of divine emotions (and the passibility implied therein) becomes a means through which Macleod tries to defend what he sees as a historic trademark of Scottish Westminster Federalism.

[30] Macleod, *Compel Them to Come In*, 77.

[31] Macleod, *Compel Them to Come In*, 78.

Macleod's emphasis upon God as one who pleads through grief is not wholly without precedent in the Free Church tradition. One of the most well-known examples (which Macleod himself cites in his lectures) is Thomas Chalmers' sermon, 'Fury Not in God.' Chalmers says of Christ's tears over Jerusalem, 'There was compassion in it—a warning and pleading earnestness that they would mind the things which belong to their peace.' Later Chalmers connects this to the divine will saying, 'And so in Scripture everywhere do we see [God] pleading and protesting with you that He does not want to signalize Himself upon the ruin of any, but would rather that they should turn and be saved.' In another sermon in the same work, Chalmers' language is even more provocative:

> [God] is grieved at the reluctancy of your services…What he wants, is to gain the friendship and confidence of his creatures; and He feels all the concern of a wounded and mortified father, when He knocks at the door of your heart and finds its affections to be away from Him. He condescends to plead the matter; and with the tenderness of a disappointed father, does he say, "Wherein have I wearied you, O children of Israel? Testify against me."[32]

For Macleod, grief may be the most prominent point of negative or painful emotional continuity between the incarnate Jesus and God, but a second one is anger. In his 2011 Systematic Theology lectures on divine impassibility, Macleod said to his students, 'When Jesus scourged the temple of moneychangers, that was human anger. Did it not correspond to anything in God? Did God not give a hoot that they were using his temple as a marketplace?... It seems to me that we can't go down these roads.'[33]

The assumption here—one which Macleod makes often—is that either God has the capacity for anger in the face of such sin (as Christ did) or he is apathetic and impassible. He gives little attention to the fact that even within his own Free Church tradition, theologians like

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[32] See Thomas Chalmers, *Selected Works of Thomas Chalmers, D.D. LL.D.: Volume IV*. ed. William Hanna (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1855), 412, 417, 122.
[33] 'Divine Impassibility (1),' lecture.

George Smeaton (1814-1889) spoke of the relationship between Christ's anger and divine anger in a way similar to Macleod and yet they explicitly affirm divine impassibility. For someone like Smeaton, divine anger, even when it is described as an emotional response to sin, is not necessarily incompatible with divine impassibility. When Smeaton speaks of Christ's anger at the Pharisees in Mark 3:5, he says that such anger is both righteous and indicative of anger within God.[34] He recognizes a close parallel between human and divine emotions when he says, 'There is no reason to remove from our representation of God the idea of displeasure or wrath against sin,—that is, without the turbulent emotion which is associated with it in fallen natures. We find it in the sinless Saviour (Mark 3:5).'[35] Smeaton distinguishes divine anger from sinful human anger, but not from Christ's perfect, righteous anger.[36]

The Boundaries of Christ as a Reflection of God

We have seen that on the issue of divine suffering, Macleod posits much more continuity between Christ's incarnate suffering and divine suffering than does traditional Reformed orthodoxy. His position raises a larger question about what principle(s) Macleod uses to distinguish between that which in Christ's incarnation reveals God and that which should be considered exclusive to Christ's human nature. He recognizes the need for such a demarcation when he writes,

> What He [Christ] is, what He says, what He does, what He feels, how He reacts: all are revelatory of God. Of course, this needs some qualification. Not all that was true of the incarnate Christ is true of the deity and not all that was experienced by the Son was

[34] Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, 456.
[35] Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Atonement*, 456. Emphasis Smeaton's.
[36] Further questions immediately arise from this which call for further study of the doctrine of God in the nineteenth century Free Church. Why does Macleod's description of divine emotions, which is made from the position of a rejection of divine passibility, often appear so close to similar statements by men like Smeaton who affirm impassibility? Do Smeaton's comments suggest a drift during the nineteenth century, however small, away from an orthodox understanding of impassibility such that it resonates with Macleod's own passibilist logic at points? Alternatively, there is the possibility that Macleod at times is closer to an impassibilist position than he realizes and that his own faulty understanding of impassibility prevents him from seeing how close he was to implicitly affirming impassibility. This thesis hints at how difficult these questions are to answer, in part because the question of divine impassibility (at least for Macleod) does not hinge upon a single argument. It may be that parts of Macleod's reasoning are indisputably passibilist while in other areas he may make arguments which he does not realize are wholly in keeping with the doctrine of divine impassibility. Such is the case when Macleod says that our doctrine of God must affirm that God cannot experience mental conflict, anxiety, discontent, envy, or depression. Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 31.

experienced by the Father. But in key—and sometimes surprising—contexts it is made unmistakably clear that the incarnate Christ is revelatory.[37]

Even when it comes to emotions, Macleod's theology necessitates a distinction between emotions in Christ which reflect God in his deity and those that do not. A key example of the latter is Christ's fear. Throughout his writings, Macleod highlights Christ's fear in Gethsemane. He writes, 'The wonder of the love of Christ for his people is not that for their sake he faced death without fear, but that for their sake he faced it, terrified. Terrified by what he knew, and terrified by what he did not know, he took damnation lovingly.'[38] Such emotion in Christ may be sinless but there is certainly nothing in Macleod's own writing to suggest that we could also predicate it of deity.

Despite the fact that Macleod clearly recognizes a need to distinguish between aspects of the incarnation which reflect Christ and those which do not, he never provides a salient method for division. In fact, he at times seems skeptical that a comprehensive set of distinctions can be determined. In a class Q&A, one of Macleod's students asked him how he reconciles the fact that he is so adamant that Christ's weeping reflects a reality in God while His finite knowledge about the future does not.[39] In part, Macleod responded, 'Well, I suppose the truth is that I don't, really, and I think that we probably have to view with suspicion the word "reconcile" in theology because it will lead to oversimplification.'[40] Despite his confidence about the fact that Christ as God's image reflects the fact that God suffers, Macleod is wary of being overly prescriptive on the question, arguing that allowance should be made for ambiguity or mystery.

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[37] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 35.
[38] Macleod, *The Person of Christ.*, 175.
[39] See, for instance, Matt. 24:26.
[40] He continues,

> What we'll find is that the subject of all of Jesus' actions and words and experiences is always the Son of God. He does not have two egos or two personalities. He is always the Son of God. And it is always he who speaks. It's he who suffers. It's he who dies. It's he who does whatever he does. The other principle is the attributes of both natures are attributes of the person. His human attributes are his and so are his divine attributes his. And so, he is both omniscient and nescient. He is both mortal and immortal. How do I reconcile them? I don't but I have to insist on both of them—that he is both. They are not antithetical because the nature he took is one which has been made in his own image. And so, in that sense, there is some continuity between them, although that requires some care in expounding it.

Macleod, 'The Names of God,' lecture.

He ended that lecture by telling his students, 'But I do very much hope that you will expatiate on these subjects in your preaching because the church today badly needs a sense of wonder. You know, to be taken up to the point where it says, 'O the depth of mystery!' Rather than having it all just kept at [the level of] our own personal problems. You've got to make people gasp at astonishment.'[41]

Even on the question of suffering, he warned against too simplistically inferring divine suffering from incarnate suffering. He offers that caution in a lecture discussion about Rahner's Rule (that the economic Trinity is the imminent Trinity and the imminent is the economic). In recognizing that there are aspects of the incarnation which are true of the incarnation which are not true of God in himself, Macleod says, 'Now on some levels I regret that because, for example, regarding divine impassibility it would be good to be able to read back the fact of the divine suffering of the incarnate Son of God into the depths of the divine life. But we cannot do that simplistically because we can't simply assume because its true of the earthly Jesus it's also true of the pre-earthly Jesus and true of the pre-temporal Trinity.'[42] Of course, he ultimately feels justified in making such a deduction because he believes that the Old and New Testaments testify to God's suffering even apart from the incarnation.

***Perichoresis* and Divine Suffering**

The previous section showed the ways in which Christ's emotional suffering (as the image of God) reveals analogous suffering in God so that Christ's sorrow over Jerusalem, for example, also reveals God's sorrow over Jerusalem. However, for Macleod, the connection between incarnate and divine suffering is not always so direct. Sometimes the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit suffer together but in different ways and yet the fact of incarnate suffering nonetheless proves divine suffering. In fact, Macleod will argue that whenever the Son suffers, the other persons of the Trinity are present and suffering but in their own way. To explain this

[41] Macleod, 'The Names of God,' lecture.
[42] Macleod, 'Trinity – final lecture,' Systematic Theology 101 (class lecture, the Free Church College, Edinburgh, February 22, 2011).

idea, Macleod points to the historic doctrines of *homoousios* and *perichoresis*, both of which signify in their own way the unity of the Trinity.

Homoousios

The term *homoousios*, as Macleod understands it, emphasizes the numerical identity of the persons who share a single essence.[43] The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are all of one being. Macleod argues that taken to its logical conclusion, the kind of unity posited in the doctrine of *homoousios* should lead us to affirm that God suffers. 'When Christ suffers,' he writes, 'He suffers as one who is *homoousios* with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit… Now, whether that is kerygmatically appropriate is another question. The whole notion of a crucified God is kerygmatically difficult. But you cannot ignore the *homoousion* when you speak of the crucified Christ. The one being who is God suffers on the cross.'[44] Macleod rightly notes that one caution in using the doctrine of *homoousios* to reason towards divine passibility is that it (along with *perichoresis*) was formulated in a Patristic context where divine impassibility was explicitly affirmed. To the extent that it is possible to use *homoousios* to justify divine passibility, we have to assume that it is done so against the term's original formulators.

The use of *homoousios* is another incidence in Macleod's thought where he argues for passibility in such a way that it is not wholly clear why what he says is incompatible with impassibility or why passibility necessarily follows. Contrary to what Macleod implies, why is it not possible both to affirm impassibility and affirm that the one being who is God suffers on the cross? When Macleod expands on this idea, his conclusions seem no less orthodox. He says, 'We can say, of course, that He [Christ] suffered in His human nature. But we cannot say that He did not suffer and we cannot say that he was not *homoousios* when He suffered. There is not one God who suffered—who bore the cost of our redemption—and another who did not. The cross is

[43] 'There is one divine *ousia*, one *substantia*, one *theiotes*, one divine nature, one godhead. Hence, the *homoousios* must be numerical. There is one God, one being who is God, and Christ's deity must be fitted into that fundamental perspective. The three do not form three Gods having a merely generic identity. They form one God with a numerical identity.' Macleod, 'The Doctrine of the Trinity,' 17.
[44] Macleod, 'The Christology of Chalcedon,' 92-3.

part of the experience of God; otherwise, He did not redeem us with His own blood.'[45] Macleod assumes such an argument requires passibility, but he never explains beyond this why that is the case. Presumably it is in part because logically prior to such a statement, Macleod already assumes suffering in both Christ's divine and human natures and when that decision has been made, it is indeed difficult to think that Christ's divine nature could suffer apart from the others. There is only one divine nature. But if Macleod's argument really is built initially on the idea that Christ in his divine nature suffers, he never explains what it might mean for the divine nature of Christ to suffer (as opposed to His human nature). Presumably he would appeal to some analogy between Christ's human and divine emotions, as one might when making an analogy between Christ's love expressed in its human and divine forms.[46]

Macleod seems to be trying to drive a wedge between the traditional view of impassibility and his own with the doctrine of *homoousios* by handling the question of suffering at the level of the divine persons rather than natures. The question from Macleod's perspective is this: if the three persons share one essence, does it not follow that the suffering of one must be shared with the others? To put it another way, can one member of the Trinity really suffer alone without breaking their fundamental unity? This line of reasoning becomes clearer when Macleod speaks of *perichoresis*.

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[45] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 35.

[46] From an historical perspective, we can better understand Macleod's use of the *homoousios* in relation to suffering on the cross when we realize that he saw the emphasis on the *homoousios* in relation to Christology as a distinctive in Scottish Reformed theology. This Scottish emphasis was most evident in Communion Seasons where there was a stress on Christ's identity; the one on the cross was one *homoousios* with God. Macleod cites Samuel Rutherford who in one sermon speaks of Christ's blood as blood that 'chambered in the veins and body of God.' Samuel Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* (Edinburgh: The Committee of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland for the Publication of the Works of Scottish Reformers and Divines, 1945), 99. Cited in Macleod, 'Reformed theology in Scotland,' *Theology in Scotland* 17, no. 2 (2010): 8. In such language, there is a close identity between Christ as sufferer and Christ as God—so close that Macleod often writes as if such ideas, while written by men who affirmed divine impassibility, were (perhaps unwittingly) laying the groundwork for the idea that God is passible.

Perichoresis

Perichoresis, as Macleod understands it, expresses the truth that 'within the one godhead the three persons co-inhere in each other and interpenetrate each other.'[47] Elaborating upon a definition proposed by John of Damascus, Macleod writes, 'What the idea of *perichoresis* really attempts is to explain a special kind and intensity of inter-personal unity to which there is no analogy in human experience.'[48] The only analogy which Macleod does suggest is marriage. Marriage, he says, is a union which, 'at its most intense moments…points to a deep human striving towards a degree of appropriation, penetration and mutuality which remains unattainable and yet always beckons.'[49] He explains that what is unattainable to man is essential to God. 'In the divine existence, there are neither physical nor mental barriers to co-inherence. The mutual understanding is complete; the experience of love is complete; the sharing of common purposes is complete; the co-operative involvement in creation and redemption is complete.'[50]

Macleod argues that in such an intense union one member of the Trinity could not suffer without the other two suffering with or in Him. To avoid the charge of patripassianism, he often clarifies that his claim is not that the Father and the Spirit feel the very sufferings of Christ. Rather, the Spirit and Father suffer at the cross in their own way. 'All three are involved in each *opus ad extra*, but each is involved in a different way. God creates in a three-fold way and God indwells in a three-fold way. I am suggesting that God suffers in a three-fold way.'[51] To illustrate the distinction, he returns to the story of Isaac and Abraham where both face the prospect of suffering in the sacrifice and yet the nature of their suffering looks very different. 'At the very least,' he says, 'God the Father is present at Calvary as Abraham was present at the sacrifice of Mount Moriah. We have to allow the concepts of *homoousios* and *perichoresis* to illuminate the

[47] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 140. Scripturally, Macleod grounds the idea in Christ's statement that 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me.' John 14:11, RSV.
[48] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 141.
[49] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 141.
[50] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 141-2.
[51] Macleod, 'The Christology of Chalcedon,' 93.

cross.' Part of that means understanding that the cost of redemption was not isolated to one member of the Trinity. 'There is a cost to God the Holy Spirit and there is a cost to God the Father in their communion with God the Son.'[52]

Macleod typically limits his discussion of suffering through *homoousios* and *perichoresis* to the cross but by his own logic, the same suffering must apply to the whole life of Christ. Wherever Christ suffered in his incarnation, the Father and the Spirit were suffering in their own peculiar way.[53] Thus, even when Christ is experiencing the most creaturely forms of pain like hunger, the Father and the Spirit are with him—presumably experiencing some form of pain through compassion.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how Macleod uses the doctrine of Christ as the image of God to defend his own view of divine passibility. Macleod's particular understanding of Christ as the image (and the form and glory) of God is such that he argues that God is revealed through Christ as one who is willing to serve and love even to the point of suffering. For Macleod, Christ's life provides concrete examples of this truth. Moreover, Macleod argues that Christ's metaphysical union with the Father and the Holy Spirit is such that he cannot suffer without the others suffering with him. In other words, Christ's suffering necessarily reveals the Triune God as one who suffers in three persons. Macleod's argument here reflects an expansion of much of the logic we saw in the previous chapter. Given his understanding of divine emotions in the Old Testament, Christ does not so much reveal God as one who suffers so much as he clarifies what has already been revealed.

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[52] Macleod, 'The Christology of Chalcedon,' 93.
[53] As we have already seen, the nature of the Father's suffering according to Macleod is analogical to the loss a human father might suffer with the loss of his son. Macleod says far less about the nature of the Spirit's suffering. In commenting on the three-ness of divine suffering in 2008, Macleod puts it this way: 'The dying is unique to the Son, who offers himself "through" the Spirit and is "given" by the Father.' Donald Macleod, 'The Doctrine of God in Pastoral Care,' in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 253.

Taking these ideas within the larger context of this thesis, we once again see how Macleod uses a major locus of his theology—in this case Christology—to affirm the doctrine of passibility. In doing so, Macleod inevitably breaches the bounds of traditional Reformed Orthodoxy and yet his own defense is characterized by attempts to defend passibility with constructive articulations of historic doctrines such as *homoousios* and *perichoresis*. Inevitably this must create tension, especially because traditional Reformed Orthodoxy's understanding of God is logically predicated on divine impassibility. In the next chapter we explore the way Macleod wrestles with what is probably the single greatest paradox within his theological system—the doctrine of sin as *anomia*, or lawlessness.

Chapter 5 – *Anomia* and Passibility

> *My position is that sin is impossible and that pain in God is impossible, but that when the one impossibility becomes reality it makes the other impossibility reality as well. Sin, which cannot be, brings divine pain, which cannot be. Is not the ultimate gravity of sin that it brought Calvary into the experience of God?*[1]

To the reader who has followed Donald Macleod's argument thus far, it may come as something of a surprise to know that quite often in his writings about divine suffering he also asserts that divine suffering is impossible. The dogmatic basis of that statement is one of the most important and distinctive aspects of Macleod's theology: the doctrine of *anomia*.[2] It is also the subject of this chapter. The concept of *anomia* (or lawlessness) is one that Macleod appears to have developed quite early in his career without any reference to the question of divine passibility and yet, as this chapter will show, it has become key to his formulation of divine passibility. It also may be his most conspicuous contribution to dogmatics.

For Macleod, *anomia* is the negation of what ought to be in a normally functioning universe and ultimately in God himself. 'Normal' in this context presupposes an intelligible divine system, set of rules, or nature according to which the universe and God are meant to exist (in their own way). As the negation of such a system, *anomia* is inherently irrational and defies explanation. Macleod primarily uses *anomia* to describe sin but he also posits that sin (as *anomia*) brings about a number of other realities which, like sin, ought not to be and which are similarly irrational in nature. They include Hell, the cross, and divine suffering. This chapter explores Macleod's development of the doctrine of *anomia* and then shows how he uses that concept to support his distinctive view of divine passibility. We will argue that ultimately for Macleod, the

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[1] Macleod, 'The Christology of Chalcedon,' 93-4.

[2] As we will see below, the use of the term *anomia* was not original to Macleod, even if his outworking of the term was unique. One can point in the work of T. F. Torrance a similar, if infrequent, use of the term. Outside of the theological context, 'anomie' became a popular concept in late-nineteenth and twentieth century criminology studies through the work of Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) and Robert Merton (1910-2003). The theory, broadly understood, argues that human behavior is to some extent held in check by 'commonly shared definitions and traditions' within a community. 'Anomia results when the power of social values to regulate the ends and means of human conduct is weakened.' In such a situation, human beings begin to act in ways which are normless. Jón Gunnar Bernburg, 'Anomie, Social Change and Crime: A Theoretical Examination of Institutional-Anomie Theory,' *The British Journal of Criminology* 42, no. 4 (Autumn 2002): 729.

concept of *anomia* is a means to push back against monistic tendencies in Christian theodicy including the passibilist tendency to posit divine suffering as having an inherent necessity.

Sin as *Anomia*

At its heart, Macleod's doctrine of *anomia* is about the nature of sin. Recognizing the emphasis Macleod places upon sin in his own theology helps us to see why so much of his constructive energy was focused here. In *A Faith to Live By*, he summarizes the importance of the doctrine of sin in this way: 'Evangelicalism is not, first and foremost, belief in an inerrant Bible. It begins with a certain kind of self-understanding: the knowledge of our own guilt, our own depravity, our own alienation from God. That is the best, in fact, the only hermeneutic. The only key to the scriptures is a sense of sin. The only proper standpoint from which to view Christ is as a lost sinner.'[3] Earlier in the same work he calls the doctrine of sin, 'The single most important doctrine in the whole area of practical religion. Indeed, the view we have with regard to the extent of human sin will determine whether we are evangelicals or non-evangelicals.'[4] Provocative though these comments may be, on both points Macleod means to speak from within his own Free Church tradition. In a 1990 lecture on the doctrine of sin he points back to Thomas Chalmers and William Cunningham for taking similar approaches to sin.[5] The way

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[3] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 110. Later in this chapter Macleod will critique aspects of Macleod's hamartiology such as the view of evil as privation. This should not obscure Macleod's indebtedness to Augustine on this point. He viewed Augustine's view of original sin as a fundamental Christian belief. See Donald Macleod, 'Unity in Truth,' *The Churchman* 101, no. 3 (1987): 259.

[4] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 96. This positive use of the term 'evangelical' is a stark contrast to the way Macleod would speak about 'modern evangelicalism' pejoratively later in life.

[5] Chalmers, he said, 'Built his whole system around this doctrine of sin…He didn't follow the classical seventeenth century analysis (theology, anthropology, soteriology, Christology, and eschatology). He instead began with the plight of man—the disease for which the remedy is provided. He started with man where he was and then he built the gospel around that question: What remedy had God provided for this particular ill?' As aside Macleod adds, 'It is, of course, true that Chalmers' *Institutes* were a literary failure and that they quickly were forgotten. That was partly because, as somebody said, they were either too novel in their arrangement to satisfy the conservatives or too conservative in their content to satisfy the radicals.'

On Cunningham, Macleod said that it was 'our great Free Church theologian William Cunningham' who kept on insisting that 'this doctrine [of original sin] was more important to the system of Christian truth than any other single doctrine.' Macleod in his lectures commends Cunningham's idea that evangelical unity is based upon an affirmation of original sin. He tells his students:

> Cunningham…said there are great differences between us and the Wesleys [i.e. John and Charles]—between us and [Thomas] Baxter—but he said the differences between us and them are as nothing compared to those between us and those who deny original sin. And he [Cunningham] looks at evangelical unity very much in terms of this doctrine. Wesley, with all his faults, was a thorough-going Augustinian as far as sin was concerned. He knew what the Fall had done to man. And he preached with very great power

Macleod situates his hamartiology contextually here is important because it suggests that the best way to read his doctrine of *anomia* is as an attempt to work constructively within the Scottish Reformed tradition in a way that reflects the importance that the doctrine was shown by earlier Scottish Reformed theologians like Chalmers and Cunningham.

Anomia: Towards a Definition of Sin

The earliest reference to *anomia* in Macleod's writings is probably a 1969 Banner of Truth article, 'The Christian Doctrine of Providence.'[6] In it, Macleod as a twenty-eight-year-old pastor wrestles with the relationship between divine sovereignty and the existence of sin. 'Sin,' he writes, 'is an ultimate problem. To the questions, How did it originate? And, Why has God permitted it? There can be no final answer… To seek for a rationale of sin is to seek for the logic of the illogical. Sin is lawlessness by definition. It is inherently absurd, irrational and monstrous.'[7]

While Macleod in this early piece does not use the term *anomia* we already see him using its English translation 'lawlessness' and doing so in a way that places irrationality at the heart of what sin is. Speaking of sin's role within divine providence, Macleod goes on to say in the same piece,

> [Sin's] presence in a world over which God reigns is as inexplicable as its presence in a heart in which Christ dwells. It is lawlessness, and consequently there can be no logical explanation. Anarchy has no rationale. And nothing can justify it. However glorious the final issues of history there can be no *felix culpa*. We can never rejoice that man fell. We

> the necessity of the new birth. And I just wonder myself whether we have in fact given this doctrine that prominence in our own preaching which it deserves.

Donald Macleod, 'The Origin of Sin,' (class lecture, Systematic Theology 102, Free Church College, Edinburgh, 1 March, 1990). Cunningham's statements on ecumenism and sin likely is part of what lies behind Macleod's tentative openness in one article to the possibility of a future Scottish denomination which, for the sake of Christian unity, is not 'officially committed on the questions raised by Arminianism.' Donald Macleod, 'What are the Fundamentals?' *Monthly Record*, November 1978, 212. For Cunningham's own comments on the centrality of original sin to dogmatics, see William Cunningham, *Historical Theology: Volume II* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1870), 386-8. For Cunningham's comments on Wesley and others whom he refers to as 'evangelical Arminians,' see *Historical Theology*: *Volume II*, 509-13.

[6] Donald Macleod, 'The Christian Doctrine of Providence,' *The Banner of Truth Magazine* 70, (July/August 1969): 15-25.

[7] Macleod, 'The Christian Doctrine of Providence,' 16. To say that sin's existence is by definition irrational is to go beyond the likes of Reinhold Niebuhr who suggested that our recognition of sin's existence as a 'defiance of logic' is merely provisional. Niebuhr claims that sin's existence only *apparently* defies logic because we are not well-enough equipped to deal with the logical complexity of sin's existence. Niebuhr explains, 'Loyalty to all the facts may require a provisional defiance of logic, lest complexity in the facts of experience be denied for the sake of a premature logical consistency.' Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man: Volume I: Human Nature* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 1996), 293.

> can never be glad that sin came into the world, because, by definition, it absolutely ought not to be.[8]

He goes on to assert that God does foreordain sin's existence, but that foreordination must be understood in such a way as to exclude any ascription of sin's authorship to God. 'Even if it could be shown that the divine foreordination of sin logically involves God's authorship of it, the conclusion must not be drawn.'[9]

Here in this early article—fascinating in part because it shows how early Macleod had developed his doctrine of *anomia*—we see the basic building blocks upon which Macleod will construct this idea over the rest of his career. It would be several decades before Macleod would offer his most succinct definition of *anomia*, one which suggests the various directions that he eventually takes the doctrine (with the notable exception of divine suffering). He writes:

> …The Bible describes sin as *lawlessness* (1 John 3:4). The word in Greek is *anomia*. Sin is literally *anomalous*. Whenever we ask, Why does sin exist? Or How did sin come in? We are forgetting that. We are assuming there is some logic to sin, some kind of explanation. But how can there be, if in its very nature it is *law-less*? Sin has no rationality. It is sterile, meaningless and impenetrable. It is the ultimate Black Hole where there is no light or logic and upon which, therefore, we cannot speak a Word because Word is Logic (*Logos*).[10]

The imagery here should not be understood as implying an Augustinian privative view of sin. Macleod writes in the same work, 'Some philosophical theologians tell us that sin is a defect, the absence of a quality and the absence of Good. But the Bible does not portray sin as a mere defect. It is a corruption, a putrefaction, a cancer in the life of a human being. It is a rampant, productive, energetic, multiplying, self-propagating entity. It is fierce. It is fire. It is living. It is a force, a tremendously powerful force.'[11] It is helpful to juxtapose this later definition of *anomia*

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[8] Macleod, 'The Christian Doctrine of Providence, 16-7.
[9] Macleod, 'The Christian Doctrine of Providence,' 18. Here again, we see Macleod willing to accept paradox if it were necessary. We address Macleod's use of *felix culpa* towards the end of this chapter. Macleod goes on to explain, 'It is perilous to interpret the divine sovereignty exhaustively in terms of its analogy with physical causation. Analogy is not identity.'
[10] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 28.
Though first published in 1998, Macleod says in the preface of *A Faith to Live By* that most of the chapters were transcribed from lectures given at two local Free Churches between 1988 and 1992. *A Faith to Live By*, 7. Therefore it is best to consider his comments on *anomia* his chapter on sin as originating in this earlier period. I obtained a copy of the original lecture recordings to ensure that the content was not materially different from what was published.
[11] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 107.

with Macleod's earliest comments on lawlessness because the later piece seems to illuminate what he was only gesturing towards in his earlier piece. Biblically, *anomia* is rooted in what Macleod has described as the particularly Johannine doctrine of sin in which (according to Macleod) sin's existence is posited as both a fact and an impossibility simultaneously.[12] In tracing Macleod's logic here, we see that sin as *anomia* is a breach of the moral law in such a way that it also represents a breach of rationality. To put it another way, it is a radical breach of Macleod's all-inclusive idea of *nomos* (or *Logos*).

Anomia as the Negation of Nomos

The idea of *anomia* naturally invites the corollary that there must be some *nomos* against which *anomia* is being contrasted. At one point in *A Faith to Live By*, Macleod describes the *nomos* or law against which *anomia* is to be compared as the Decalogue. 'God has given us His law, His own *nomos*, summarized for us in the Ten Commandments, and man has rebelled against it…Sin is not only transgression of the law. It is want of conformity to the law and at last a rejection of the law and of the law-giver himself.'[13] Part of that description belies Macleod's situatedness within Westminster Federalism. It is a clear echo of the Shorter Catechism's definition of sin as 'any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God,' a phrase which Macleod implies in a lecture to his students is intended as a translation of *anomia* in 1 John 3:4.[14]

The way Macleod then introduces the concept of rationality into the nature of sin as *anomia* is by linking the word 'anomaly' to *anomia*. *Anomia*, he says,

> reminds us that sin in its very nature is anomalous. The English word 'anomalous' comes from this same Greek word, *anomia*: without law. If something is an anomaly, that means it goes against all law and all reason, and that is a [sic] marvellous way of describing sin.

[12] 'John…has a very distinct doctrine of sin, defining it as lawlessness and then portraying it as simultaneously impossible and inevitable for a believer.' Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 27.
[13] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 102.
[14] *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 14. Macleod tells his students, 'And then [there is] the most comprehensive term of all, the term *anomia*, which we have in 1 John 3:4—sin is *anomia*, which the KJV renders as "sin is transgression of the law," but which our catechism probably grasps more accurately when it says that sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. Literally, John is saying to us that sin is lawlessness. Sin is life without law—life in defiance of God's own *nomos*…' Macleod, 'Origin of Sin.'

> Sin is the ultimate anomaly…Sin is the end of the law. Sin is an anomaly, and an anomaly by definition is what is beyond reason and what cannot be understood.[15]

Using the notion of anomaly, Macleod places sin as *anomia* in a context that is in many ways similar to the way we think of laws in the natural sciences. In natural sciences like physics and biology, laws are meant to describe the way the world *is*.[16]

In fact, for Macleod, the analogy between moral law and physical laws is appropriate because there exists an underlying continuity between them. In a nod to T. F. Torrance who shared a similar notion, Macleod writes, 'Professor Torrance argues that there are objective standards in physics. Indeed, the laws of physics, the doctrines of theology and the principles of jurisprudence have a common source and belong to a unitary system. An act does not become right or wrong by decree of Parliament. On the contrary the duty of legislature is not to *make* laws, but to *discover* them.'[17] In the same work, Macleod described this continuity in terms of the divine decree: 'God's decree affects each creature according to its own nature: inanimate objects according to physical laws, animate ones according to biological laws and moral ones according to the laws of responsibility.'[18]

This wider context sheds light on what Macleod is trying to communicate when he equates *anomia* with anomaly. *Anomia* is that which cannot be explained by any relevant law. Its nature, therefore, is to be irrational. Macleod never devotes much attention to the question of how it is possible to speak meaningfully of lawless nature if nature is inherently ordered (by laws), but it is a challenge that T. F. Torrance recognized and wrote about at some length.[19] It is

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[15] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 103. On the etymology of anomalous, Macleod was incorrect. Anomalous is derived from the Greek word *anōmalos*, from *an* and *homalos*, which literally means 'uneven' (*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. 'anomalous (adj.),' accessed December 27, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anomalous#h1). This mistake recurs in his corpus at least as late as 2014 (see Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 117). The error, however, should not be overstated. It does not seem to materially impact the logic of his argument.

[16] In a piece entitled, 'Herman Bavinck and the Basis of Christian Certainty,' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 29 (1) (Spring 2011): 93, Macleod distances himself from philosophical rationalism, arguing that both scientific and religious knowledge rest upon faith in '*principia*, or self-evident truths.' In this he found the writings of Bavinck exemplary.

[17] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 98. This idea reappears decades later in *Christ Crucified*, 119-20.

[18] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 210.

[19] See Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 113-4.

no coincidence that the terms often used by Macleod to describe *anomia* are scientific terms that were popularized in the twentieth century. The most frequently used are 'black hole' and 'singularity.'[20] A black hole is a fitting metaphor for lawlessness because it is a place in the universe where the known laws of physics do not appear to apply.[21] As we will see, Macleod makes particular use of this imagery with relation to the cross, an event which in many ways seems to defy the way the moral universe ought to function. Likewise, a singularity is an event without precedent and one that cannot be explained by a law. Of course, in many contexts, one can argue that what cannot be explained by a known law must nonetheless be explainable by an unknown law. Macleod, however, often uses singularity to suggest something which adheres to no law whatsoever.

Anomia and Anthropology

What Macleod may not have recognized when he first formulated his notion of *anomia* is that in relating *anomia* to logical and not just ethical categories, he was allowing for the possibility that *anomia* could be used to describe realities beyond sin itself—ideas like natural evil, Hell, and divine suffering. That potential would only be realized in Macleod's writings years later. The younger Macleod was a pastor and as such, his more immediate interests were explicitly anthropological. What does the nature of sin as *anomia* tell us about what man is and how he came to be? In seeing how Macleod answers that question we further grasp his use of the concept.

The relationship between *anomia* as sin and anthropology begins with the fall. It is because sin is *anomia* that Adam's fall defies logical explanation.

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[20] For examples of Macleod's use of the black hole metaphor, see Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 29-30, 100, 129, 209; *A Faith to Live By*, 66-7, 140, 143-4, 148, 296, 299; *The Person of Christ*, 177-8, 217; *Christ Crucified*, 49, 95, 224. For singularity, see *Behold Your God*, 209; *The Person of Christ*, 177-8; *Christ Crucified*, 128.

[21] The illustration should not be taken to mean that Macleod believed that black holes could not be explained by natural laws. In a Q&A with students in 1990, Macleod said, 'I've been asking physicists…about black holes and whether black holes represent the end of law and order, and they tell me no—that black holes also have their own law…they say that even there, there are laws prevailing and that therefore there is no possibility of chaos within the cosmos.' Donald Macleod, 'The Divine Decree,' (class lecture, Systematic Theology 101, Free Church College, Edinburgh, 9 February, 1990).

> How then does sin come in and how does it relate to the purpose of God? Sin, according to 1 John 3:4, is *lawlessness*. Sin has no meaning, no logic, no purpose, no fruit. Sin is the end of the law. When we ask, Why sin? How sin? we are really forgetting that. We are assuming that there is some logic to sin. But at the point of sin logic collapses because sin is the Black Hole whence there is no light and for which there is no logic. There is no way of knowing how or why sin entered heaven. There is no answer to the query, How could Satan tempt Adam and Eve when they were perfect and holy and so close to God?[22]

Here Macleod takes up the Reformed orthodox assertion that Adam was created morally upright and that as such, it is impossible to locate in his nature any weakness that Satan could have exploited in order to tempt him towards sin. He emphasizes that point when he writes, 'I have a horror of anything which reflects adversely on Adam. I do not like to hear him in any way belittled… Adam was glorious. He was holy. He was not neutral, ambivalent between good and evil. He had a positive bias and inclination to the good. He was a magnificent example of the creativity of God.'[23] There is, therefore, no final explanation that can be given for Adam's decision to sin.[24] His choice was an absence of logic, impossible justify.

In saying that Adam's fall has no explanation, Macleod makes no divergence with his own Reformed orthodox tradition. Herman Bavinck is typical of the Reformed position on the mystery of sin when he says, 'The impossibility of explaining the origin of sin, therefore, must not be understood as an excuse, a refuge for ignorance. Rather, it should be said openly and clearly: we are here at the boundaries of our knowledge. Sin *exists*, but it will never be able to justify its existence. It is unlawful and irrational.'[25] What is more distinctive of Macleod's own

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[22] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 66-7. At least twice Macleod makes the claim that God himself might not be able to offer a logic to sin. '[Sin] is a black hole, a singularity, an absurdity of which no one (not even God himself?) can give an explanation.' Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 209. See also Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 178.

[23] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 104.

[24] Macleod also implies that the irrationality at the root of Adam's first sin is evident in the way he tries to hide from God in the aftermath: 'This man who had been so clear-headed only moments before is how hiding from God under a tree! He thinks God cannot see him under a tree! His mind has gone, because of sin. Man is still in that same position: hiding from God behind fig-leaves and trees.' Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 108.

[25] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume Three: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 70. This quote should be read in the light of the fact that Bavinck, unlike Macleod, held to the Augustinian view of sin as privation. Similarly, G. C. Berkouwer writes of sin's genesis, 'One cannot find sense in the senseless and meaning in the meaningless.' Berkouwer, *Sin* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1971), 134. See his helpful chapter in the same work, 'The Riddle of Sin,' 130-148.

hamartiology (again, by way of *anomia*) is the way in which he applies the irrationality of Adam's first sin to all other sins and makes it his central claim about sin.

That sin in the life of a Christian must be seen as both impossible and undeniable is an idea that Macleod attributes to 1 John. He suggests that John presents his readers with a paradox: on the one hand, 'if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves' and yet it is also the case that 'No one born of God commits sin.'[26] Biblical scholars have often sought to resolve this tension by claiming that the latter proposition is a reference to habitual sin or to grievous sins.[27] Macleod suggests that such an interpretation evades the force of John's intended message: the existence of sin in the life of a Christian should be treated as an impossibility, not because it does not exist but because its existence has no explanation.

> The Christian sins and (I say this advisedly) sins in union with Christ. He cannot say to God, 'Lord, suspend the union while I sin,' because at this level what God joins together man cannot put asunder. What a monstrous anomaly it is: a redeemed soul united to a risen Saviour committing an act of lawlessness. We are so tolerant of sin in ourselves… The Apostle John says, in fact, that it is impossible (1 John 3:9). John's reason has a very modern ring to it: because the Christian is born of God, because the sperm of God is in him, he cannot sin. John wants us to know that when we sin we are committing the gravest anomaly and perpetrating the most appalling absurdity because, and Paul tells us, we are sinning in union with Christ (1 Cor. 6:15). Great damage has been done by attempts to evade the force of this teaching. Daily, we do this absurd, impossible thing and take it in our stride, as if it were the most natural thing in the world that a Christian should sin. Sin is that which absolutely ought not to be, anywhere, and least of all in a Christian.[28]

Definitive Sanctification

The particular doctrine that Macleod defends here with the terminology of *anomia* is the doctrine of definitive sanctification, a concept which he gave his fullest expression to in a 1971 *Banner of Truth* article entitled 'Paul's Use of the Term "The Old Man".'[29] In it, Macleod argues that the 'old man' in Pauline literature is not a figure that must continually be put to death in the

[26] 1 John 1:8, 3:9, RSV.
[27] C. H. Dodd writes of 1 John 3:9, 'These expressions therefore should properly refer, not to single or occasional acts of sin, but to habitual sin, or a continuous sinful state.' Dodd, *The Johannine Epistles* (New York: Harper & Row, 1946), 79.
[28] Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 103.
[29] Macleod, 'Paul's Use of the Term "The Old Man",' 13-9.

process of progressive sanctification.[30] 'Putting off the old man is neither a continuous process nor a present duty; it is an accomplished fact.'[31]

One implication of this view which is as much pastoral as it is dogmatic is that a Christian can no longer blame his sins on some kind of internal 'old man.'

> Believers cannot place the responsibility for their sins upon the old man. This is the precise reason why it is so dangerous to have our conceptions at this point determined by our personal religious feelings. Far too often the old man has served as an antinomian convenience. How common and how facile is the excuse, "It was the old man!" But this is quite illegitimate. There is no old man.[32]

In this early essay, Macleod makes no secret of the fact that his exegesis is built upon the work of his mentor John Murray (1898-1975),[33] but he makes Murray's idea his own by uniting it to the concept of *anomia* and using it to push back against what he seems to consider a kind of antinomian reading of the Westminster Confession's statement on remaining corruption in the believer—one which he implies was endemic to the Free Church context in which he was raised.[34]

In his 2011 lectures on original sin, Macleod teaches his students (and affirms) the Westminster Confession's statement that while the believer is freed from bondage to sin, yet 'by reason of his remaining corruption, he doth not perfectly, nor only, will that which is good, but doth also will that which is evil.'[35] In affirming that statement, however, he suggests that that idea

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[30] Cf. Col. 3:9 and Romans 6:6.
[31] Macleod, 'Paul's use of the Term "The Old Man",' 14.
[32] Macleod, 'Paul's use of the Term "The Old Man",' 15-6.
[33] Macleod, 'Paul's use of the Term "The Old Man",' 15.
[34] Cf. *WCF* 9.4. In a 2009 lecture at Highland Theological College, Macleod recalls,

> Way back in the 1950s, I read his [Murray's] book, *Principles of Conduct*… Murray argues very cogently that the 'old man' was crucified on the cross of Calvary and no longer exists. And that was not what I was taught in my childhood by John Morris, [several untranslatable names], and others who were always on about our having both an old man and a new man. 'Tha duine òg agus seann duine agam': 'I have an old man and a new man.' And Murray said, No, that old man is crucified, and dead and buried. He no longer exists. The born-again man is not an old man and a new man. He is a new man. And I began in all innocence to preach that doctrine—not least in Lewis—and it got me into a fearful amount of trouble way back in those early years.

Donald Macleod, 'Assurance,' Annual John Murray Lecture (lecture, Highland Theological College, 2009). Passing reference to the controversy generated by Macleod's teaching on the old man is made by David Meredith in *The People's Theologian*, 314. For Murray's view see *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 211-219.
[35] *WCF* 9.4.

of indwelling sin considered in isolation can lead to an imbalanced view of sanctification: 'In the regenerate there is this fact of remaining corruption—of indwelling sin (as people like John Owen tended to call it). Now this, perhaps in my view has been rather comfortably accommodated by Reformed theology.' We must, he says, also maintain the view of definitive sanctification taught by John Murray.

> And so…we wed the insights of (for example) Professor John Murray to the Confession's position here, where we would say, yes, there is indwelling sin, but indwelling sin in a believer is an anomaly…it's an anomaly because here is somebody who is born again, who is in Christ, who is indwelt by his Spirit, in whom there is God's seed. How on earth can that person sin? And you don't say, 'Oh…everybody does it.' You have to get to the point where the sheer anomalousness of it, the absurdity of it hits you home—hits you real hard—because this should not be. It's inexplicable how Adam could sin.[36]

Thus, Macleod seeks to affirm the Confession's affirmation of the reality of indwelling sin and yet he warns against any interpretation that might make a believer less alert to what he calls the anomalousness of sin.[37] In addition to helping us to see Macleod's development of *anomia*, the way Macleod applies the impossibility of sin to the life of Adam and the believer hints at the way he will use *anomia* to speak to the impossibility of divine suffering and other realities which ought not to be, precisely because they are in some sense lawless.

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[36] Donald Macleod, 'Original Sin (2),' (class lecture, Systematic Theology 202, Free Church College, Edinburgh, 14 February, 2011).

[37] As Macleod applied the doctrine of indwelling sin and definitive sanctification pastorally, his language was often quite vivid:

> Indwelling sin to the apostle [Paul] wasn't something to write dissertations about. It wasn't some kind of interesting abstract problem. It was something to be murdered! Something to strangle! Something you hated. And something you took by the throat. Well, of course, if you realize what you're doing when you sin—that you are sinning in union with Christ—then you see the whole emotional reaction comes from the perception of the horror. And that's why you feel murderous about sin. And if we want tonight…one particular prayer above every other prayer in the area of sanctification, it's this: 'Lord, give me murderous thoughts about sin. Let me feel like strangling it—like throttling it. Let me turn my violence—all my aggression—let me turn it against these things in my life where I am defeated and where I offend God.'

Later in the same lecture he opines on how the Holy Spirit is involved in mortification:

> What kind of leader is the Holy Spirit? Well let me put it this way so that you'll never, never forget it. He is the leader of a gang of murderers—of people who are out to throttle sin—and where the Spirit is leading us and is in control of our lives, what he leads us to do is to murder sin. A Spirit-led person is not somebody who always knows infallibly what he ought to do, what job she ought to take, where she ought to live, whom she ought to marry. A Spirit-led person is somebody who is murdering sin…It is a sure sign that we are not led by the Spirit if we are at peace with sin.

Donald Macleod, 'The Doctrine of Sanctification,' (lecture: location and date unknown).

Anomia as Sin in the Twentieth-Century Scottish Context

One of the obvious questions that arises when surveying Macleod's doctrine of *anomia* is where did these concepts originate? Across his corpus, Macleod almost exclusively grounds his ideas in biblical sources like 1 John and to the Shorter Catechism's statement of sin as lawlessness. Important as those connections are, the interpreter of Macleod would be wise to also recognize that—original though his ideas may be—Macleod was writing in a twentieth-century Scottish context in which he was far from alone in emphasizing sin's irrationality. Macleod's interpretation of *anomia* reflects a distinctively twentieth-century Scottish milieu and his emphasis on sin's irrationality was particularly fitting to the post-war context he inhabited.

Narratives of theodicy in twentieth-century British theology not unfairly often open with a statement that the century began with a conspicuously optimistic view of sin. John Hick (1922-2012), for instance, writes that the dominant patterns of Christian theodicy in the decades leading to the First World War were largely driven by an Irenaean view of evil which understood sin and suffering to have a pedagogical role in mankind's moral development.[38] This more hopeful interpretation of sin and evil was paired with a certain reading of Darwin's theory of evolution that understood evolution to be synonymous with progress.[39] In such a system, sin and evil become essential tools for moral progress without which, men would remain moral children. According to Hick, such an optimistic view of evil's teleology was shattered by the atrocities of the First World War.[40]

Early Twentieth-Century Scottish Context

In the wake of World War One, some of Scotland's most significant Reformed theologians sought to speak dogmatically about sin in a way that was consistent with its awful nature which was put on full display by that conflict. One perspective seized upon by two of

[38] John Hick, *Evil and the Love of God* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 243. Hick himself is partial to an Irenaean view of sin but rejects the form it took at the turn of the twentieth century.
[39] Hick, *Evil and the Love of God*, 242-3.
[40] Hick, *Evil and the Love of God*, 245.

Scotland's most important early twentieth-century theologians was that sin, rather than being useful for human development, is inherently irrational. P. T. Forsyth (1848-1921) and H. R. Mackintosh (1870-1936) used sin's irrationality to push back against any notion that sin is or must be an essential part of the created order. In doing so, they foreshadowed Macleod's own emphases.

Forsyth in his work *The Justification of God* explains that one flaw of contemporary philosophy is its tendency to try to bring all concepts into a unified rational theory. This is its great weakness in the face of something so irrational as sin.

> Philosophy deals but with the ordered course or content of the world under its eyes…it is alien to the idea of crisis and tragedy. It cannot therefore admit an absolute contradiction to the world's general success like sin. It is helpless before anything so entirely irrational in kind…[It seeks to] bring to manageable order the general anomalies of life, and adjust them to its world scheme. It says they are exaggerated and sets about to reduce the swelling.[41]

Forsyth suggests that the tendency of philosophy is always to seek an inherent meaning and order in evil, but in doing so it refuses to face the truth about sin. It is a problem that cannot rationally be understood or justified.

Similarly, several years after Forsyth, H. R. Mackintosh (1870-1936) at the University of Edinburgh wrote against what he called 'the materialistic mechanistic monism which darkened the sky for a generation.'[42] For Mackintosh, this system, driven by pre-War optimism, represented an attempt to rationalize sin in terms of understandable causes and effects. Mackintosh argued that we cannot explain sin as the predictable effect of a set of external causes. It arises rather from within the human heart and even there, its true origin is a mystery.

> Let us not fail to register the fact that by tracking sin to the secret places of the human spirit we are not in reality *explaining* sin…The problem of *why* we sin, *why* we misuse our moral freedom, still confronts us as implacably as ever. Sin in the last resort is radically unintelligible; it is incapable of being interpreted in terms of rational purpose; it is irreducible to factors which in a moral sense can be made transparent and self-accrediting. As we contemplate the sin we have done, it confronts us as a thoroughly irrational entity, imperious to light – inexplicable to the mind, and to the conscience inexcusable. We can find no real place for it in the theoretical or the practical world. All

[41] Peter T. Forsyth, *The Justification of God*, 1948 ed. (London: Latimer House, 1917), 159.
[42] Hugh R. Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, ed. 1941 (London: Nisbet & Co., 1927), 7.

> the possible aids to reflection do not enable us to make sin satisfying either to reason or to love, but we stand with bowed head in the presence of the accusing fact: 'The good that I would I do not, but the evil that I would not, that I do.'[43]

For Mackintosh, sins are *un*-caused in any rationally explicable way. They may be influenced by external circumstances, but that is not their cause, which remains irrational.[44] In the work of Forsyth and Mackintosh we see earlier Scottish theologians developing ideas similar to Macleod's own and in a way that is particular to their twentieth-century Scottish context. We can already say, then, that Macleod's own ideas were by no means anomalous (for want of a better word) in twentieth-century Scottish theology. However, it is not until the later work of Thomas F. Torrance (1913-2007) that Macleod's work on *anomia* finds its most important (if surprising) interlocutor.

T. F. Torrance and Disorder

T. F. Torrance was the long-time dogmatics professor at the University of Edinburgh (and thus neighbor to Macleod at the Free Church College located just next door).[45] In print, the relationship between the two was often adversarial. They were most at odds over their differing views of Scottish church history and their differing emphasis in Christology.[46] On the issue of Christology, Macleod wrote several pieces criticizing Torrance's view of incarnational

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[43] Mackintosh, *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, 61. Cf. Romans 7:19. Mackintosh states that the Fall and the nature of original sin are beyond the scope of his present work. He does not explicitly state that sin has a non-human origin but he does resist the claim that sin can be explained with mere psychology. He also argues that forgiveness of sin is a supernatural reality between a personal God and his creatures. *The Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, 45, 181. For his own part, Macleod locates the true origin of sin in man in part with the prior fall of Lucifer, a fall which he says was equally anomalous. '[Lucifer] was perfectly blessed, magnificently intelligent, morally upright and totally integrated…How can I explain the lawlessness of the Light-bearer? Why did the Light-bearer choose darkness? I have no answer to that at all.' Macleod, *A Faith to Live By*, 102.

[44] While emphasizing individual responsibility for sins, Mackintosh does concede that Schleiermacher was also right in drawing attention to the corporate character of sin. H. R. Mackintosh, *Types of Modern Theology* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1937), 85.

[45] No one would mistake Torrance and Macleod for theological allies. Macleod was critical of the elder theologian especially on issues of Christology and ecumenism. Torrance responded to Macleod's public critiques of his work with no less vigor. James Eglinton has suggested that these men represent the two distinctive streams of Scottish Reformed theology in the twentieth century. Eglinton, 'Reformed Theology in Modern Europe (19th and 20th Centuries), 138. These differences make it all the more fascinating how similarly formulated their views of evil as order or *anomia* are.

[46] On the former, see Macleod, 'Dr T. F. Torrance and Scottish Theology: a Review Article.'

redemption which Macleod felt created confusion around the sinlessness of Christ.[47] Even so, on the issue of disorder and *anomia*, these men's articulations are at times remarkably similar.

For Torrance, the defining characteristic of evil—both moral and physical—is disorder.[48] His descriptions of disorder often bear a strong resemblance to Macleod's *anomia* though they are not synonymous and are differentiated in part by Macleod's and Torrance's differing theological interests.[49] Three passages especially highlight Torrance's development of his notion of disorder. Their relevance to the present research is in their similarity with Macleod's concept of *anomia*.[50]

The first is in a 1949 response to J. A. T. Robinson's (1919-1983) argument for universalism.[51] In an earlier article, Robinson had argued that God's omnipotent love made the salvation of all men a logical necessity.[52] To this, Torrance responded that universalism as a necessary implication of God's omnipotent love might be rationally satisfying but it does not recognize the logical impasse that sin presents.[53] For Torrance, sin introduces an element of irrationality into dogmatics which prevents the surety that all will be saved.[54]

> [Universalism] commits the dogmatic fallacy of systematizing the illogical. Sin has a fundamentally surd-like character. Somehow evil posits itself and cannot be rationalized… Evil is fundamentally discontinuity. No explanation involving only continuity or coherence can ever approach the problem, for that would be to draw the line of continuity dialectically over discontinuity. The doctrine of the atonement teaches us that no matter how much we think about it, here our reason reaches its limit. It cannot bridge the contradiction between God and man in guilt. The contradiction is

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[47] See, for instance, *The Person of Christ*, 223.

[48] Eric Flett has suggested that 'order' is a 'central integrating motif in Torrance's work.' Eric G. Flett, *Persons, Powers, and Pluralities: Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Culture* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 62

[49] For example, Torrance is far more interested than Macleod in the relevance of disorder to questions of natural evil.

[50] The chronology of these publications is especially relevant to understanding Macleod's use of *anomia* because the first two articles were written before Macleod began his career as a theologian.

[51] Thomas F. Torrance, 'Universalism or Election,' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2, no. 2 (June 1949), 139-155. In this essay Torrance does not use the term 'disorder' but his argument clearly has in view the key themes that he would use to describe disorder.

[52] J. A. T. Robinson, 'Universalism – Is It Heretical?' *Scottish Journal of Theology* 2, no. 2 (June 1949), 139-155.

[53] Torrance, 'Universalism or Election,' 311. Paul Molnar offers a helpful overview of Torrance's critique of universalism. However, he gives little direct attention to Torrance's use of sin's irrationality in his argument. The present review of Torrance's hamartiology suggests a lacuna in Torrance studies meriting further exploration. Paul D. Molnar, 'Thomas F. Torrance and the problem of universalism,' *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 68, no. 2 (May 2015), 164-86.

[54] Torrance, 'Universalism or Election,' 314.

resolved only by an act in which man in contradiction to God is reconciled and yet the terrible bottomless reality of sin is not denied.[55]

Where Robinson argues that God's infinite love should logically result in men freely moving towards Him, Torrance retorts that he ignores the 'un-understandable mystery' of the reprobate.[56] The true mystery of sin is revealed in the possibility that those whom God has justified will still reject him.[57] For Torrance, the explanation for man's ultimate rejection of the gospel is grounded not in a decree of reprobation but in the irrationality of sin. 'Even when a man has made his bed in hell God's hand of love will continue to grasp him there. To choose finally and forever—unfathomable mystery of iniquity—to say "No" to Jesus is to be held in a hell of one's own choosing and making.'[58] Therefore, even if we can hope for the universal salvation of mankind, we still cannot assert the impossibility of eternal damnation because the human choice for damnation is always irrational.[59] While the specific term 'disorder' does not appear in this first text, we will see how Torrance will later speak of disorder in ways similar to the way he describes sin in this passage, namely that sin as disorder is that which is irrational.

A second key, albeit brief passage comes ten years later in a 1959 essay entitled, 'The Meaning of Order.'[60] What is most significant about this passage is that in it Torrance explicitly links his concept of disorder with lawlessness (or *anomia*) and describes them in ways similar to how Macleod will in the late 1960s.

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[55] Torrance, 'Universalism or Election,' 314-5. Throughout the essay, Torrance seems to suggest that the atonement and sin's irrational nature are somehow mutually interpretative, though the relationship between the two is never fully clarified. Sin creates such a logically irreconcilable gulf between God and man that 'just how the contradiction [between God and guilty man] is dealt with in the atonement is yet to be revealed at the *Parousia*.' Torrance, 'Universalism or Election,' 314. The underlying point is that sin creates a gulf which cannot be ignored for the sake of dogmatic deference to God's love. Sin is a real logical barrier to Robinson's so-called 'necessity' of God's omnipotent love. 'Even God could not answer the problem of sin except by the desperate *action* of Calvary…' Torrance, 'Universalism or Election,' 311.

[56] Robinson, 'Universalism – Is It Heretical?,' 148. Torrance, 'Universalism or Election,' 316.

[57] Torrance offers Judas as the tragic example of this truth. 'If ever omnipotent divine love was manifested it was in Jesus Christ, and yet in the very hour when the supreme token of that love was given to him at the last supper Judas went out to betray that love with a dastardly kiss.' Torrance, 'Universalism or Election,' 312.

[58] Torrance, 'Universalism or Election,' 317. Here, Torrance is also rejecting limited atonement.

[59] Torrance, 'Universalism or Election,' 312.

[60] Thomas F. Torrance, 'The Meaning of Order,' *Gospel, Church, and Ministry: Thomas F. Torrance Collected Studies 1*, edited by Jock Stein (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 93. The article was first published in *Church Quarterly Review* 160 (Jan 1959) 21-36.

> In the biblical revelation the whole concept of order is viewed over against disorder and chaos. Apart from the ordering of God's creative Word the world is without form or void, but into the ordered cosmos there has broken the disorder of sin. It belongs to the very nature of sin to divide, to disrupt, to be anarchic—sin is lawlessness, *anomia*. The opposite of all that is order, harmony, and communion. When God made the world, he made it in order and everything was set in due proportion. But through the lawlessness of sin the world fell out of proportion, out of order, and was threatened with sheer chaos…Meantime wherever there is *anomia* it is met by the divine *nomos,* and there is conflict between disorder and order.[61]

It would be another three decades before Torrance's view of evil as disorder would receive its fullest expression in the chapter 'Contingence and Disorder' in his 1981 work, *Divine and Contingent Order*. In it, Torrance asserts that disorder (or evil) exists as the negation of order and as such it does not yield to rational explanation. It presents a logical problem to the human mind whose natural tendency is to seek order and continuity in creation. He writes:

> The very notion of disorder or evil entails the idea of a breach in regularity or a break in continuity, which we cannot even entertain in thought without reference to regularity or continuity. To think rationally and scientifically we have to think in terms of regularities and continuities, but when we are asked to think of what is irregular or discontinuous our rational and scientific determinations of mind make us think it away, for the coherent continuity of our thought carries it across the discontinuities.[62]

This raises the question of whether a theologian or philosopher can speak of evil in rational terms. Torrance asks, 'is not the rational thing to do to suspend our habit of thinking only in regularities or continuities, much as we would reign to a halt a galloping horse before an ugly big ditch which it could not jump?'[63] He argues that a proper understanding of disorder begins with a recognition that it cannot be understood. This approach he contrasts with the existentialists who would question the inherent order of the whole cosmos and in effect jump headlong *into* disorder and the monists who would seek to treat the impasse as merely superficial.[64]

Torrance also uses the irrationality of evil to critique the classic privative view of evil. If we speak of evil in terms of privation of good and defection from being, he says, we are merely

[61] Torrance, 'The Meaning of Order,' 93-4.
[62] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 113.
[63] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 113.
[64] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 114.

'trying to explain evil by drawing a line of continuity below or through any discontinuity that may appear, thus in the last resort rationalizing it away.'[65] The privation view also seems at odds with the brutal reality of the crucifixion where the forces working against Christ were 'sinister and relentlessly hostile.'[66] For Torrance, all that can be said of these forces is that they cannot be explained by reference to the Creator or the creature. There is nothing about creatureliness *per se* that is sufficient to explain the existence of sin. In the end, 'Evil remains an utterly inexplicable "mystery" (as the Bible speaks of it), but a fearful actuality, nevertheless, which must be totally and consistently opposed by man as it is by God.'[67]

One of the distinctives of Torrance's essay on disorder is the extent to which he tries to relate disorder to questions of the natural sciences. As much as natural science is driven by the belief that the universe is rationally ordered, aspects of nature (such as the predator-prey relationship) often leave the scientist 'overwhelmed by the pointlessness of it all.'[68] Torrance writes, 'It is difficult not to think that somehow nature has been infiltrated by an extrinsic evil… corrupting natural processes, and introducing irrational kinks into their order.'[69] However, when one is willing to admit that evil exists not only in man but also in the rest of creation, it is still not clear how to distinguish evil from normally functioning physical processes. The cosmos seems built upon laws of entropy and it is difficult to imagine a cosmic order where death and decay do not exist as a necessity.[70] Torrance's conclusion is that while death and decay are not disorder *per se*, disorder has nonetheless enmeshed itself in these realities.[71]

In Torrance's scheme, the nature of redemption is deeply tied to the nature of disorder with its irrational component. Disorder confronts creation with the potential collapse into

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[65] Torrance says this in reference to what he calls the Augustinian-Thomist view of privation. Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 117.
[66] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order,* 118.
[67] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order,* 118.
[68] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 123.
[69] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 123.
[70] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 121.
[71] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 123.

meaninglessness and non-being. Only Christianity can offer the hope that rationality can once again restore the irrational:

> It is the claim of Christian theology that some measure of understanding of evil is possible, because the objective divine order of the good and rational does not merely negate evil but lays hold of it in a re-creative and re-ordering movement with a view to mastering it… and making it serve a fuller dimension of order that might have been possible otherwise.[72]

A key claim of Christianity, then, is that God takes what is intrinsically irrational (i.e. disorder) and gives it rational meaning by using it for good. Torrance believes we see evidence of this in the miracles of Jesus. Miracles are not suspensions of the natural order but a re-creation of the natural order where disorder had taken firm hold. Into disorder, the Logos brings rationality and in doing so, ushers in what Torrance calls an 'ontological salvation.'[73]

The value of Torrance's thought to the present chapter is two-fold. First, it is the clearest expression of the fact that Macleod was working in a context where other theologians were making similar claims about the nature of sin (even if the extent to which Torrance and others influenced Macleod's hamartiology is unclear). The second reason why it is useful to read Macleod's *anomia* and Torrance's 'disorder' alongside one another is how well their ideas complement each other. Given the different loci to which they direct their attention, it is tempting to see in each of their dogmatic developments of evil a sense of where the other could have developed their thought had they pursued similar questions.

Macleod's Expanded use of *Anomia*

To return specifically to Macleod's work, thus far we have shown that by the late 1960s Macleod had already developed an understanding of sin as *anomia* (or lawlessness) and that that concept remained central to his hamartiology for the rest of his career. However, as we will see, Macleod's understanding of *anomia* begins with sin but that is not where it ends. Crucial to understanding *anomia*'s relevance to divine suffering is the fact that several years after Macleod

[72] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 114.
[73] Torrance, *Divine and Contingent Order*, 116.

first used *anomia* to define sin, he began to associate it with other realities beyond sin itself. He soon came to the position that other realities besides sin share with sin the character of lawlessness so that by the late 1980s he was describing both the reality of Hell and Christ's cross in terms of lawlessness. Shortly thereafter, he also began to describe divine suffering in terms of *anomia*. That Macleod eventually speaks of sin, divine suffering, Hell, and the cross in terms of *anomia* speaks to the embeddedness of the concept within his theology so that for the interpreter of Macleod to understand his view of divine suffering, we must see the web of connections centering upon *anomia* of which divine suffering is but one part.

Anomia as Hell

One of the earliest pieces in which we can clearly detect Macleod's expanded use of *anomia* is in his 1986 *Monthly Record* article, 'The Wrath, Present and to Come.'[74] In it, Macleod concludes his discussion on the eschatological nature of divine wrath by highlighting the Bible's various descriptions of Hell as being 'outside.'[75]

> These are only hints, but it seems safe to move from them to the conclusion that Hell is *outside* the cosmos. The *cosmos* is the realm of order and beauty, the sphere within which law operates. Hell is no part of that. It has neither order nor beauty. It is Outside, the final Black Hole where the writ of Law and Logic does not run. It possesses neither moral nor physical order. It is simply a darkness which never has (and never can) hear the divine word, Let there be Light. In this it corresponds to the essential nature of sin itself, defined by the Apostle John as *lawlessness*…it admits of no explanation and knows no logic. It is simply an anomaly, its origin a mystery, the reasons for God's allowing it a mystery, its consequences utterly sterile. In the final reckoning, it is banished from the cosmos, thus ensuring a universe where the supremacy of Law is total and all Lawlessness is *outside*.[76]

For Macleod, Hell is not sin and yet like sin, it is defined by lawlessness and fittingly becomes the place where sin as lawlessness is cast. Hell is the negation of creation: a reality of order, beauty, and truth. Of course, it is not obvious, propositionally, what such a place would be like. We can easily conceptualize (or at least think we can conceptualize) a world in which sin

[74] Macleod, 'The Wrath, Present and to Come,' *MR*, November 1986, 211-13. The article was reproduced as the second half of his chapter, 'Divine Anger,' in Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 117-29.
[75] He cites Matt. 8:12, 22:13, 25:30; Rev. 22:15; Lev. 16:22; and a variant reading of Heb. 2:9.
[76] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 129.

abounds unhindered, but what would it look like for other aspects of lawlessness to abound (if in fact this is what Macleod really intends to suggest). If we can imagine a place without moral order, it is far less clear how we might imagine a place which lacks physical order.[77]

We can at least see why Macleod finds the analogy of the black hole so useful in contemplating the nature of Hell.[78] It is a place which at its very heart is subject to no governing laws.[79] With the black hole metaphor, Macleod also points to the hope that the lawlessness which has ruined the cosmos can be thrown into a place (Hell) whose own gravitational pull is so strong that what is inside of it can never again escape to threaten the cosmos. Black holes turn in upon themselves, forcing their contents with ferocity to a final point of singularity.

Christ's Dereliction

Macleod's most vivid depiction of sin's relationship with Hell in terms of *anomia* is in the way he describes Christ's personal experience of the cross where he bears the sins (or lawlessness) of the world and receives the punishment of sin which lawlessness deserves—to be cast into Hell, the realm of lawlessness. He writes,

> [On the cross] He will be dealt with as Sin deserves. He will become the Holy Place where the sin of the whole world will be condemned…There will be no sparing. He will become the one Outside, the Great Outsider. He will be forsaken by God, not heard when He cries, not comforted in His pain. He will be in the Black Hole, whence light and meaning and law and reason are banished and where there can be no way of knowing who He is, no sense of God's love and no answer to His, Why?... He would know a banishment to an area of reality – if reality it was – where no creature had gone before.[80]

Citing some sympathy with Calvin's interpretation, Macleod understands Christ descent into Hell as his suffering on the cross with its lowest point being the cry of dereliction.[81] It was there that, while not descending physically into Hell, Christ nonetheless experienced the pains of Hell as if he really were there. Even when the term *anomia* is absent, this quote shows how

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[77] Macleod's understanding of Hell might appear to tend towards a form of annihilationism where people are banished to nothingness, but he explicitly rejects such an interpretation. Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 68.
[78] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 30, 129; *A Faith to Live By*, 66-7, 296.
[79] Of course, Macleod himself admits that black holes must be governed by some underlying physical laws, even if they are known to man. He makes no such qualification about the nature of Hell, leaving the interpreter to speculate how Macleod might describe God's upholding of Hell as part of his providence.
[80] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 36.
[81] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 45. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.XVI.10.

Macleod describes it in similar terms. Christ experiences Hell as a black hole—the absence of logic and law.

It is precisely because Christ descends into a reality without logic that his cry of dereliction can receive no answer. He is in Hell, the place of utter irrationality where no answers can be found.[82] Sin is meaningless and Hell is the place of awful irrationality. The tragedy of what Christ experiences is heightened by the fact that he is the Logos, the ground of all logic and law. Speaking of Christ's dereliction, Macleod writes, 'The lowest point of the *kenosis* is the cross and the cross is the ultimate in vanity and futility. Here, the Life becomes dead and the Eternal Word is reduced to silence. Here the career of the Son of Man runs into the sand, disgraced, discredited, and meaningless. He has achieved nothing and the grim words, "All is vanity!" run round the universe with a new depth of meaning.'[83] Later he continues, 'On that cross, at its darkest point, the Son knew himself only as sin and his Father only as avenger. Here was a singularity. The *Logos*, the ground of all law, became lawlessness (*anomia*), speechless in a darkness beyond reason.'[84] This, for Macleod, is to say that Christ experienced the full gravity of Hell as the antithesis of his very nature as the ground of all reason, law, and beauty.

Anomia and the Event of the Cross

Macleod's use of the motif of *anomia* in the event of the cross is multi-layered. One of the complexities of interpretation here is the fact that he makes a distinction between aspects of the cross which were lawless and others which are only *apparently* lawless. In the latter category are truths about the cross which are both lawless and lawful simultaneously.

At several key points in his corpus, Macleod has suggested that the cross presents us with three great anomalies.[85] The first is that a sinless man is made to pay the wages for sin. The

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[82] It is not always clear what such metaphors are meant to communicate. If Hell is a reality, must it not in some sense be a place upheld by God and in that sense require some underlying rationality?
[83] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 217.
[84] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 217.
[85] Macleod offers these three anomalies together in at least three of his works. See Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha,* 82-5; *Christ Crucified,* 60; *A Faith to Live By*, 141-2.

second is that this man is the Son of God. 'What is *he* doing here,' Macleod asks, 'hanging between two felons, his life-blood ebbing away? How can the eternal Logos, who in the beginning was with God, and was God—how can he now be reaping the bitter harvest of sin.'[86] The final anomaly is the Father's involvement in the event. God the Father intentionally hands his innocent Son over to death. Absent further explanation, Macleod says that these facts should leave the observer with a picture of the cross as utterly lawless—something that absolutely ought not to have been. As he puts it provocatively in one essay:

> The cross is immoral. There the innocent suffers: at God's hands. There God's Son is destroyed: at God's hands. Let's not sentimentalise it. This is not some 'green hill far away'. It is the scene of the greatest atrocity in history. Calvary is, quite literally, a shambles. God's Lamb is being slaughtered: on a garbage heap, outside the city, in darkness, by a brutal soldiery. And God is responsible.[87]

Is God guilty then of a crime? Obviously, Macleod would say no. After all, he holds to a view of penal substitution theory which leads him to interpret the cross in such a way that God's actions, malicious though they may appear, actually represent the preservation of justice. For Macleod, the cross is the righteous means by which God both forgives sinners and satisfies justice.

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Macleod uses the motif of lawlessness at the cross merely as a rhetorical device for asserting the cross's underlying goodness. For Macleod, there remains a real sense in which—even from the divine perspective—the cross is in some sense truly lawless and that God is intimately related to that lawlessness.

> Love, the divine love, bears the whole cost of redemption: the Father's love, which is also the love of the Three. The *hilasmos* [propitiation] is offered *by* God and offered *to* God. This is the crowning *anomia*: the supreme paradox. But it is an *anomia* 'forced' on God by that first, dreadful *anomia* in Eden, when humanity rebelled against God and created a singularity which law as such could neither explain nor redress, and to which even the divine love could offer no solution except the self-sacrificing intervention of the Beloved Son.[88]

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[86] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 60.
[87] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 83.
[88] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 128.

How can God commit *anomia* or be so intimately connected with it as Macleod describes here? Macleod is not positing sinfulness in God. Instead, he suggests that at the cross (and as a result of sin), God has done something that in some sense never should have happened. He has done something that in a normally functioning universe would be completely irrational. To borrow from an image that we will see Macleod himself use to describe divine suffering, to call the cross *anomia* is to view it from a pre-lapsarian perspective. If we can imagine standing with Adam at the beginning of creation—a creation that is wholly good—and telling Adam that he inhabits a world in which God the Father will kill his Son, he might understandably reply that such a notion is impossible. No logic could help him arrive at such a possibility. One would have to posit the existence of sin, a reality which is itself irrational.

There is, for Macleod, a real sense that the cross ought not to have happened. A cosmos that is wholly ordered, true, and beautiful should never have contained the possibility that the only way for those who bear the image of God to have a relationship with God was through the death of the Son. Macleod uses this notion of the cross as anomalous to push back against any tendency to receive Christ's substitutionary atonement as a wholly expected and obvious response to sin—as if the lawbooks of heaven always contained a clause in the event of man's fall.[89] Macleod's point is that even if the entrance of sin and the atonement are a part of God's eternal decree, we must also understand them as some sense impossible.

Anomia as the Source of Divine Pain

In the way Macleod relates the cross of Christ to *anomia* we begin to see how he associates divine passibility with that doctrine as well. The cross is a reality which itself is in some sense lawlessness and which comes about only because of the lawlessness of sin, but it is not the only such reality.

[89] When we speak of Macleod 'pushing back' like this, there is not a specific theologian or well-defined doctrinal alternative against which Macleod is arguing. It is more so the case that he suspects this kind of tendency in his audience—the tendency to accept the cross as such a 'normal' fact that it loses the gravity that made it so significant in the first place.

> When anomia (1 John 3:4) which is sin enters the world, it carries other anomalies with it: most dramatically the anomaly of pain for God himself. My position is that sin is impossible and that pain in God is impossible, but that when the one impossibility becomes reality it makes the other impossibility reality as well. Sin, which cannot be, brings divine pain, which cannot be. Is not the ultimate gravity of sin that it brought Calvary into the experience of God?'[90]

Two conclusions about divine suffering follow from this and other passages like it in Macleod's corpus. First, for Macleod divine suffering is a direct result of the entrance of sin as lawlessness into the world. As we will see, Macleod will use that fact to distance himself from aspects of Jürgen Moltmann's doctrine of divine passibility (and any theodicy which might tend towards monistic views of evil). For Macleod, divine suffering is sin's most grievous result. The second conclusion is that being itself a result of sin, divine suffering shares some characteristics with sin. Divine suffering is *anomia*. It is lawlessness and something which from one perspective ought not to be. But what does it mean for divine suffering to be *anomia*?[91]

One difficulty with describing sin at creation as that which cannot be is that if sin managed to enter into the original creation, it stands to reason that sin could just as easily enter into the new heavens and the new earth. This is a problem which the Augustinian tradition has

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[90] Macleod, 'The Christology of Chalcedon' in *The Only Hope: Jesus Yesterday*, 93-4.

[91] In calling divine suffering *anomia* I am taking one step further than Macleod does in his published writings (though in so doing I take Macleod's ideas no further than he did himself). Not only does Macleod define divine suffering in the same way that he defines lawlessness (i.e. as irrational, what ought not to be, and the negation of what ought to occur in a normally functioning universe), in his 2011 lectures he explicitly refers to God's being upset as *anomia*. He tells his students,

> Divine passibility is an anomaly consequent on the emergence of sin which is *anomia*. Yes, it's hard to understand how God can suffer. It's horrible that God should suffer. It's utterly anomalous that God could suffer and if you stood [with] an angel on creation and discussed this question [of] can God suffer, he'd have said, 'No!' He is the eternally blessed one. But then this dreadful, dreadful thing happens that we take in our stride. Sin came into the world. And the angels are aghast. Not, first of all, that God may feel pain (or does feel pain) but that there's an anomaly! Lawlessness has broken out in the universe. And the moment that *anomia* breaks out it creates a reaction—a *chain* reaction—in which other *anomia* follow suit. They follow quickly. The moment sin comes in then you have the *anomia* [that] God is upset. Just leave it there. God is upset. 'God can't be upset,' the angels say. Ah, but he is upset because there's been an outbreak of lawlessness. The impossible has happened. Sin has come into the world and there follows from that the further impossibility that God is upset… The existence of sin is absurdity. And God being upset is absurdity. And of course, there follows on from that the further absurdity that on the cross of Golgotha the King of Glory dies. That cannot be. God's Son cannot die. God can't become flesh and be humiliated and spat upon and die on a cross. That's impossible. But the moment you start with the absurdity of sin you lead to other absurdities such as divine passibility and the death of Christ—God's Son on the cross of Calvary.

Donald Macleod, 'Impassibility (2),' (class lecture, Systematic Theology 101, Free Church College, Edinburgh, 1 December, 2010).

sought to avoid by appealing to a distinction between Adam as *posse peccare* (able to sin) and glorified man as not able to sin *non posse peccare* (not able to sin). In his lectures, Macleod affirms this distinction by appealing to the *Westminster Confession*'s language that 'Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which was good and well-pleasing to God, but yet mutably, so that he might fall from it.'[92] However, this mutability is often underplayed in Macleod's hamartiology to the point where it seems as if there were no distinction to be drawn between glorified man's ability to sin and Adam's ability to sin at his creation.

Divine Suffering as *Anomia*

The most basic definition of *anomia* is that which ought not to be. When we apply this to the idea that God has suffered and yet that suffering is *anomia* we are meant to hold in tension two ideas. The first is that it is possible (and theologically important) to imagine a reality in which God does not suffer and in which the very thought of God suffering strikes one as an impossibility. Secondly, God *has* suffered, however impossible that reality might seem. How, then, did God 'move' from the former reality to the latter?

At times Macleod's language is obfuscated by a misuse of the terms passibility and impassibility. For instance, in trying to explain God's suffering as a kind of *anomia* he writes, 'We know that in a normal universe God would be impassible.'[93] Elsewhere he makes a similar point like this: 'In a normal, un-deranged universe, God would not suffer; and so long as we assume normality, the arguments for divine impassibility are plausible (particularly if the arguments are philosophical, rather than biblical).'[94] Especially in the former quote, it sounds as if Macleod means to say that because of *anomia,* God has moved from being impassible to passible but that is not the case. It is more accurate to describe Macleod's own position this way: God in his essence is eternally passible and in a normal universe he would be both passible and experience

[92] *WCF* 9.2.
[93] Macleod, 'The Christology of Jürgen Moltmann,' 43.
[94] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 37.

no pain. To speak in a logical (rather than chronological) order, with the advent of sin, God has moved from being capable of suffering and yet not suffering to being capable of suffering and suffering.[95]

It is important to remember that while the concept of *anomia* invites a new way of thinking about divine suffering, the aspects of divine suffering to which Macleod applies the doctrine of *anomia* are the same ones we have already seen in earlier chapters. As we saw in Chapter Two, he writes of divine suffering almost exclusively in terms of emotional pain. However, one way in which that analogous pain differs from human emotional pain is that in God this pain is a contingent yet eternal reality.[96] Thus, the lawlessness of sin has resulted in the contingent and yet eternal reality of suffering in God.

Jürgen Moltmann and The Crucified God

For Macleod, the primary value of the concept of *anomia* in relation to divine passibility is in the way that it allows him to distance himself from what he considers to be erroneous notions of divine suffering which take divine suffering as a kind of necessity. We see this most clearly in the way that he interacts with Jürgen Moltmann's work on divine suffering at the cross. That Macleod distances himself from Moltmann at all on the theme of divine passibility is significant because Macleod is so appreciative of Moltmann's contribution in this area.[97]

As we saw in Chapter One, Macleod claims that through his own preaching he arrived at the conclusion that God is passible. Only later did he come across prominent theologians like Moltmann, Quick, and others who advocated divine passibility.[98] However, by the time we see Macleod committing his ideas of divine passibility to paper (circa early 1980s), the influence of Moltmann is evident, and nowhere more conspicuously than in his two consecutive 1982 *Monthly*

[95] There would seem to be an analogy with man's capacity to sin. Before the Fall, man was capable of sin and yet had no experience of it.
[96] Recall that in Chapter Three Macleod also spoke of the cross as a contingent event which had the effect in eternity of satisfying the wrath of God.
[97] Moltmann, of course, was a key proponent of divine passibility in the twentieth century and it is no wonder that his work should influence any (particularly Western European) thinker on the topic.
[98] Donald Macleod, 'Divine Impassibility (2).'

Record articles entitled, 'The Crucified God,' a title which he claims to be a tribute to Moltmann's own work by the same name.[99]

> Before there is a rush to buy it [Moltmann's *The Crucified God*], we should warn readers that it is a fairly weighty specimen of academic theology. Furthermore, Moltmann could not satisfy Karl Barth as to his orthodoxy and can hardly expect, in the circumstances, to be endorsed by *The Monthly Record* (assuming he reads it). Indeed, some might think he were better left unmentioned in our pure and august pages. The trouble is, we owe him not only the title of this article but a good deal of theological stimulus besides and it would be immoral to borrow without acknowledging our debt. Moltmann has clearly highlighted the paradoxical nature of the fact that God was crucified; insisted that it was not something we can just take in our stride…The fact of the crucified God must be not only the foundation but the judge of our Christianity. The cross, said Luther, is the test of everything (*Crux probat omnia*).[100]

Clearly when it comes to the question of divine passibility, Macleod saw himself in an appreciative dialogue with Moltmann's own work. Reading *The Crucified God* along with Macleod's own work on the cross and divine passibility, it is not difficult to find similar themes.

For instance, like Macleod, Moltmann emphasizes the trinitarian nature of divine suffering. He writes, 'The Son suffers and dies on the cross. The Father suffers with him, but not in the same way.'[101] Elsewhere, he elaborates, 'The Father who abandons him and delivers him up suffers the death of the Son in the infinite grief of love…The Son suffers dying, the Father suffers the death of the Son. The grief of the Father here is just as important as the death of the Son. The Fatherlessness of the Son is matched by the Sonlessness of the Father…'[102]

Similarities notwithstanding, in a 1999 article that Macleod published on Moltmann's Christology, he endorsed Moltmann's assertion of divine impassibility and yet challenged much of his approach. First, he says that while Moltmann is not wrong to use a dialectical approach to defend the idea of divine passibility, he should have taken the biblical cue to use an analogical approach as well. Hearkening back to what we saw in Chapter Three about the importance of the image of God to Macleod's defense of divine passibility, Macleod says that the usefulness of

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[99] Donald Macleod, 'The Crucified God,' *MR*, March 1982, 51-2; 'The Crucified God,' *Monthly Record*, April 1982, 75-7. These articles were later published together in *From Glory to Golgotha*, 67-80.
[100] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 67.
[101] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 203.
[102] Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 243.

the dialectical approach 'is no reason to reject the principle of analogy. Indeed, it is analogy which offers the best framework for the defence of passibility.'[103]

In Moltmann's understanding of the relationship between suffering, sin, and the incarnation Macleod highlights an even greater tension between the two theologians. He claims that Moltmann is 'obsessed with suffering almost to the exclusion of sin.'[104] Moltmann, he says, presents God as one who suffers in solidarity with the suffering and yet he gives no attention to the need for an atonement for sin (which Macleod would argue is the source of all suffering, human and divine). In fact, Moltmann is critical of any notion that Christ's incarnation was contingent upon the advent of sin (or as he puts it, an 'emergency measure' in response to sin). For Moltmann, sin may be the 'occasion (*occasio*)' for the love of God to be displayed through the incarnation but it is nots its true 'reason (*causa*)'. 'The incarnation of the Son is the perfected self-communication of the triune God to his world' and its final necessity is not dependent upon the contingency of sin.[105]

This is a clear contrast with Macleod's own description of the incarnation as an event whose description betrays echoes of *anomia*. For Macleod, the incarnation would not have happened apart from the existence of the sin which it was meant to overcome.

> Behind the drama of the incarnation there lies the catastrophe of the fall. The one is the divine response of the other. We might well admit that if we were living in a normal universe a step of the magnitude of the incarnation would have been impossible. But we are not. We are living in a world ruined by sin. If we ignore or deny or minimize this fact we shall never see the appropriateness of the incarnation…We had to be 'rescued' (Col. 1:13) from the power of darkness, and that could be achieved only by the coming of the Son of God to grapple personally with the forces of evil.[106]

Clearly, Macleod is critical of the way Moltmann simply assumes the existence of suffering and assumes the incarnation without appreciating the relationship of both to the gravity

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[103] Macleod, 'The Christology of Jürgen Moltmann,' 43.
[104] Macleod, 'The Christology of Jürgen Moltmann,' 40.
[105] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Fortress Press, 1993), 115-6.
[106] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 251.

of sin. Towards the end of the article, Macleod delivers his most biting assessment of Moltmann's work, which relates directly to the question of divine suffering:

> What Moltmann does not do justice to…is the anomalousness of the divine pain. 'The self-sacrifice of love', he writes, 'is God's eternal nature'. This gives the divine pain a degree of inevitability and normality which does not do justice to the perspectives of grace or to the discretionary nature of mercy. Nor does it take proper account of the reasons behind our instinctive aversion to the idea of divine passibility. Our instinct is that it is inconceivable that 'the blessed God' should suffer stress, disturbance or commotion. It is unthinkable that a frown should cross his face or a furrow wrinkle his brow. We know that in a normal universe God would be impassible. But the universe is not normal. It has been disrupted by sin; and sin is *anomia* (1 John). Once that *anomia* enters history it carries a thousand other anomalies in its train. It involves the whole creation in suffering. It involves God in the alien, distasteful work of condemnation. It involves God in pain.
>
> Any theodicy which relieves this tension is *ipso facto* discredited. Sin is that which absolutely ought not to be: and pain in God is that which absolutely ought not to be. The Crucified God is unthinkable. Sin (*anomia*) makes it possible, but nothing makes it logical, far less self-evident. Moltmann is open to Anselm's charge, *Nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum* [you have not considered how weighty sin is].[107]

Here, more than anywhere else, we can see how Macleod's understanding of *anomia* informs his view of divine passibility. By asserting the lawlessness of divine pain, Macleod seeks to distance himself from the idea that God suffers out of necessity as if it were in his very nature to suffer and without suffering he is not fully God. To do so, from Macleod's perspective, would be to make divine suffering inherently good and perhaps even necessary.

For Moltmann, (who on this point is leveraging the work of C.E. Rolt,) love must suffer in order to demonstrate its fullness. He writes, 'God is love; love makes a person capable of suffering; and love's capacity for suffering is fulfilled in the self-giving and self-sacrifice of the lover.'[108] For Macleod, it is entirely possible to conceive of a reality in which there is no suffering in God and yet he is able to express the fullness of his love within Himself.

The gravity of Moltmann's mistake in Macleod's reasoning is that in making suffering necessary for the perfect expression of God's love, the evil which is divine suffering can no

[107] Macleod, 'The Christology of Jürgen Moltmann,' 43-4. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*, 32.
[108] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 32.

longer be considered evil. Divine pain becomes an inherent good. From Macleod's perspective, the temptation of Moltmann's theodicy is that it offers a satisfying resolution to theodicy and to the awfulness of divine suffering. However, as he would say, it is a theodicy which has not yet grasped the gravity and the irrationality of sin and divine suffering as *anomia.*

Anomia as a Critique of Monism

The way Macleod critiques Moltmann's view of divine suffering with the doctrine of *anomia* is instructive because it points to the central role that *anomia* plays across his theology. *Anomia* is Macleod's dogmatic response to any theodicy—not just Moltmann's—which would see either in sin or in suffering (human or divine) some kind of inherent necessity or inevitability because doing so would result in a monistic tendency to view evil as a necessary minor theme to a greater good. In this sense, Macleod echoes the concerns decades earlier of Mackintosh and Forsyth who in their own time used the irrationality of sin to push back against what Mackintosh called the 'mechanistic monism' that had haunted a whole generation of Europeans.

In reviewing the doctrine of *anomia*, we see that for Macleod, the problem of divine suffering and the problem of sin are parallel themes in three ways: (1) Both realities ought not to be (and are in some sense *anomia*), (2) there is a tendency in multiple streams of Christian theology to minimize the gravity of one or both realities by seeing in them some kind of inherent necessity, and (3) they are resolved by God in similar ways.

The second of these is clear in the way Macleod critiques Moltmann's view of divine suffering. One could argue that the same principle is at work even in the 1969 *Banner of Truth* article on providence quoted earlier in the chapter where Macleod uses the notion of sin's lawlessness to rebut the idea of *felix culpa* precisely because it made sin a necessity where it should have seen sin as a horror.[109]

[109] Macleod, 'The Christian Doctrine of Providence,' 16-7.

Speaking years later of *felix culpa,* (a phrase which he mistakenly attributes to Augustine,)[110] Macleod writes,

> Let's not be caught trying to explain it [sin]: not even as Augustine did when he cried, *Felix culpa* ('Happy fault!'). He meant (and many have said it since) that we should be thankful that Adam fell because great good came from it. In particular, if Adam hadn't fallen, Christ wouldn't have come. But that is close to blasphemy. It is to justify sin and to try to explain it, to forget that it is *anomia*. It may be overruled. But it produces nothing: nothing but darkness (which always carries with it Death and Emptiness).[111]

While the phrase *felix culpa* did not originate with Augustine, the theological framework behind it has often been associated with his work. John Hick, for instance, has suggested that the *felix culpa* argument is exactly what is enshrined in Augustine's statement that 'God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist.'[112] Macleod's work implicitly suggests that what *felix culpa* and Moltmann's theodicy have in common is that both wrongly smooth over the anomalousness of sin and suffering in order to create a logically satisfying dogmatic system.[113]

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[110] The term comes from the *Exsultet*, which is offered at Easter Mass in the Roman Catholic Church: '*O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem!*' 'O happy fault that earned for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer!'

[111] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 29. In a 1990 lecture on original sin, Macleod says,

> 'Augustine injected into Western Christian thought the idea of *felix culpa*—'the happy fault'—glad that Adam fell. Now to me that sentiment is abhorrent because it is trying to suggest that somehow good came. It's a good thing that Adam fell…And I can never say that because here is lawlessness. Now of course God overrode the lawlessness. God diverted it to his own purposes. But that owed nothing to something inherent in the lawlessness itself. In fact, one cannot say *felix culpa* without rejoicing in the dereliction of the Son by the Father which was the ultimate consequence of the *anomia* of sin.

The *felix culpa* idea has not been universally commended as a necessary dogma within Reformed orthodoxy. G. C. Berkouwer, for instance, takes issue with Oliver Quick for saying that 'those who think it wrong to utter it [*felix culpa*] have not understood the fullness of the gospel.' Berkouwer responds, 'it is fully well possible to confess the greatness of the *Redemptor* and the *redemption*, without considering the "felix culpa" an acceptable expression in that connection.' G. C. Berkouwer, *The Work of Christ*, translated by Cornelius Lambregtse (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1965), 32. See also, Oliver Quick, *Doctrines of the Creed*, 211.

Macleod, 'The Origin of Sin,' Class lecture.

[112] Hick, 176; *Enchiridion*, viii, 27. Hick protests that this Augustinian theodicy is unacceptable because the so-called better world that God has created according to Augustine is one in which many of God's creatures suffer an eternal torment. 'If God has allowed sin only in order to bring out of it the greater good of redemption, then to the extent that redemption fails to occur the divine purpose has been frustrated.' Hick, 177.

[113] One should not overstate Macleod's critique of Augustine. It likely represents not so much a critique of Augustine *per se* as it does a tendency to see divine preordination in such a way that sin becomes a necessary means to a better end.

It should also be noted that Macleod locates the fundamental problem of theodicy not in suffering but in sin. In his 2011 lectures, he points out to his students the fact that the *Westminster Confession* is 'remarkably' silent on the problem of suffering.

> It flags up a difference between earlier ages and our own age. Our age is obsessed with suffering and the mystery of pain. Now, this is a fairly novel situation…For our forefathers the question was not 'why does man suffer?' [It was] 'Why did God permit sin?' *Sin* is the mystery and once you have sin then suffering as

The final parallel between *anomia* as sin and *anomia* as divine suffering is that each is resolved in the same way. That is, in both, God takes what is inherently not good (or that which is inherently meaningless) and brings good from them. We have already seen how Macleod views sin as a reality within God's plan which he 'works for good.'[114] Macleod suggests God's capacity to do the same with His pain. As we noted in an earlier chapter, he argues that 'The pain [of God] is not simply transcended, it is assimilated into the blessedness of God. It is in full view of the cross that He says, "I am well pleased!"'[115]

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been largely descriptive—an attempt to understand the logic of Macleod's doctrine of *anomia* and ultimately its relevance to his doctrine of divine passibility. Future research in Macleod studies would benefit a great deal from a longer assessment of this theme across his corpus. Such an assessment is needed in part because like Macleod's doctrine of divine passibility, his doctrine of *anomia* does not rise or fall on a single idea. Its use is complex and future theologians may find aspects of it suitable for appropriation and not others. What we have shown clearly is that Macleod used his prior doctrine of *anomia* to shape his doctrine of divine passibility.

In surveying Macleod's doctrine of *anomia*, a final problem suggests itself, particularly in relation to divine passibility. We have argued that Macleod uses the doctrine of *anomia* as a means of rebutting monistic views of evil—views which in various ways account for evil as a necessary means to bring about greater goods in creation (or even in God). In creating such a challenge to monism, however, Macleod at times seems to open himself to the problem of dualism.

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its entail is intelligible—and so as a consequence the Confession does not, in fact, have a paragraph on suffering at all.

Donald Macleod, 'The Creation of Man' (class lecture, Systematic Theology 102, Free Church College, Edinburgh, 22 March, 2011).

[114] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 209.

[115] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 37. Macleod makes a similar claim of God's capacity to do the same with human pain. Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 29-30.

With *anomia*, we have a force born in a way that cannot be explained, wreaking havoc on an otherwise good creation and even causing God himself pain. As Macleod puts it so succinctly in *Behold Your God*, in the present reality there exists 'a triad of impossibilities: the impossibility of sin, the impossibility of the crucifixion of the Son of God and the impossibility of divine pain. All are inconceivable; and yet the moment the first occurred, the other two followed. This is surely the last word on the gravity of sin: the pain it has caused to God.'[116] If *anomia* were truly impossible or irrational, it would seem necessary to posit that its existence is a surprise even to God, something which he might be able to overcome but which is still unanticipated. Of course, if that is the case, it raises the question as to whether we can ever be sure that *anomia* can be fully destroyed. What can prevent its occurrence in the new heavens and the new earth?

On the other hand, Macleod is equally adamant that God is wholly sovereign over sin. Hence, he writes of sin's existence in relation to the divine decrees,

> We know there is a difference between the way that foreordination bears on evil and the way it bears on good, but we struggle to express the difference. The best we can do is to suggest that there is a creative foreordination and there is a permissive foreordination. We are in trouble simply because of the nature of sin itself. It is *anomia* (without law) and this makes it impossible to give a coherent account of it. It is a black hole, a singularity, an absurdity, of which no one (not even God himself?) can give an explanation. But it is not outside the Plan, or part of another plan or of another's plan. This, too, God works for good.[117]

It is not clear what Macleod means when he wonders whether God himself could explain sin. Nevertheless, Macleod clearly wants to place sin as *anomia* under the hand of divine sovereignty from its inception to its eventual demise. Doing so, however, would seem to imply that however 'impossible' sin and divine suffering might seem from a human perspective, from the divine perspective this irrational reality rests within a divine rationality which considers *anomia* wholly expected and usable for greater purposes.

[116] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 37.
[117] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 209.

Chapter 6 – Preaching and Passibility

> *Each Lord's Day, congregations should be led to the point where they cry, 'Oh! The depth!' And if they are not—if we have robbed the Gospel of the great elements of mystery and wonder and depth and paradox—then we have failed in our mission and cheated our people. Men may laugh. They may gnash their teeth. But the only message we have a right to preach is one so astonishing that angels desire to look into it and so profound that they have to stoop to do so.*[1]

Donald Macleod began his career in 1964 not as an academic but as a local minister. Before he was a professor, he was a preacher. That perspective shaped everything he did thereafter. The relevance of this to the present thesis is that Macleod's view of preaching had a conspicuous impact on his articulation of divine passibility. Macleod saw the *telos* of his work on passibility not in the academy but in the pulpit. We cannot fully understand his view of divine suffering without recognizing its relationship to his homiletics.

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, it is to show how Macleod preached the doctrine of divine passibility.[2] The underlying assumption (which I intend to prove) is that while there is clear continuity between his writings and his sermons on the topic, they are also distinct in surprising ways that become key to interpreting Macleod's work. The second goal of this chapter is to suggest a dogmatic logic behind the way Macleod preached divine passibility. In his writings, Macleod explicitly promotes the idea that certain theological truths may be doctrinally correct and

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[1] Donald Macleod, 'The Primacy of Preaching,' *MR*, April 1980, 64. The article was later published in *Priorities for the Church* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2003): 57-66.

[2] In the course of my research, I sampled sixty-five of Macleod's sermons, listening specifically for references to divine impassibility. These sermons were gathered from various churches' databases, Edinburgh Theological Seminary, and personal collections. At present, it would not be possible for a researcher to listen to all of Macleod's sermons because such a database does not exist. The present chapter will serve as an important basis for understanding Macleod's homiletics, especially in relation to divine passibility, upon which future sermon archive discoveries can add useful context.

I have included for the reader an appendix where I have transcribed larger portions of key sermon passages on divine passibility for added context. What cannot be so easily communicated in writing is Macleod's presentation style—his pauses, his intonation, the words he chooses to emphasize, etc.—which themselves are important to understand what Macleod is trying to communicate.

A number of people and organizations assisted me in the process of collecting and digitizing these sermons. I am indebted to Iain Mackenzie of Tong, Lewis who had already collected and digitized many of Macleod's sermons and lectures. A second key source of material was Edinburgh Theological Seminary who had kept a number of Macleod's sermons and lectures in storage.

yet kerygmatically incorrect. 'Kerygmatic' as Macleod uses the term is an adjective related to preaching. A theological statement is kerygmatically correct if it is fitting to say from the pulpit. I argue that in Macleod's preaching there is also an implicit tendency to assume that the reverse is also true: a statement can be doctrinally incorrect (or at least heavily imbalanced) and yet be kerygmatically correct. This would explain some of the surprising ways in which Macleod, in his preaching, often departs from his own written statements about divine passibility.

The Centrality of Preaching

Before we can take on the question of passibility and preaching directly, it is important to set out a wider context for Macleod's view of preaching. After all, it is fair to ask at the outset what are the grounds for assuming that the task of preaching did in fact have such a formative role in his work as a theologian? The most conspicuous answer to that question comes from Macleod himself in his 1986 essay, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology':

> The theological process does not exist for itself. It exists only as a preparation for preaching. If it does not issue in proclamation, it is an abortion, or a still-birth. To change the perspective, if our theology (or any detail in it) is not preachable, its claim to being a theology at all is exceedingly doubtful…A true theology will seek articulation, claim a place in the liturgy of the true church, and assert its right to walk with the people of God in the valley of the shadow of death. If it is content to be silent or to be confined to the groves of academia, it has lost its prophetic character, and with that its integrity.[3]

There is much that this statement leaves unanswered. How is one to distinguish 'preachable' theology from its corrupt alternative? By relevance to hearer? Or does a theological idea justify itself in having a certain proximity to the central message of the gospel?[4] Later in the same piece when Macleod emphasizes that a preacher is responsible for covering a wide scope of theological truths, he points to a close relationship between the ideas 'preachable' and 'biblical.' He writes,

[3] Donald Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology,' 246.

[4] 'Preachability' is probably what Macleod had in mind when, at a 1982 conference, he concluded a rather negative description of divine impassibility by saying, 'There's no way you could ever get from that to a sermon.' Macleod, 'The Crucified God,' address to the Carey Conference, 1982.

'Theologically, nothing is to be held back. What God has revealed was not intended for academics and theological colleges, but for the people of God. If a thing is not biblical, it must have no place in our preaching. If it is biblical, we have no right not to teach it.'[5] What exactly 'biblical' preaching is here is somewhat ambiguous. In the context, Macleod is critiquing the tendency of preachers to avoid speaking about theologically or morally complex or difficult topics. 'We must wrestle with the great themes, even if they throw us. We cannot plead height or depth or complexity. We are stewards of the *mysteries* of God and it would be an absurd defense that we kept some things back because they were too *mysterious*.'[6] What is most clear in this discussion is the central place that Macleod claims for preaching in the theological process.

It is no surprise then that in his own historic ecclesial context, Macleod saw preaching as central to the task of the minister. In fact, he viewed the inadequacy of contemporary preaching as a key reason why the Free Church was losing its foothold in Scotland. The thirty-four-year-old Macleod put this charge directly to the Free Church in 1975 in his first *Monthly Record* column (written two years before he became the magazine's editor).

> Our biggest single problem is our preaching. We left [The Free Church] college with scarcely a clue as to how to preach and furthermore, we left college with a virtual contempt for Homiletics…we have to realise that many people who come to our churches find the message un-intelligible, find it totally irrelevant, find it almost absorbingly boring…I'm not saying that you others should get worried. I'm saying that I myself have to live as Paul lived—preaching in fear and trembling. That did not mean he was afraid of his audience, but it did mean that he was anxious, he kept asking himself, Am I doing it right? It is this obsession that I would inculcate, this awareness of the primacy and urgency of Gospel proclamation, the need to ask ourselves anxiously, Is this the right message? Is this the most appropriate message? Am I delivering it in the most spiritually promising way?[7]

For Macleod, the problem was not so much that its ministers were not preaching the gospel; it is that they were not preaching the gospel well. Two years later in his *Banner* article on the image of

[5] Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology,' 263.
[6] Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology,' 263.
[7] 'Home Missions in the Life of the Church,' *MR*, March 1975, 39.

God, Macleod argued that poor preaching amounted to a failure to fully appreciate the aesthetic sense of human beings which belongs to them as image bearers. 'Christian evangelism cannot afford to ignore this aspect of human nature. God in His sovereignty may over-rule ugliness of presentation as He may over-rule errors in doctrine. But this no more justifies the former than it does the latter. Amorphous sermons, loose phraseology, careless diction, ludicrous postures—these things grate inevitably on a God-given factor in human personality.' Later he continues, 'We are too ready to regard the dominance of modernism in the church as due only to the inscrutable sovereignty of God. Perhaps the time has come to ask to what extent the situation is due to the fact that the advocates of error are prepared to work longer hours and to revise their work more ruthlessly—with the result that from a literary point of view it is vastly superior to evangelical out-put.'[8] In another piece, Macleod made clear the kind of time that should be set aside for sermon preparation: 'there is no reason why every minister in the Church should not spend the hours from nine to one in his study.'[9]

He also argued that preaching ability should be a critical element governing the acceptance and training of ministerial candidates. He expressed disappointment that some men (including himself) had been approved as ministry candidates without any prior proven ability to preach.[10] For Macleod, the training of ministers should be oriented around 'the primacy of preaching' and once a

[8] Macleod, 'God's Image in Man,' 11.
[9] Macleod, *Priorities for the Church*, 64.
[10] Macleod, *Priorities for the Church*, 60. 'It might have been notorious enough that I could blether, but no one had any right to believe that I could preach…But surely this concern should be paramount from the beginning and only in very rare instances should presbyteries accept candidates who have no preaching experience at all.'

person is in the ministry their chief task is to be a preacher.[11] 'It's what ministers exist for: what they're supposed to give their best strength to.'[12]

> Preaching and teaching is his [the minister's] life's work: his major, and indispensable contribution to the church. Others may do it occasionally: he labours at it. He has…other tasks as well. But these are things he shares with others. What the church needs from him is preaching. If he doesn't supply it the whole body suffers; and it is no compensation that he is a nice man, a good visitor, or an expert at repairing drains or making sandwiches.[13]

The Origins of Macleod's Emphasis on Preaching

It is possible to trace Macleod's emphasis on the centrality of preaching to a number of origins both theological and historical. Biblically, he grounds it in passages like Matt. 28:19, 2 Tim. 2:15, 1 Cor. 1:17, and 1 Tim. 5:17, all of which point to the importance of proclaiming the gospel in the first century church. Then, of course, Macleod points to his own Scottish Reformed tradition's emphasis upon the centrality of the Word to worship, a topic Macleod handles at length in his chapter, 'Word and Sacrament in Reformed Theologies of Worship.'[14] In it, we see how Macleod's prioritization of the Word has a surprising governing impact on his ecclesiology. For instance, he suggests that it is incongruous to say that non-ordained lay members are often asked to provide the ministry of the Word in local congregations and yet are not allowed to administer the sacraments. Such a restriction, he says, 'leaves these churches open to the charge of contradicting their own emphasis on the priority of the Word. How can someone who is deemed fit to perform the greater

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[11] Macleod, *Priorities for the Church*, 61. In many of these quotes it is evident that when Macleod speaks of preaching, he is referring specifically to sermons in a worship context. It should be noted that at some points in his corpus, Macleod has a much wider understanding of the temr. He says that in the New Testament there is no technical distinction between preaching and teaching. Moreover, preaching is not confined to the pulpit.

> Preaching is not defined in the New Testament as a special method of communication. The content of the preaching (the *kerygma*) is indeed special. But that *kerygma* may be put across in an almost infinite variety of ways: in one-to-one conversations, to small groups or to huge gatherings; by speaking, by announcing, by reasoning, by arguing, by proclaiming and by writing. It is entirely inappropriate to identify a preaching ministry with a pulpit ministry. Preaching means putting the *kerygma* into the public arena by any means in our power.

Donald Macleod, 'Deacons and Elders' *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 13, no. 1 (1995): 43.

[12] Macleod, *Priorities for the Church*, 15. 6

[13] Macleod, *Priorities for the Church*, 15.

[14] Macleod, 'Word and Sacrament in Reformed Theologies of Worship: A Free Church Perspective,' in *Worship and Liturgy in Context*, eds. Duncan B. Forrester and Doug Gay (London: SCM Press, 2009): 81-91

task (preaching the Word) be deemed unfit to perform the lesser task (administering the sacrament)?'[15] For Macleod, preaching was also key to ecclesial unity. In an article on the theme of 'unity in truth' Macleod writes, 'If we want to explore the theme of unity in truth, we must emphasize the importance of propositional truth and the importance of proclamation and the church's central ministry to the world of our own time and place.' In a thinly veiled critique of twentieth-century ecumenical movements, he continues, 'This is the foundation of our ecumenism. The question is not [sic] Can we sit together? The question is, "Can we preach together?" Biblical ecumenism is not something which exhausts itself in sacramental, mystical, apophatic participation in the Lord's Supper. It is something which expresses itself in a community of proclamation.'[16] As he goes on to say, what united the Reformers was not unity in 'clapping hands' or 'sitting at the sacrament.' It was in their creeds and confessions, which pointed to one common message about the plight of man and God's answer to that plight.

His own Free Church context is also key. On the problem of poor preaching in Scotland, Macleod was fond of quoting various passages from an 1848 article by the Free Church luminary Hugh Miller (1802-1856) entitled 'Pulpit Duties Not Secondary.'[17] In that piece Miller emphasizes the centrality of preaching to the task of ministry in a way that mirrors Macleod's own concerns. He laments that in the Free Church of his own day, 'It has become much the fashion of the time… to speak of preaching as not the paramount, but merely one of the subsidiary duties of the

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[15] Macleod, 'Word and Sacrament in Reformed Theologies of Worship,' 84.
[16] Donald Macleod, 'Unity in Truth,' *The Churchman* 101, no. 3 (1987): 252.
[17] See, for example, Macleod, *Priorities for the Church,* 59-68. The article is dated May 3, 1848. Hugh Miller, *Leading Articles on Various Subjects* ed. John Davidson (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1873), 358-68. In his essay, 'Word and Sacrament,' cited above, Macleod says that pressure to deemphasize preaching in worship came in the late nineteenth century in part because of the work of Robert Lee (1804-1868) and the Church Service Society. While helpful in some ways, he laments that it also 'prodded the Church in the direction of ritual, ceremonial and sacramentalism at the expense of preaching; and it did so under little theological control, taking its bearings from historic liturgical forms rather than from the New Testament.' Macleod, 'Word and Sacrament,' 82.

clergyman.'[18] Like Macleod, he called for more attention to the task of preaching and blamed shrinking churches on poor preaching:

> No apology whatever ought to be sustained for imperfect pulpit preparation…It is no unusual thing to see a church preached empty; there have been cases of single clergymen, great in their way, who have emptied four in succession: for people neither ought nor will misspend their Sabbaths in dozing under sermons to which no effort of attention, however honestly made, enables them to listen; and what happens to single congregations may well happen to a whole ecclesiastical body, should its general style of preaching fall below the existing average.[19]

Much of Macleod's writings about the importance of preaching in the (specifically post-1900) Free Church was effectively a rearticulation of Miller's own logic contextualized for the late twentieth century.

These concerns are not to say that preaching had little place in the post-1900 Free Church. Its polity was (and to a large extent still is) organized in such a way that preaching inevitably was a central task of virtually every minister across the denomination. This is because for most of the twentieth century, assistant ministers were extremely rare. Nearly all Free Church congregations had only one minister (if they had one at all).[20] Practically this meant that preaching was *de facto* central to every Free Church minister's ministry. Most would have been expected to preach at least twice every Sunday and at the weekly prayer meeting. Thus, Macleod's contention that preaching should be the chief concern of every minister was more easily applicable than it would be in contexts where assistant pastors might have no preaching responsibilities at all.

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[18] Miller, *Leading Articles,* 360.
[19] Miller, *Leading Articles*, 363.
[20] In the entire period from 1900-1984, *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland* shows that only three times was a provision made for an assistant minister (and two of those specified that the assistant was there to set up a new congregation). These provisions can be found in the General Assembly Records of the Free Church of Scotland for the years 1966, 1970, and 1984. In 1986, the General Assembly passed an act to clarify the process of obtaining an assistant minister, after which the appointment of assistant ministers became relatively more frequent, but still uncommon (see 'V. Act anent Assistantships' in *The Principal Acts of the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland*, 1986. In several articles in the *WHFP* (circa 2000s), Macleod was critical of the increasingly frequent appointment of assistant ministers. He argued that in principle all congregations should be appointed one minister before any congregation be allowed the 'luxury' of two (see Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, April 19, 2002). Vacant congregations were (and remain) a pervasive problem within the Free Church.

Macleod the Preacher

Inevitably, Macleod's own pulpit ministry embodied his emphasis on the primacy of preaching. Of course, part of that was measured by the sheer quantity of teaching that was required of him in his early ministry. His son John recollects that while at Partick Highland Free Church in the 1970s, Macleod's typical schedule involved preaching six times per week (and in two different languages). However, in published first-hand accounts of Macleod's preaching, what is remembered is not primarily the sheer output of his preaching (which at least for a period was enormous) but the content and delivery of his sermons.

The 'Appreciations' section at the end of Macleod's *Festschrift*, *The People's Theologian*, offers several personal accounts of Macleod's preaching which, while bordering on the hagiographic, do give some sense of the effect Macleod's sermons had on at least some of his listeners. One South Korean student at the Free Church college in the 1980s said that Macleod's preaching was the first time he had ever shed tears hearing an English sermon.[21] Another former student described being 'utterly overwhelmed and astonished by the experience' of hearing Macleod preach for the first time: 'The entire sermon was unashamedly theological, and yet dealt with profundities in such a manner that appealed to the simplest soul. Minds were gripped, hearts deeply moved, and wills energized by truth so vivid and powerful that no one was left in any doubt.'[22] Somewhat more informative was the brief description given by Alex MacDonald, the former minister at Buccleuch and Greyfriars Free Church in Edinburgh.

> Donald breaks all the rules in preaching (as in other ways). He has no eye contact with his audience, he gazes into the far distance. His voice is low and hesitant as he begins, but by the time he reaches his peroration it approaches the decibel level of an electric guitar! His preaching ceases to follow the natural cadence of human speech and rises to some esoteric Celtic torrent of its own. And yet…and yet, if you yield to the Spirit

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[21] Changwon Shu, 'Appreciations,' in *The People's Theologian*, 307. He also recalled that in the classroom, Macleod emphasized the importance of preaching for theology this way: 'Unless the theology is being preached in the pulpit it is no longer theology at all.' Shu, 'Appreciations,' 308.

[22] David George, 'Appreciations,' in *The People's Theologian*, 310-11.

> speaking through this man, you feel his eyes are seeing far-off things which he is helping you to glimpse, you are drawn into a new world of exciting vistas and undreamed-of theological truth, you are raised by high oratory to a new level of understanding of your God and Saviour.[23]

Adding to the aura of his delivery, Macleod was widely known to use little or no notes.[24] It is difficult to quantify or categorize claims like these made about Macleod's preaching, and an emphasis on his style rather than his substance can drift from the theological to the sociological. Nonetheless, to understand *what* Macleod said from the pulpit, it is important to recognize that for those who heard him, his preaching created an atmosphere; one which, if his own comments on preaching are any indication, was consciously and painstakingly honed for decades (and which will never come across on the page the way it did in person). It is also suggestive of the fact that Macleod's pulpit language was never *merely* propositional. It was crafted specifically for the atmosphere of his (by all accounts) unique pulpit ministry; and crafted in ways, as we shall see that give surprising shape to the way in which he communicated the doctrine of divine passibility.

'Preaching and Systematic Theology'

Beyond his claims about the centrality of preaching to the minister's life, Macleod dedicated significant thought to the relationship between preaching and systematic theology, the lengthiest treatment of which appears in the chapter he contributed to the volume *The Preacher and Preaching* entitled 'Preaching and Systematic Theology.' In it he provides two broad principles about the

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[23] Alex J. MacDonald, 'Introduction' in *The People's Theologian*, 8-9. David Meredith, a Free Church minister who attended Partick Highland Free Church while at university in Glasgow had similar recollections. He writes,

> It is hard to describe the sense of God which fell on the services during these days…I can honestly say that I have very rarely experienced such power since…It was preaching which broke so many of the rules: it was long, delivered with a strong and unusual provincial accent, the body language can only be described as contorted and it was not always consecutive exposition. Yet it was always fresh and relevant to my world, and such preaching I had never experienced before…At that time in my life I was interacting with the great names like Dostoevsky, Camus and Sartre; my mind was full of questions but they were being consistently answered at Partick Highland.

David Meredith, 'Appreciations' in *The People's Theologian*, 314-5.

[24] Wanting to see this for myself, in the Spring of 2022 I visited Leith Free Church in Edinburgh one morning when Macleod was guest preaching. He was 81 at the time and while his sermon did not contain all the energy evident in earlier recordings, he still preached for more than half an hour with no notes, only occasionally slipping on a pair of reading glasses to quote his scripture text.

relationship between systematic theology and exegesis (in preparation for a sermon). The first (and perhaps most obvious) is that the preacher's interpretations of a text must be consistent with his wider doctrinal commitments. 'Each text,' Macleod writes, 'must be seen in the light of the whole system of revealed truth.'[25] Undergirding that principle is the *analogy of faith*: 'The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture, it must be searched and known by other passages that speak more clearly.'[26] In this way, 'the system of doctrine *exercises control* over the exposition of a particular passage.'[27] One text Macleod offers to make his point is 2 Corinthians 5:21: 'God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us.'[28] He writes, 'We hold to the doctrine of the sinlessness of Christ, and that immediately rules out the idea that vicarious suffering involved the Lord in any moral or spiritual pollution. *Made sin* can never become *made sinful*.'[29] Therefore, the doctrine of Christ's impeccability is an *a priori* assumption one must bring to a text which otherwise might seem to suggest that Christ sinned.

This principle underlies the way Macleod's preaching and systematic theology often flowed into one another, sometimes in the most explicit way. For instance, the editorial essay that ran in the January 1986 *Monthly Record* was entitled 'The Father's Love.'[30] In it, Macleod uses language and details that mirror, at points almost verbatim, a sermon on John 3:16 that forms part of this research.[31] Granted, the sermon is of a much longer length, but the *Monthly Record* article reads as a condensed summary of its exposition. Given that the context and date of the sermon are unclear, we

[25] Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology,' 248.
[26] *WCF* 1.9.
[27] Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology,' 249. Emphasis original.
[28] Macleod's translation.
[29] Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology,' 249-50.
[30] Macleod, 'The Father's Love,' *MR*, January 1986, 3-6.
[31] See Appendix: Sermon 6.

cannot say for certain which came first, but this example points vividly to the fact that it is not always clear in Macleod's work where the sermon ends and the dogmatic work begins. Where we see the real novelty in Macleod's approach to the relationship between dogmatics and preaching is his warning about two dangers of allowing dogmatics to govern exegesis. These concerns become key to shaping his articulation of divine passibility.

> One is the temptation to suppress and play down the doctrine of a particular text in the interest of our own system. For example, those who hold to the Calvinistic doctrine of election may, because they mistakenly fear for their own position, do less than justice to the breadth of God's love as declared in John 3:16 and 1 Timothy 2:4… The second danger is closely related to the first. Rather than letting the text speak its own message, we sometimes can embark on the apologetical exercise of showing how it can be reconciled with some favorite doctrine of our own school. Here again a passage like John 3:16 suffers most. Too many sermons give the impression that the preacher's overriding concern is to qualify and contract the love of God rather than to show it in the glory of its self-renunciation, magnanimity, and extravagance.[32]

Macleod gives at least five more examples which are specific to those with Reformed commitments. (1) For the sake of the doctrine of election, he says, there is a temptation to 'minimize the emphasis on working out our own salvation (Phil. 2:12), washing our own robes (Rev. 7:14), and purifying ourselves (1 John 3:3).'[33] (2) 'An aversion to decisionism' leaves some ministers reluctant to call for an '*immediate* response to Christ.' (3) The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints can make one hesitant to warn of the danger of apostasy. (4) Limited atonement keeps the minister from offering the gospel indiscriminately. And, of course, there is Macleod's frustration seen in the previous chapter that (5) preachers downplay the gravity of sin. 'The preacher faces a text that declares that those who are born of God do not sin (1 John 3:9) and spends his strength showing that they do. The text's emphasis on the anomalousness and the monstrousness of sin in the life of a Christian is forgotten.'[34]

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[32] Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology,' 251-3.
[33] Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology,'251.
[34] Macleod, 'Preaching and Systematic Theology, 252.

There is an evident (or at least apparently evident) tension between these two principles which Macleod never fully resolves or even acknowledges. On the one hand for Macleod, systematic theology governs the preaching of a text. On the other hand, systematic theology cannot be allowed to overstep the text.[35] Taken to their logical conclusions, it would seem inevitable that there will be times when the preacher must choose between one of these two seemingly mutually exclusive alternatives.

Sermons on Divine Suffering

It is with this tension in mind that we turn to Macleod's preaching on divine passibility precisely because it is in the places where Macleod highlights divine suffering in his sermons that we clearly sense a tension between Macleod's own systematic theology and the desire to bring out the truths of a certain text which seem (at least on the surface) in tension with his theological system. The questions we turn to first in relation to Macleod's preaching on divine passibility are *how* does he do it and how does the way he preaches divine suffering differ from the way that he writes about it? Only then can we propose a dogmatic logic that underlies what he does here.

Compared to what we have seen in Macleod's writings, the most striking feature of Macleod's sermons which include discussions of divine suffering is the unqualified nature of the claims made about divine pain. For instance, in his writings Macleod makes two key qualifications about the nature of divine passibility. First, God's suffering ultimately is subsumed into his blessedness. Presumably such would entail that any biblical text about God's suffering must be qualified by the fact that God's suffering is always subsumed into blessedness. In eternity, as Macleod has said, God's blessedness is the dominant note.[36] The second and more pertinent dogmatic qualification

[35] In one *Banner of Truth* address in 1977, Macleod spoke of his own position on this tension like this: 'If I may, it is a rule with myself that one should not betray in pulpit utterances too great a sensitiveness as to Calvinistic peculiarities. And that we should not be constantly back-trotting in order to guard ourselves against misunderstandings in this connection.' Donald Macleod, 'The Priesthood of Christ,' *Banner of Truth Conference*, 1977.

[36] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 37.

Macleod makes about define suffering, however, is about God's inability to suffer forms of mental distress. God cannot 'suffer internal distress. He cannot be the victim of mental conflict, or prey to anxiety, discontent, envy, depression or any other neuroses. He can never lose His composure or show the symptoms of stress or agitation.'[37] As we will see, Macleod's portrayal of divine suffering in his sermons hardly takes this key qualification into account at all.

In what follows we include key passages from four sermons that are indicative of Macleod's typical homiletic presentation of divine suffering.[38] Three are based on three of the texts Macleod uses most to bolster his argument for divine passibility: Hosea 11:8, John 3:16, and Genesis 22. A fourth is from a sermon on Genesis 6:6 which involves the thorny issue of divine repentance. As we will see, each of these passages illustrates a clear divergence in propositional presentation between Macleod's writings and his sermons. After surveying them, I will propose a way to understand the tension between the way he describes passibility in these texts and in his dogmatics.

Hosea 11:8 – 'How Shall I Give Thee Up, Ephraim?'

Among the sermons sampled in the course of this research, Macleod's sermon on Hosea 11:8 provides the longest exposition and application of divine suffering, a portion of which is quoted below.[39] At the outset of this fifty-minute sermon, Macleod says that Hosea 11 'opens a window into the heart and the mind and the soul of God and shows us what kind of God he is.' The passage below is from his third and final point: 'He is the God who feels deeply.'

Macleod opens this part of his sermon with an explicit rejection of divine impassibility, a doctrine which he confesses to the congregation has been part of Christian orthodoxy since the second century. Over against this Macleod argues that Hosea 11 proves that God is one who suffers:

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[37] Macleod, *Behold Your God,* 31.
[38] Note that I do not make the further claim that these sermon passages are indicative of Macleod's preaching as whole. That is a claim beyond the scope of this research. A larger study of Macleod's preaching merits future study.
[39] For a fuller excerpt, see Appendix: Sermon 4.

Now I know that there's been a long tradition in the Christian church going back to about the second century…that God doesn't have feelings. God doesn't feel. And that came in because the church fell under the influence of a stoic philosophy to which feelings or passion was a sign of weakness and so they said that even the human nature of Jesus had to be without passion because passion was weakness.

And then I turn from that to this great passage in the Word of God itself. Not some philosopher, but here we are in the Word of God and there he talks in verse nine: 'I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger for I am God and not a man.' And he says there before that in verse eight, 'My heart is turned within me. My repentings are kindled together.' And you see the depth of the feeling there. The *fierceness* of *mine* anger—the fierceness of the anger of God. And then as God contemplates this terrible situation with his church: 'How can I give thee over?'

Well, in a way, Justice is saying to him, 'Oh but you have no option but to give her over and walk out on her. You have no option!' But He says, 'I am God! I am not a man!' He says, 'I am the Holy One in the midst of you and therefore my heart is turned within me. My repentings (or my compassions) are kindled together.' And we have this marvelous picture of the heart of God churning and turning and this great conflict of emotions. My compassions are heaving! And my compassions are in turmoil.

It's the Word of God. It's the language God has chosen to describe himself. This is not some indifferent God who doesn't care or who doesn't mind. This is the god capable of fierce anger and this is a god who is capable of the most tempestuous compassion, and this is a god whose heart is churning over in the intensity of emotion. That is the kind of God that He is. And that's the God who is present here tonight in His own Word and in the heart of each one of His children, this God who feels deeply.

…

Somebody [once] said, 'God is the greatest sufferer in the universe.' I don't want you to take that as prosaic, literal truth. But I want you to know this from the Bible itself. 'He beheld the city and he wept over it.' Sometimes as we watch the television, we find the news unendurable, so deeply disturbing. Those terrible soap operas with their constant recycling of human misery and degradation. Aren't they unendurable? 'My heart is stirred within me.' All the pain in the world. God says, 'In all their affliction, I am afflicted.' 'These,' he says, 'are my creatures. That's my creation. Oh, my poor, poor creation. My heart is stirred within me. My compassions are kindled together.' God says he feels our sin—and he feels our pain. And when it comes to the day of judgement he will feel it too. When that terrible moment comes, when in the solemn exercise of his office as judge and in the pursuit of justice and equity God says, 'Depart from me ye cursed.' In that moment when God says, 'Take him down.'

I think there is something awfully solemn there. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Judgement is a strange work—alien to God. Our sin has put our heavenly Father in the position where he has to say, 'Take him down. Take him down to Hell, down into the darkness, into that place of outer darkness.' That is for our sin to put God in a terrible position. Our sin has put him there—when God has to do that which gives him no pleasure.

> And he will do it not because it gives him pleasure but because it is right—because you chose to live a sinner and you chose to die a sinner and you have put God in a position where he must do what gives him no pleasure and he must do what he recoils from. And you will hear those words going down to Hell: 'How can I give you over! My heart is stirred within me. My compassions are kindled together.'
>
> …
>
> And I think, too, of this God as He looked at the cross of Calvary, and the suffering and pain and death of His own Son. And I say to you if He found it so hard to chastise Israel as He eventually had to, how did He find it when He said, 'Awake, O Sword, against my shepherd and against the man that is my fellow'—when He had to take the knife, like Abraham, to His only Son whom He loved—when He had to bruise our savior. He has put him to grief. Our sin brought that on God. Either he die, or we die. And I think there is grief in that—grief and commotion in the heart of God. And what love must have been there when all the angels stood on the balconies of heaven and screamed at God, 'Don't do it! Don't do it! Don't do it!' And yet he did it. God His Son not sparing gave him to die. I scarce can take it in.

Macleod's language here clearly portrays a far greater degree of passibility in God than he generally proposes in his writings. Here is a God who experiences internal 'conflict,' 'turmoil,' and 'tempestuous compassion.' There is 'commotion in the heart of God.' Furthermore, it is a commotion brought about by human sin which has seemingly put God in the startling position where his will is pulled in two different directions, leaving him in severe emotional pain.

Equally apparent is that this sermon is not always intended to be read strictly propositionally. These passages are at points flooded with figurative language. Justice is personified demanding that God condemn His people. There is an imagined scene where God sends the reprobate down into Hell. The height of the figurative language is the highly emotive moment when God's angels plead with him not to strike His Son at Calvary. In the sermon recording, their pleading is matched by the pitch of Macleod's own voice when he shouts in sympathetic agony the words, 'Don't do it! Don't do it! Don't do it!' After which, he pauses and drops to a whisper to say, 'And yet he did it.' The highly figurative language here prompts a question which at this point we can only posit. How does the highly figurative nature of this sermon shape the way his statements here on passibility are meant to be understood?

John 3:16a – 'For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son.'[40]

The following sermon on John 3:16a was preached at the evening service of Buccleuch Free Church in Edinburgh on July 7, 1996.[41] As is typical for Macleod, he interpreted the verse as a statement about the love of God the Father.

> He loved so much that he gave his own—his one and only—Son. That's the measure of it. That love is proposed to you tonight in terms which all of you can understand: In terms of family ties, in terms of human relationship, in terms of the bonds of strong and deep earthly affection – the sacrifice of that which is most precious. There are many other measures of God's love…But the greatest thing of all is God sent his Son. That is the real measure – this thing that *I* would not have done. This thing that *you* would not have done. This thing that God called upon Abraham to do. And the story of his doing it still pulls at our heart strings three thousand years later—all its poignancy and all its force. God did not spare that which was most precious.
>
> We consider who He was: The Son of God. The one in whom there was all the fullness and glory of God the Father's own nature. When God looked into the eyes of His Son, there He saw His own face. There was fellowship, mutuality understanding, communion, intimacy, closeness. There was his own very, very kind. I have said before and perhaps you've heard me say it so I apologize for the repetition: The greatest human creativity cannot give us what is our own nature. Not the art of a Leonardo or a Michelangelo can create from our own substance, in our own image but God's Son—not created but begotten—in him there was all the glory of God. And God loved him. He was the only Son that God had. No angel was God's son in this sense. Not even the Holy Spirit was God's son in this sense, but only the eternal Son. And oh, the Spirit, too, was precious, but there is a uniqueness here. There is a bond here, peculiar to this one relationship. 'Take your Son, your only Son Isaac whom you loved. The only Son that he had.
>
> Would we give ours for our closest friends? Give our children for the world? God gave His only, His only Son. It may be that for some of you it opens wounds. The most poignant of all losses: the loss of a child—not something toward which any of us goes willingly. But God went towards it in grace and love because there is some point at which, in agreement with His own Son, he put me and my interests before the interests of His own Son. It was done mutually by covenant and agreement between them and yet it is a fact before which we stand and gaze in wonder. He gave His own, one and only, Son. And he gave him so limitlessly, so unreservedly.
>
> I have often asked this text, 'Gave him to what?' And being rather annoyed that it doesn't tell me—doesn't define the giving. But I know now that it's best the way God left it because

[40] See Appendix: Sermon 2.

[41] This sermon was particularly important because that Sunday was the first time Macleod preached after he was acquitted of the sexual assault allegations made against him a month earlier in June. Because of the investigation, Macleod had not preached since the previous November. His return to the pulpit was covered in several newspapers including the *West Highland Free Press* who reported a 'full house' to the homecoming. 'Free Church professor in plea to Lord Advocate over Macleod,' *WHFP*, July 12, 1996.

> the giving is limitless. This giving of God's own Son to the humiliation of the incarnation: taking flesh, taking the form of a servant, taking the low condition, taking our earthly pain, our poverty, our temptation, our helplessness, to be there in the midst of the social problems of first century Palestine, and to feel the frustration of not being able to resolve them, to live within earshot of man's blasphemy and impiety, and, because of assumed limitation, not be able to resolve and overcome, to go down to Gethsemane.
>
> And at the risk of repetition again, the best light upon it is the light of that great verse in First Peter which tells me, 'which things the angels desire to look into.' They peer down and they peered down upon the career of the incarnate Son with increasing wonder, with growing incredulity as the story unfolded before their astonished eyes. And as one impossible occurrence was followed by another, and at how many points as they saw the Father sacrificing his own Son must those angels have said, 'This must be the end.'
>
> I have learned the folly of saying things can't get worse. At what point did the angels learn that that was folly? Was it at Gethsemane when they saw him bending and saw him distraught and saw him pleading with God that the cup might pass? Did they then breathe a sigh of relief and say, 'Well that's the end of the giving.' Or was it at the arrest? Was it at the trial? And what happened then at the moment when they nailed him to the tree? The Maker, the Great Creator. What did they say then? 'It can't get worse.'
>
> Was it those first three hours as he hung there on that longest journey upon which a creature ever set out? The journey from the third hour to the ninth hour on the cross of Calvary—never a traveler so weighted and so burdened, never a journey so long, as he carried our sin to that place of banishment that God had ordained for it. He had to go where he was out of sight of God. Can you ponder how far that was? 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' That was the giving. This giving to all that sin deserved, to that chaos, to that confusion, to that felt sense of anarchy, to that darkness, to that dark hole which alone could correspond to the anomalousness and the anarchicalness that was sin itself.
>
> I sent a son today to Inverness and it was far enough. He gave His Son without limit. He didn't say to the powers of darkness and the forces of Hell or the executors of justice, 'So far and no further.' He said, 'Do all that must needs be done.' And did He then turn His own face away because the pain was unsustainable and unendurable?

As with Macleod's sermon on Hosea 11, there are unqualified statements about divine passibility with no sense that such pain might need to be qualified by the blessedness. There is also the highly figurative language, especially when Macleod takes the perspective of the angelic hosts. However, what is most revealing about this sermon in particular is the way that Macleod makes explicit what is implicit in the other passages which is that God's emotions in relation to the cross are to be viewed through the lens of human emotions. It is a love 'proposed to you in terms that you can understand.' It may be that that sentence is meant to communicate the idea of analogy but that

is by no means clear within the sermon itself. The audience is simply asked to imagine the loss of their own child and to project the emotional distress of such a prospect upon their understanding of God the Father. In the last instance, he wonders whether—even for God the Father—the cross might have been 'unendurable.'

This sermon also reveals a technique that Macleod often uses to emphasize the gravity of divine suffering which is not always obvious. In speaking about the cost to the Father, Macleod will often switch subjects and talk about the cost to the Son. Then he will conclude these (often graphic and lengthy) depictions of the Son's suffering by reminding his audience that all of this actually points to the Father's love who chose to endure handing His Son over to such sufferings. Thus, Macleod can speak at length about what the Son suffered for His people and then with a single sentence reinterpret all of Christ's sufferings as an illumination of the Father's love.

Genesis 6:6 – And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, 'I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.

The passage below on Genesis 6:6 is informative because it includes the concept of divine repentance, a biblical idea that even Macleod himself has suggested is metaphorical. While he rarely deals with the issue across his corpus, he does tell his students in his lectures on divine passibility, 'We have to wrestle with what exactly it [God's repentance] might mean because it would suggest that God changes his mind and we would be inclined to believe that that is not possible—so we'd interpret the repentance metaphorically. But it is not at all clear that when the Bible speaks of divine anger or divine pity or divine jealously that that also has to be interpreted metaphorically.'[42] It is in the light of this comment that we turn to his brief comments on repentance in Genesis 6:6:

> And the second fact we find here is this: God's reluctance to punish. We see God forming this decree—this decree of destruction (as it's been called). 'I will wipe man from off the

[42] Macleod, 'Impassibility (1),' Lecture.

face of the earth. I have made him, and he has rebelled, and he has corrupted his whole environment, and I have no option in justice,' God is saying, 'but to wipe him off the face of the earth.' But in that very context, God, we are told, God was grieved. The Lord was grieved. And his heart was filled with pain. You yourselves know how hard it is sometimes to destroy something you have made—something that's not been right. It doesn't serve the purpose you had in mind. And you've put so much effort and so much strength and maybe even ingenuity into it, but you have to destroy it and you're grieved and your heart was filled with pain.

And it's so important to remember that the punishment of sin gives God no pleasure. It is that which God does most reluctantly—which God will do because he has to, but that which gives God no pleasure at all. One day in the solemnity of the great judgement God will assign some men and women to Hell. And in that moment his heart will be filled with grief and filled with pain. That, in some ways, is the most awful thing about sin. It has created this dreadful anomaly: Pain in the heart of the blessed God.

Here then we have the clearest divergence between how Macleod describes divine repentance in an academic setting (i.e. as a metaphor for something other than repentance) and in the context of preaching. It may be that Macleod in this passage is implying that divine repentance is a metaphor for divine grief. He presents these two ideas as having at least some commonality. However, his analogy with human regret seems to imply some level of surprise on God's part—a genuine regret that man has taken creation in an (even from God's perspective) unexpected direction.

Genesis 22:1 – And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham and said to him Abraham and he said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Take now thy son, thine only Isaac, whom thou lovest and get thee into the land of Moriah and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains that I shall tell thee of.

For Macleod, Genesis 22 is the paradigmatic illustration of divine suffering in the Old Testament and it is no surprise that Macleod illuminates this idea in his sermon on this passage. Forty-five minutes into an hour-long sermon on this text, Macleod turns towards the issue of divine suffering.[43]

Another thing pointed to by this great narrative is the affection between the Father and the Son. We take Abraham's love for Isaac as a parable of it. 'Thy son, Isaac, thine only son,

[43] See Appendix: Sermon 1.

> whom thou lovest.' And Christ was all of these things to God. He was God's Son. He was God's only Son. He was God's beloved Son. And we're never going to understand the glory of Golgotha until we realize the intimacy and the preciousness—until we ask ourselves, would we have been prepared to give our son—our daughter—to the cross? And do we dare to think that we love our son or our daughter more than God loved His Son?
>
> Have we made our God so much of an abstraction, so inert, and so immobile that he has no passion left? He has no wrath? He has no jealousy? He has no pity? Had God no pity? As He saw His son immolated and whipped and wounded and hanging dehydrated on that terrible cross, had God no pity? Would you like to think that God wouldn't pity your son if it was your son on the cross? Would He not pity His own son? I am made in His image but I could not hope apart from grace to retain my sanity in the context of such a loss. And the God whose image I bear loved and pitied and felt because He loved his own son. Calvary is not simply a fiction or a collision between abstract principles. It isn't a case of justice and mercy having some kind of fabulous and mythical war. It's God's son, God's only son, God's beloved son and God's eye pities. And God's heart is close to breaking because there is a forsaking and a desolation in the heart of God the Father as there is in God the Son. It is a mutual loss. It is a mutual deprivation. I do not think I could love an abstract God. I think that the humanity of Christ is the handle by which I lay hold of God. And I believe that deep in God himself there is *humanness* and that my own vestigial humanness and humanity is only the image and the vestige of his.[44]

This final sermon reminds us of the central purpose of these expositions of divine suffering in Macleod's sermons. For Macleod, the suffering of God the Father—especially at Calvary—is a key means through which God, communicating through the Scriptures, intends us to understand his love. As he puts it so explicitly in this sermon, 'we're never going to understand the glory of Golgotha' until we appreciate its cost to the Father. For Macleod, that is the measure of the love of God shown to mankind in the gospel. It both stands alongside the love of Christ demonstrated in his own suffering and is also interpreted by that love. In considering the logic of his preached expositions on divine passibility, it is important to remember that in virtually every case, the goal is to convince the audience of the love of God – a goal justified in his sermon on John 3:16a by saying that of all the truths we can state about God, 'The most incredible thing, the thing that you find hardest to believe, is the love of God – especially God's love for yourself.'

[44] Macleod saying that Christ's humanity is the handle by which he grasps God echoes the statement attributed to the Free Church theologian John 'Rabbi' Duncan that Macleod often quoted: 'Sin is the handle by which I get Christ.' Macleod, *MR*, May 1988, 101.

Interpreting Macleod's Preaching About Divine Suffering

These four passages clearly show a different presentation of divine passibility than we find in his writings and the question that remains is why? Why, in passages like these, does Macleod preach God as the victim of anxious, conflicted, and uncontrolled (and very human) emotions when he explicitly guards against such notions of divine suffering in his writings and lectures? In what follows, we suggest that one paradigm that helps explain Macleod's unique preaching style in terms of passibility is rooted in how he understood the preaching heritage of his own Scottish Reformed context. We go on to suggest that Macleod's preaching is not to be explained merely in terms of historical continuity, but in terms of an implicit dogmatic logic about what it means to preach truth from the pulpit.

The Divine Sufferer of Communion Sermons

The first paradigm which arises out of Macleod's own writing is the idea that in historic Reformed Scottish preaching, preachers tended to push their language and maybe even their theological claims beyond where their own theological systems would seem to allow, even pushing the boundaries of the doctrine of divine impassibility. 'Typical Scottish preachers certainly give no impression that they moderated their language for fear of being accused of denying divine impassibility.'[45] This is Macleod's view of Scottish preaching, but however typical such a tendency may be, he points exclusively to the example of one of Samuel Rutherford's (1600-1661) published communion sermons. In it, Rutherford says:

> Jesus cried with a loud voice, with such a shout as never before went to heaven. The Son, crying to the Father, shouting with tears and strong cries, 'Father, Father, God's mercy!'…O what fray was there! God weeping, God sobbing under the water! Never was there such a fray in heaven, and earth, either before or shall be after. Angels might have quaked, if they be capable of such passion. They might have said 'Alas! What ails our dear Lord and Master to cry so hideously?' Christ worried on a piece of tree! He who takes up the isles of the sea

[45] Donald Macleod, 'The Significance of the Westminster Confession,' in *The History of Scottish Theology*: *Volume II,* 7.

> as a little thing; yea, He who can take up heaven and earth with a touch of His little finger! He who can weigh the mountains in a balance![46]

In one article, Macleod says that this passage is 'scarcely compatible with the then all-prevailing notion of divine impassibility.'[47] While it may not in fact represent a rejection of divine impassibility, the language is certainly provocative. The one suffering on the tree is the same one who weighs the universe in his hands. For Macleod the kind of rhetorical flourish Rutherford demonstrates in this sermon is emblematic of traditional Reformed Scottish preaching which demonstrates a willingness to push the bounds of ordinary language in every direction in order to illuminate the cross and imprint its significance indelibly into the hearer's heart.

In *Christ Crucified* he quotes a passage from the same sermon in which Rutherford personifies nature in sympathy with its maker.

> Darkness was all in Judea when our Lord suffered. And why? Because the Candle that lighted the sun and moon was blown out. The God-head was eclipsed, and the world's eye was put out. He took away the sun with him, as it were, to another world, when he that was the world's sun was put out. When he went out of the earth, the sun would not stay behind Him. Sun, what ails thee? 'I have not will to shine when my Lord is going to another world.' As if the sun had said to Jesus, 'Lord, if Thou be going to another world, take me with you.'[48]

To this Macleod responds, 'Can any of this be reduced to propositional Christian doctrine?' He says, no. In fact, he warns against it. Referring to Rutherford and other contemporaries who had a tendency to personify nature in their descriptions of Calvary, he writes, 'We need to be careful here. Nature is no autonomous personal agent possessed of emotional intelligence.'[49] And yet, Macleod's warning seems to be only that—a caution regarding a style of preaching that is otherwise wholly appropriate. Here we have a fascinating connection with Macleod's own preaching which, as we have seen, at times not only drifts into the figurative but breaks all propositional restraints to

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[46] Samuel Rutherford, *Fourteen Communion Sermons*, 2nd ed. (Glasgow: Charles Glass & Co., 1877), 287.
[47] Donald Macleod, 'The Feill,' 11. See also, Macleod, 'Reformed Theology in Scotland,' 9.
[48] Rutherford, *Communion Sermons*, 287.
[49] Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 43.

make its point. Macleod's overall conclusion about Rutherford's sermons was positive: 'Today, almost four hundred years later, we should be saying things differently. But should we be saying different things?'[50]

Macleod seems to situate many of the distinctives of his own preaching in historic Reformed Scottish preaching. Most notably, he laments that contemporary preaching has moved away from the kind of free offer of the gospel that was characteristic of Reformed Scottish preaching since the Reformation and which, he implies, in the eyes of many pushed the boundaries of orthodoxy. Writing in 1987, Macleod laments,

> Do our pulpits today preach Christ as fully, as freely and as urgently as they did 25 years ago? We think not…There is not as much of Christ and certainly not as much pleading and beseeching. Yet this was the glory of the church in Scotland. This is what distinguished Scottish from Dutch and even from English Calvinism. This is what gave such fragrance to the ministry of Rutherford and Boston and McCheyne. Today, maybe, there is a fear of passion, even in the pulpit. Even more important, today we are less well schooled in our Calvinism, less sure where the boundaries of orthodoxy are and petrified of straying into Arminianism (or a reputation for it). But what kind of Calvinism is this?... The Marrow Men told 18th century Scotland, 'Christ is dead for you! There is salvation for every sinner of mankind lost! Christ is yours to come to! The deed is made out in your name—you only have to take possession!' There is good news for every creature, said the Lord in Mark 16:15. Let's (like John Knox) 'ding the pulpit into blads' telling it.[51]

The kind of free offer of the gospel in preaching for which Macleod advocates here is analogous to what we have seen in the issue of divine passibility. Macleod knows that behind every gospel offer like 'Christ is dead for you' lies the fundamental doctrine of limited atonement which would seem to impede such a proclamation. Certainly, someone who heard Macleod preach that from the pulpit might be forgiven for accepting it as a truth requiring no further qualification.

Here then is one key paradigm for examining Macleod's preaching on divine suffering. He is consciously imbibing his own tradition's tendency as he understands it to push the bounds of propositional theology in sermons in order to illuminate the cross and its importance. As Macleod

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[50] Macleod, *The Feill*, 12.
[51] Donald Macleod, 'Can the Church Grow?' *MR*, March 1987, 53.

puts it, this is preaching 'which probes and expounds the mysteries of Calvary' and in which 'the word is not the antithesis or enemy of mystery, but its very vehicle.'[52]

Kerygmatically-Correct Preaching

Beyond historical context, however, this research is interested in the systematic logic of Macleod's work, and it is possible to propose not only an historic but also a theological logic that explains the imbalanced language of Macleod's preaching on divine suffering (again, compared to his own writings about divine suffering). I propose that in Macleod's writings on preaching and systematic theology, there is a latent logic that explains what might otherwise appear as an irreconcilable divide between Macleod's preaching and the rest of his work, rooted in his understanding of the task of proclaiming the *kerygma*.[53]

At several points in his writings, Macleod makes a distinction between facts which are doctrinally correct and facts which are kerygmatically correct. A doctrinally correct statement is a theological statement which is deemed factually correct. A kerygmatically correct statement is a theological statement which is deemed fitting for the pulpit. The term 'kerygmatically correct' has its origin in Karl Rahner's statement that 'not every objectively true statement is also kerygmatically correct.'[54] As an example, Rahner points to the objective truth that 'when Jesus prayed as a man, he

[52] Macleod, 'The Feill,' 12.
[53] We might propose a third paradigm for Macleod's preaching divine passibility as a 'theology of overstatement.' Macleod argues this is how much of Latin American liberation theology should be understood. 'Theirs is a classic example of a theology of overstatement. If we assess it as a balanced description of Christianity as a whole, it fails miserably. But that is not how it asks to be assessed. Acutely and painfully aware of its own Latin American context (largely the result of a heartless orthodoxy) it has recovered a long-neglected vein of New Testament teaching, expounded it with deliberate exaggeration and made the world listen.' Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 260. For more on Macleod's interactions with liberation theology, see Nicholson, 'Donald Macleod: Free Church Liberation Theologian?' By itself, the principle of overstatement could not encompass all the tension in Macleod's preaching on passibility. However, it does show that Macleod appreciated the necessity of exaggerating a truth (and thus presenting an imbalanced theology) in order for that truth to be rightly understood by the audience. Macleod's wider thoughts on liberation theology are complex, but he is explicit in stating that while he perceived their overall system to be doctrinally imbalanced, for its own context that imbalance was wholly appropriate.
[54] Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations, Volume I: God, Christ, Mary and Grace*, 2nd ed., trans. Cornelius Ernst (London: Darton Longman & Todd, 1965), 129.

prayed to the three divine Persons.'[55] Rahner says this statement must be true and yet, 'kerygmatically it would be incorrect to dwell on the fact that Jesus worshipped the Son of God.' For Rahner, such an idea is ironically both true and yet prone to mislead or at least to obfuscate what is most important. The solution he proposes for determining theologically *and* kerygmatically true statements is as follows:

> If we ask which theologically true statements are also kerygmatic, we shall have to orientate ourselves by reference to modes of expression current in the New Testament (though not to them alone). It is only in this way that we shall avoid the danger of bringing things into the foreground of a human consciousness which is always finite, of emphasizing connections and relationships, which conceal or at least push into the background the more important view of revealed reality, that which is of ultimate significance for the working out of salvation.[56]

When Macleod introduces Rahner's concept in *The Person of Christ*, he uses it to caution the use of the historic ascription of *theotokos* to Mary. While it is an objectively true statement that Mary was the 'God-bearer' insofar as she bore the Son of God in her womb, he argues that historically, the effect of preaching Mary as the *theotokos* has been to elevate Mary 'to a prominence she never enjoyed in the New Testament.'[57] The subsequent emphasis upon Mary in the Catholic church results from what Macleod calls a 'non-kerygmatic understanding of *theotokos*.'[58]

There is a clear difference in the way Macleod and Rahner use the idea of 'kerygmatic correctness.' For Rahner, kerygmatic correctness was an idea directed towards the theological process. It determines where the theologian should focus their studies. For Macleod, however, it is primarily a question for the preacher. We see this in the way he applies it to the question of whether the minister should tell every sinner, 'God loves you.'[59] On the one hand, Macleod acknowledges

[55] Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 129.
[56] Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, 129.
[57] Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 188.
[58] This is a criticism that Macleod brings against Rahner's own emphasis upon Mary. Macleod, *The Person of Christ*, 188.
[59] Macleod, '*Amyraldus redividus:* a review article,' *Evangelical Quarterly,* 226. As this article makes clear, the question was especially relevant to Macleod's own historic Scottish Reformed context. It is one of many thorny theological questions that follow from the tension between the free offer of the gospel and limited atonement.

that the statement is completely accurate. That 'God loves every member of the human race', he says, is evident through common grace. However, he also argues that the question for the preacher is not simply whether the statement is true but 'is it *kerygmatically* correct? How is it going to be heard? Will it be heard as an announcement that all is well with the soul? Will it be heard as an announcement that one is already saved and there is nothing to worry about? May it even be heard as an announcement that we are all elect and all redeemed and all already born again?'[60] If the answer to these latter questions is yes, then the statement 'God loves you' is doctrinally correct and yet kerygmatically incorrect.[61]

These questions echo the kinds of concerns we saw Macleod express in his first *Monthly Record* piece in 1975 when he says that preachers must obsessively ask themselves: 'Is this the right message? Is it the most appropriate message? Am I delivering it in the most spiritually promising ways?'[62] In that sense, it is probably less the case that Rahner's ideas introduced a wholly new paradigm into Macleod's ideas on preaching so much as it articulated some of Macleod's long-held commitments about the task of preaching.

This distinction between doctrinal and kerygmatic correctness goes some way towards explaining some of the particularities of Macleod's pulpit statements about divine suffering. It explains, for instance, why Macleod might not qualify his pulpit comments about divine suffering with affirmations of God's eternal blessedness, because doing so would unhelpfully divert attention away from the central revealed truth being communicated—the fact of divine suffering. It would be difficult, for instance, to preach the way that Macleod does in his sermon on Hosea—describing

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[60] '*Amyraldus redivivus*: a review article,' *Evangelical Quarterly*, 226.

[61] Macleod also applies the question of kerygmatic correctness to the notion of the crucified God. He writes, 'on the cross of Calvary the only God there is suffers and dies. Now, whether that is kerygmatically appropriate is another question. The whole notion of a crucified God is kerygmatically difficult.' Macleod, 'The Christology of Chalcedon,' 92-3.

[62] 'Home Missions in the Life of the Church,' 39.

God in utter turmoil—only to then to remind his audience that by ascribing suffering to God, we must, of course exclude the possibility of internal distress.[63]

The problem with using Rahner's principle to explain Macleod's preaching on divine suffering is that Macleod breaks a rule implicit in Rahner's logic. Rahner assumes that while not every theological statement is kerygmatically correct, every kerygmatically correct statement is also theologically correct. In other words, if we say that a statement is kerygmatically correct, we already assume it is doctrinally accurate. Whereas many of Macleod's statements about divine suffering are striking not simply because they lack important qualifications but because they would appear untrue even by Macleod's own reasoning. Such is the case when Macleod suggests that the Father's heart is close to breaking or when he suggestively asks whether the pain of the Father seeing his Son on the cross was 'unendurable' and 'unsustainable.' This is the same Macleod who can write that any statement of passibility must also affirm that God 'cannot be the victim of mental conflict, or prey to anxiety, discontent, envy, depression or any other neurosis.'[64] Many of Macleod's preached comments on divine suffering are, to use the language of Rahner, objectively *not* correct. This is the true challenge of interpreting Macleod's preaching on divine suffering.

What can be dismissed out of hand is the idea that Macleod's pulpit statements on divine suffering are imbalanced as a result of carelessness. We have seen how Macleod himself stressed the need for preparation and precision in preaching, condemning among other errors 'loose phraseology' and 'careless diction.'[65] Furthermore, in reviewing all the passages where Macleod speaks on divine suffering, there is a clear continuity between the sermons. The same passages are referenced. Particular phrases are repeated. All of which suggests that Macleod had long settled his views on how to present divine passibility from the pulpit. Macleod's pulpit language on divine

[63] Cf. Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 31.
[64] Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 31.
[65] Macleod, 'God's Image in Man,' 11.

suffering, even though it is theologically challenging to reconcile with his wider work, is clearly deliberate.

To resolve this apparent tension and to complete the dogmatic logic of Macleod's preaching on passibility, we suggest that Macleod implicitly employs a logic that can be explained with the help of Rahner's principle but that moves beyond where Rahner himself ever went. Rahner states that not every correct theological statement is also kerygmatically correct. Macleod both accepts this and, crucially, also preaches as if the reverse of that statement is also true: not every kerygmatically correct statement is also theologically correct.

Accepting such a principle would justify the preacher in saying something that he knows to be heavily imbalanced or even erroneous theologically *if* (and only if) it produces in the hearer a right response. As Macleod has said, the key question in relation to kerygmatic correctness is 'how will the message be heard and received?' In surveying Macleod's sermon passages, it is obvious how Macleod wants his statements on divine suffering to be received: as signposts directing the hearer's attention to the love of God. Insofar as Macleod produced in his audience an overwhelming sense of the love of God, it may be that he considers his unqualified claims about divine suffering justified. From a different perspective, it seems reasonable to assume that Macleod did not intend for his audiences to leave the room meditating upon (or fretting about) the notion that God has trouble controlling his emotions. He expected to leave the church with a picture that would help them better understand God's love for them.

To take our argument one step further, it is also the case that Macleod typically justifies his strongest language about divine suffering by appealing to the Biblical witness. In the Hosea sermon Macleod reminds his audience that in speaking of divine passibility as he does, he is merely reflecting the emphasis of the text. 'It's the Word of God. It's the language God has chosen to describe

himself.'[66] This also fits with Rahner's principle in that he argues that what should drive the question of *kerygmatic* correctness is whether the statement is orientated by reference to 'modes of expression current in the New Testament.'[67]

This seems to be Macleod's logic as well, even when he makes statements that are doctrinally incorrect and yet kerygmatically correct. Such statements are permissible insofar as they reflect biblical modes of speaking. In a 2019 online article entitled, 'Does God have feelings?' Macleod seems to affirm this notion and relates it specifically to Hosea 11. In the article, Macleod surveys the language of a book by G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) who himself emphasizes the strongly passibilist language of the text.[68] Macleod defends Morgan's language by arguing that however theologically imbalanced it may be, such expressions represent the very language of Scripture. 'Any responsibility for exaggeration or over-statement must lie with the divine author, and whatever the ultimate theological meaning of the passage, the surface-meaning is plain. God's heart, his very nature, recoils from inflicting on his apostate son Israel, the justice—the annihilation—that he deserves.'[69] Macleod then concludes by recognizing the tension the biblical language creates and in effect argues that we must not avoid it.

> Yes, there are tensions here that are too severe to be resolved by what Campbell Morgan calls 'mere intellectuality'. How can God wrestle with alternative courses of action before dismissing one of them with the words, 'No, I will not'? … Yet, whatever the final solution to the theological challenges, the passage makes plain that inspiration never prevented the prophets from portraying the divine love in terms of the deepest feelings and most earnest passion. Nor did it preclude their highlighting the pain involved for God by his bond with his people.[70]

It is a difficult statement to parse in part because there are two issues here. The first is whether a passage like Hosea 11 permits us to assert dogmatically that God is passible. For Macleod,

[66] Appendix: Sermon 4.
[67] Rahner, *Theological Investigations,* 129.
[68] See G. Campbell Morgan, *Hosea: The Heart and Holiness of God* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott), 129.
[69] Macleod, 'Does God have feelings?'
[70] Macleod, 'Does God Have Feelings?'

the answer is yes. However, this quote also points to the question that has been central in this chapter: Should the minister preach a passage like Hosea 11 according to what Macleod calls its 'surface-meaning', even when it creates dissonance with one's own systematic theology (as it does even for Macleod)? For Macleod, we have seen that the answer is also clearly yes.

Conclusion

Macleod's preaching and his comments there on passibility should never be viewed as a mere appendage to the 'real' Macleod—the one who sat atop his perch on the Mound at the Free Church College doled out far more nuanced accounts of what it means for God to suffer. That is to dismiss Macleod's own tribute to his preaching on the issue of divine passibility:

> It was my preaching that influenced me. I know that eventually I came across Moltmann and so on…But by that time my mind was quite clear on it… It seemed to me all the time that I was being pushed in that direction by John 3:16 and the story of Abraham and Isaac, Romans 8:32, John 4…And it was these texts, I think, the emphasis on the cost to God the Father which pushed me in these directions…I've been drawn more than most men to the cross, I suppose, as a homiletical subject and I think that as a consequence I've been subject to cross-influenced things. I hope.[71]

A proper interpretation of Macleod's work will always give attention to his preaching. This chapter has shown how dramatically different Macleod's preaching on divine passibility is at times from much of his theological writing. And yet it has also shown that they flow from the same mind with a clear, if implicit, logic. It is a logic which (to put it in propositional terms) intentionally risks doctrinal accuracy for the sake of what Macleod considers to be the central aim of theology: the *kerygma* of Jesus Christ.

[71] Macleod, 'Impassibility (2),' Lecture.

Chapter 7 – Passibility, Public Theology, and Ethics

> *The fact of the crucified God must be not only the foundation but the judge of our Christianity. The cross, said Luther, is the test of everything (*Crux probat omnia*).*[1]

For nearly five decades, Donald Macleod maintained an almost uninterrupted public commentary on culture and politics somewhere in the Scottish press. That work began in earnest in 1977 when he assumed the role of editor of the *Monthly Record* of the Free Church of Scotland, a position he held until 1991. By 1993, Macleod was again writing regularly, this time for the *West Highland Free Press*. His final column ran on April 20, 2023, in the Lewis-based *Stornoway Gazette* where he had been writing regularly since 2021. By itself, Macleod's work as a journalist merits further study. For the sociologist, his writings are a valuable window into the mind of a leader of one of Scotland's most well-known religious minority groups covering a period from Edward Heath to Rishi Sunak. But what hath a Scottish weekly regional newspaper column to do with the very un-newsworthy question of divine passibility? This is the question at hand.[2]

What we can say at the outset is that Macleod's public commentaries were self-consciously theological. That is, Macleod was not simply a theologian who also wrote about his political opinions. He was a theologian writing cultural and political commentaries from an explicitly Christian and Reformed perspective.[3] Given this, we take for granted that Macleod's journalism has value for interpreting his theology (and vice versa).

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[1] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 67.
[2] In assessing Macleod's journalism, I have primarily drawn on his work in the *Monthly Record* and *The West Highland Free Press* where Macleod published the vast majority of his work. He wrote less regularly for other periodicals such as *The Observer*.
[3] Whether Macleod's work faithfully embodied the Reformed or 'biblical' perspective which he claimed was often challenged. For instance, after one *Monthly Record* article in which Macleod suggested that higher taxation was a moral imperative, one reader wryly replied, 'Dear Sir, We have no doubt that the meek will inherit the earth. We were surprised to learn [from you] that this should be through higher levels of taxation.' Graham Weeks, 'Letters to the Editor,' *MR*, March 1990, 69.

In this chapter we propose that the doctrine of divine passibility has a notable role in the logic of Macleod's public theology and the ethical claims made therein. That logic is this: 'The view from below', which is the animating principle of Macleod's journalism is both normative for how Christians should engage in the public square and also indicative of the way God has involved himself in creation. We demonstrate that a key assumption of this view from below is that the suffering of compassion or sympathy is morally normative for both God and man.[4] In order to set out this logic, we first propose Macleod's concept of 'seeing things from below' as the governing principle of his journalism (and much of his ethics). In order to prove this relationship, we first propose that the concept of 'seeing things from below' is the central governing principle of Macleod's journalism and, crucially, how that view requires suffering as morally normative. Secondly, we show a similar motif at work in Macleod's doctrine of God where Macleod posits, albeit implicitly, that God himself has taken the view from below. While Macleod's work here raises rather significant unresolved tensions in his theology, it allows Macleod to posit a closer analogous relationship between God and man insofar as it relates to the necessity of suffering in moral action.

Seeing Things from Below

'Seeing things from below' is a phrase which Macleod borrows from Dietrich Bonhoeffer who, reflecting upon his own imprisonment, wrote to a friend, 'We have for once learned to see the great events of world history from below, from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled—in short, from the perspective of those who suffer.'[5] For Macleod, taking the view from below means seeing the world as the outcast and the

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[4] Macleod never makes a clear distinction between sympathy and empathy in his writings. At times he will use sympathy to describe what might more technically be called empathy. Given his ambiguous use of the terms sympathy, empathy, pity, and compassion, the context is key. What is clear, however, is that all these terms when ascribed to God involve some form of suffering and this is what is most relevant about these terms in the present research. As such, I have chosen to use the term sympathy throughout this chapter to refer to pain at the sight of others which may or may not imply the specific feeling of empathy. Where a distinction is relevant, I acknowledge it.

[5] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* ed. Eberhard Bethge (London: SCM Press, 1971), 17. Bonhoeffer's brief comments here have allowed for fertile theological reflection in numerous contexts. See, for instance, Henco van

oppressed see it (whoever the oppressed may be in a given context), but it does not end there. It is also a call to action. It is to accept a mandate to help the oppressed find liberation from the underlying causes of their poverty.[6] Hence, in Macleod's own career, the chief result of taking the view from below has not been primarily in the form of articles written *about* the oppressed but rather in articles written *on behalf of* the oppressed, as their advocate.[7]

The Advent of Macleod's View From Below

Macleod's early appropriation of Bonhoeffer's view from below is inextricably linked with the ascent of Margaret Thatcher to the role of Prime Minister in 1979 which happened only two years after Macleod took up his pen at the *Monthly Record*. Reflecting on her legacy shortly after her death in 2013, Macleod wrote,

> I owe Margaret Thatcher an immense debt: she woke me out of my political slumbers. While always interested in current affairs, I was totally detached from party politics and cannot recall ever voting…When I became Editor of the Free Church's Monthly Record in 1977, my early editorial comments maintained the great clerical tradition of union-bashing…Then came Thatcher…I opened my eyes, and there before me was a Britain of three million unemployed, a generation of hopeless school-leavers, and desperate industrial communities provoked beyond endurance. After that, my eyes stayed open. In the 1979 devolution referendum I voted against [devolution]. In the 1999 referendum I voted for [it]; and I voted that way for one simple reason: it offered the only guarantee that never again would Scotland suffer from a decade of Thatcherite Toryism.[8]

der Westhuizen, 'Doing theology from below, from below? Bonhoeffer, De Gruchy, South Africa,' *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 6, no. 4 (2020): 83-112.

[6] In my article, 'Donald Macleod: Free Church liberation theologian?', I have taken up the question of whether it is appropriate to label Macleod as a liberation theologian. I show that much of Macleod's public theology reflects the concerns and methodology of Latin American liberation theology. I conclude, however, that while Macleod shares the concerns (and often the language) of this tradition, his own views arise largely from within his own Scottish and Reformed context. Thus, Macleod exhibits a distinctly Scottish (and more specifically Highland and Islands) Reformed theology of liberation.

[7] In writing about some oppressed groups such as the Gael, Macleod would inevitably include himself.

[8] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, April 19, 2013. Macleod's parting words in the article capture his antipathy towards Thatcher:

> There is a curious irony in Margaret Thatcher's fall from power. Throughout her years as Premier she preached that if you worked hard and sought no favours you would never be out of a job. Then, suddenly, she lost her own; and whatever her alleged strength of character, she never recovered. Being sacked demoralized her. Had the setback come earlier in her career it might have taught her that not all the unemployed are malingerers, and not all who strive for other workers' rights are parasites. But, alas, it came too late to teach her anything.

Macleod's animus towards Margaret Thatcher needed no additional fuel from Dietrich Bonhoeffer to ignite, but Bonhoeffer's 'view from below' was invaluable to Macleod because it gave him a single phrase upon which he could hang his entire program for Christian engagement in the public square, one which stood as the antithesis of Thatcherism.[9] The view from below was to Macleod the genuine Christocentric approach to civic life. In his biopic that aired on the *BBC Alba*, he recollected,

> Christ himself was a poor man who was an outsider in the community and was ultimately crucified on a cross. He viewed the world from that cross, and Bonhoeffer also had that in mind. My main objection to Mrs. Thatcher's government was the unemployment situation—especially amongst the young people—which didn't seem to bother them [the government]. Lives were destroyed due to lack of work. We have never fully recovered from that. There are people in cities like Glasgow where generations have been unemployed (which can totally destroy a person's self-respect).[10]

Far from being used merely as a weapon with which to attack all things Thatcher, the view from below ultimately became the single-most important animating principle of Macleod's public theology and therefore his journalism. He said, for instance, that the view from below should be the normative perspective for the church as it stands and acts in the public square.

> The church must see things from below, not from above. This again is something it finds very difficult. The churches, especially Reformed churches, are often composed of the fit and the strong, the intelligent and the healthy. They have been hard-working and successful. Very often, the membership has little experience of unemployment or social discrimination or poor housing or inner-city deprivation or rural hardship… 'How', wrote Solzhenitsyn, 'can you expect a man who's warm to understand one who's cold?' We see from the top, through the eyes of privilege and strength and success. We even tend to give these things a moral rating. Our success is the reward for our labour. Other people's failure (and poverty) reflects only moral weakness.'[11]

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[9] While Macleod has written at several points about his admiration for Bonhoeffer as a martyr, he gives little attention to the wider system of thought in Bonhoeffer that 'the view from below' might represent.

[10] *Freumhan*, 36:05. In the context of the present research, it is not insignificant that Macleod describes Thatcher as being wholly unaffected by the suffering around her. It presumes the suffering of sympathy as the morally upright response to the suffering of others.

[11] Macleod, 'The Christian and the State,' 71. Macleod regularly cites this quote from Aleksander Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

In all of this, Macleod continually points back to Christ as the exemplar of the view from below. 'Christ, having become flesh, dwelt among the poor and deliberately identified with the broken-hearted, the captives, the blind and the bruised (Luke 4:18)…We, with Him, look at the world from the cross, viewing it through the eyes of the weak and powerless, the dumb and speechless, the despised and rejected.'[12] In identifying with these groups, Macleod argued that the church must speak out for them with deliberate overstatement because their voice is so easily drowned out by wealthier and more powerful voices and it must do so even at the risk of drawing the ire of the world. 'If the church is going to identify with the poor, it will inevitably speak asymmetrically and thus leave itself open to the charge of being unbalanced and subversive.'[13]

When considered in its entirety, Macleod's journalism could rightly be characterized as a meaningful attempt to apply the view from below to the particularities of Macleod's late twentieth and early twenty-first century British context. Across this corpus, Macleod regularly asks (or already assumes an answer to) three key questions: (1) who are the poor (and why are they poor), (2) what does God through the Scriptures have to say about their situation, and lastly, (3) what is required to alleviate their poverty?[14]

These questions apply most directly to the materially poor, but we might expand the idea to all those who are on the margins of society and to the oppressed in various situations.[15] In his own

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[12] Macleod, 'The Christian and the State,' 72.
[13] Macleod, 'The Christian and the State,' 72.
[14] These questions parallel the three mediations of liberation theology: socio-analytical mediation, hermeneutical mediation, and practical mediation as proposed by the brothers Leonardo and Clodovis Boff in *Introducing Liberation Theology*, trans. Paul Burns (New York: Orbis Books, 1987), 24. Elsewhere I have used these mediations to consider the appropriateness of identifying Macleod with liberation theology, (see, Nicholson, 'Donald Macleod: Free Church liberation theologian?' *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 1-15. Regardless of whether Macleod should be thought of in any sense as a liberation theologian, these three questions provide a helpful framework for systematizing much of his public theology.
[15] Hence Macleod can describe prisoners in terms of being marginalized outcasts who need an advocate. He told his students in one lecture on anthropology,

> We have to reflect on the conditions in which we incarcerate criminals. There is absolutely no political mileage in prison reform. You will not find a single MP in this country remotely interested in it because they all think that you [the general populace] are so vindictive, [that] you want all these people to rot in Hell—and they don't want them to have even elementary dignity in cells where there are four or five people…So it's up to yourselves

British context, Macleod argued that a number of social classes were poor or oppressed as a result of unjust economic or legal systems; systems which Macleod thought should be challenged by the church.

> In Britain today, there is still structural injustice. Economic and industrial power is concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority able to command financial rewards out of all proportion to their actual work. The majority, whether in management or on the shop-floor, work for wages which, by comparison, are trivial; and at any time they may find themselves redundant as a result of decisions taken in board-rooms which have little understanding of ordinary human problems. Fortunes are inherited, not made. Add the problem of long-term unemployment, of poor housing, of regional inequality, of racial discrimination, and it is not surprising that there are occasional outbursts of lawlessness.[16]

This, at least as far as Macleod is concerned, is what one will see when they open their eyes with the view from below.[17]

The Ideal of Christian Socialism

Clearly, for Macleod, the view from below involves more than mere perception. It requires action. The specific action that Macleod called for was Christian Socialism. His use of the term was not original. In advocating for a distinctly Christian form of socialism (which he began to do explicitly in the 1990s), Macleod was situating his own political perspective within a network of other ideas popular in late-twentieth-century Great Britain. The Christian Socialist movement was typified during the 1990s with the popular-level book, *Reclaiming the Ground: Christianity and Socialism*, which was a series of essays offering apologies and perspectives on the movement.[18] Led on the political front by Labour politicians like John Smith (1938-1994), Tony Blair (1953-), and Paul

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> to do what you can to ensure there is vigilance kept over issues of that kind…We have to be aware who it is in society for whom no one speaks and that includes those who are in prison, a large majority of whom tend to come from a particular social class.

Donald Macleod, 'Man in Society (1),' Systematic Theology 102 (class lecture, Free Church College, Edinburgh, April 7, 2011). See also, Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, July 11, 2008.

[16] Macleod, 'The Christian and the State,' 71.

[17] Macleod would include Highland expressions of Presbyterianism among oppressed groups, particularly for the way outside legal and economic forces were able to put pressure on their Sabbatarian tradition. Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, April 1, 1994.

[18] Christopher Bryant, ed., *Reclaiming the Ground: Christianity and Socialism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1993). Macleod praised the book in Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, May 7, 1993.

Boateng (1951-), this movement self-consciously embodied the legacy of earlier British Christian Socialists like F.D. Maurice (1805-1872), Charles Gore (1853-1932), and Henry Scott Holland (1847-1918). Macleod himself saw the movement as part of a global phenomenon which is why he could claim that the Latin American Liberation Theologians Gustavo Gutierrez (1928-), Leonardo Boff (1938-), and Jon Sobrino (1938-) were also outstanding examples of it.[19]

In the 1990s and onwards, Macleod publicly supported the Labour party because he believed they were the party that did (or could) best embody Christian Socialism. In 2000 he wrote,

> Socialism is my reason for voting Labour and I will stick to my personal mantra: 'We must see things from below.' Nothing has happened in the last few years to negate Jesus' observation, 'The poor you have always with you.' It was with them that Christian Socialism identified. Our movement was born to bring them deliverance. Their salvation was no mere accident of our policies. It was their stated focus. Let's get back to basics: Christian Socialist basics.[20]

Broadly speaking, Macleod advocated for greater government-enforced redistributions of wealth and power across the UK in order to re-balance the places in society where various groups were in his view unfairly disenfranchised or impoverished (in ways that could be remedied by law). He called for higher tax rates on the wealthy, the revenues from which the materially poor, the elderly, and others could benefit.[21]

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[19] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, March 1, 1996. Likewise, many within the Christian Socialist movement recognized in Latin American Liberation theology an espousal of Christian Socialism but in another context. See Christopher Bryant, 'Introduction,' in *Reclaiming the Ground*, 22-3.

[20] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, September 29, 2000. In the same article he writes, 'This is not to say that there are no Christians and no Christian values in any other political parties. Nor is it to say that Labour's values coincide exactly with those of Jesus. But it is to claim (in my view rightly) that socialism is the political philosophy which approximates most closely to the concerns of Christ.' His support of Labour notwithstanding, Macleod could also be highly critical of Labour's faithlessness to true Christian socialism. In a 2007 *WHFP* article, Macleod argues that Tony Blair had converted to Christian socialism, but he never converted to Christ. That is, he was happy to adopt the ethics of Christianity, but he seemed uninterested in the core doctrinal claims of the religion. Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, March 14, 2007.

[21] Macleod made a number of memorable comments about the importance of taxes: 'I'm only a theologian. Perichoresis and supralapsarianism I can cope with. But this problem of the disappearing taxes baffles me. All I know is that I'll shoot the next Labour Politian who pledges not to raise taxes (I hope that's not a hostage to fortune).' Donald Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, August 29, 1997.

The idea of redistributing power took various forms. In general, Macleod was critical of London (and Edinburgh to a lesser extent) because he claimed they governed in their own interests on a host of issues which, for the sake of equity, he thought should be devolved to regional or local communities. To give only one example, he was often furious about the fact that wealthy individuals (often from the South) were allowed to own massive estates in the Highlands and in doing so, were able to keep locals from using the land. In such a situation, the land effectively becomes a desert that has no benefit whatsoever to local populations. This, Macleod said, was simply the next iteration of Highland oppression by the powerful.

> It's the old story: the Highlands have their uses. Once, they were needed for cannon fodder, then for wool, then for things to shoot and then for oil. Now it's for desert…There is such a maddening inequality to it all. London monopolises all the outstanding economic opportunities of this country, sucking up billions of pounds of subsidy and investment. Fair enough. But it affronts our humanity when it goes on to demand that the areas it has bled dry should be gifted to it as a playground.[22]

As a remedy, Macleod supported many of the Scottish land reforms proposed in the late 1990s which became enshrined in the Land Reform Scotland Act 2003.[23] At a conference on land reform at the University of Edinburgh in 1998, Macleod spoke of the proposed legislation saying, 'We know enough to move to immediate legislation on some key issues such as the taxing of supporting estates and the right to roam: even in my view on the integration of agrarian and mineral

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[22] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, August 2, 1996. The last article Macleod published a month before his death was on recent major failures in island ferry services. Again, he located much of the problem in the fact that those who live outside the Highlands and Islands do not care for it. Donald Macleod, 'Footnotes: Surely time to think outside the box' *Stornoway Gazette*, April 20, 2023.

[23] While Labour managed to deliver on some of Macleod's hopes, in recent decades Macleod has remined largely disappointed by Labour's failure to represent the poor. Reflecting back on the ascension of Tony Blair to Prime Minister in 1997 and the coinciding hope for a socialist government, Macleod wrote in 2002, 'We were voting for a revolution which would reject forever the direction the country had taken under Mrs Thatcher. Our revolutionary dream included details: We wanted (and seemed to be promised) land reform. We wanted (and seemed to be promised) thousands more teachers and nurses. We wanted (and got) devolution. But we also wanted something bigger. Our dream was philosophical; religious, even. We wanted Socialism; and since the Prime Minister-elect was a member of the Christian Socialist Movement we even dared to hope that the new government would unashamedly pursue that agenda.' Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, March 22, 2002.

rights and on tenants' right to buy.' However, he argued that the specific policies do not represent the end of the battle for economic justice as it relates to land in Scotland:

> The campaign for land reform is driven by ideals: by a desire to curtail the powerful and to empower the disempowered; by a concern for stewardship and community; by a passion for freedom and justice. No one bill is going to deliver on these ideals; and until the ideals are delivered the campaign will continue, if necessary through Bill after Bill, because we are driven by the most irresistible of all forces: the divine spark of discontent.[24]

Christian Socialism as an Application of Reformed Anthropology

Macleod often defended his Christian Socialism by appealing to a Reformed anthropology, arguing that the doctrines of the image of God and total depravity should dictate the way society approach its political goals. The image of God, he reasoned, places upon the community a collective responsibility to ensure that each individual is allowed to fully manifest their potential as an image-bearer. He summarized the role of the image of God in public policy in a 2011 *WHFP* piece this way:

> Humans are made in the image of God, and every one without exception has a right to an existence that reflects that glory. But we can reflect it only if we have a fair share of the 'goods' of this life: a fair share of land, air and water, food and clothing; protection from predators, whether paedophiles, loan sharks or drug pushers; and jurisdiction over our own homes and families, free from the meddling of an intrusive state. But every human also has a right to a fair share of those things which are not essential, but which belong to the dignity and nobility of life: a right to a decent environment; to healthcare; to education; to books; to roaming and rambling; to art and music; to freedom of religion; to holy days, feasts, festivals and holidays.[25]

Here we have a distinctly Reformed view of the image of God being used in the defense of Christian Socialism. By Reformed anthropology we mean this: Macleod posits that all human beings are equal bearers of the image of God even in their fallen state. In that fallen state, what remains of the image of God in all people is what Macleod refers to as the natural image, which consists of

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[24] Donald Macleod, 'Land Reform and Human Values', in *Understanding Land Reform in Scotland: Report of the Conference of 6 March 1998* eds. Robin Callander and Andy Wightman (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh 1998), 52-4. Alastair McIntosh reports that these lines were received with 'rapturous ovation' from the audience. Alastair McIntosh, 'The Political Theology of Modern Scottish Land Reform,' *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 3, no. 3 (2009): 357.

[25] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, April 29, 2011.

capacities such as rationality, communication, agency, aesthetic sense, and community.[26] He goes on to argue that societal factors (such as poverty) often prevent humans from manifesting their God-given capacities as image bearers and as such, it is incumbent upon society as a whole to work and to legislate to ensure that every individual has the potential to allow all of their capacities as image-bearers to flourish. He often connects this community mandate to 1 Timothy 2:1-2, a passage which he says implies that politicians are called to 'pursue policies which will make it possible for their people to live with honour' and to promote godliness.[27]

While Macleod uses the image of God as a call to dignify the poorest and the least privileged in society, he uses the Reformed doctrine of total depravity to call for the curbing of wealth and power at the top of society. In one article he writes,

> It is precisely because of this doctrine of total depravity that we need a socialist political system. According to the late Mrs Thatcher's brand of free-market capitalism every successful entrepreneur would turn out to be a Good Samaritan ploughing his wealth back into the community. One or two would, but the vast majority would not. This is why we cannot rely on the voluntary redistribution of wealth…Only a polity which requires each to give according to his ability can guarantee, in turn, that each receives according to his need.[28]

As Macleod saw it, Christian Socialism marked an attempt to do justice to the realities of the image of God and total depravity in the political sphere. The key principle underlying all of this, however, was always the view from below.

The View from Below and Empathy

Before positing a connection between Macleod's journalism and divine passibility, it is first important to make explicit a key element of the view which Macleod never states outright, perhaps because he simply takes it for granted, which is that the view from below involves suffering. For

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[26] Macleod's lengthiest written statement on the image of God was his 1973 *Banner of Truth* article, 'God's Image in Man.' Thought published when he was only thirty-two, recordings of his 2011 lectures on anthropology show that his commitments remained largely unchanged. See, Macleod, 'Man in the Image of God (1),' (class lecture, 2011).

[27] 'First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men, for kings who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way.' RSV. Macleod, 'The Christian and the State,' 61-2.

[28] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, July 26, 2013.

Macleod, to experience the pain of sympathy in considering the suffering of others is a moral imperative and often a necessary precursor to just action. This is why throughout his journalism, Macleod not only calls for just laws, but he implies that just laws must rest at least in part on a kind of empathy (or at least sympathy) that is pained at the sight of suffering. Thus, it is in being moved *by* sympathy, we can be moved *to* action.

It should come as no surprise that Macleod grounds the moral normativity of suffering sympathy in the example of Christ weeping over Jerusalem. In one *WHFP* article, Macleod argued that this level of sorrow is what is needed in the halls of parliament in order for UK laws to be just.

> An army of self-complacent moralists is the last thing we need in British politics. We need Christians, yes. But the kind of Christians we need are those who are preoccupied with their own sins, not the sins of others. We need men and women who have stood with Jesus Christ, beholding our land and weeping over it. We need parliamentarians who will bring to the House of Commons not the burning hatred of the moral crusader but the honesty of Christian humility and the warmth of Christian mercy. Men and women who have seen things from below.[29]

The antithesis of this view for Macleod, was Margaret Thatcher who, as we saw him claim in Chapter One, did not seem to care about the plight of the poor. After one highly-publicized visit to Edinburgh, Macleod urged her to visit the poorest parts of the city so that she might 'learn something of the resigned dignity of the poor; the simplistic folly of blaming it all on the parents; the soul-destroying claustrophobic oppressiveness of a concrete jungle; and the pained confusion of divine image-bearers who have never had an answer to that most Scottish of all questions: what do you do?'[30] In other words, he invites her to take the view from below. But the call is for more than a statistical analysis of poverty. It is to engage in the visceral experience of seeing poverty with one's own eyes and being moved by it.

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[29] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, March 28, 1997.

[30] Macleod, 'Mrs Thatcher and the Kingdom,' *MR*, June 1988, 133. Macleod has left little record of his own personal engagement in places like Wester Hailes. For the whole of his time in Edinburgh he lived in the relatively affluent Morningside community.

Several times in his writings on public engagement, Macleod suggests that some form of empathy or sympathy is needed to motivate political action. It is the only way he says that socialism can prevail.

> There will be no secure Socialist government in Britain till the country has a social conscience, demanding a government pledge to rule not in the interests of the many, but in the interests of the few. Until the plight of those at the bottom of the heap touches the conscience of every man, woman and child, the few [i.e. the poorest in society] will grow in number and their condition will go from bad to worse.[31]

In another article published around the same time, Macleod asked why Scottish Presbyterians were noticeably absent from the political sphere. He suggests that it may be because their view of total depravity leads them to interpret their difficulties as a result of sins (and therefore not something that can be remedied by the government). However, he argues that this should not be enough to prevent his own political engagement. 'Even so, there is a case, surely, for our hearts being stirred by the poverty and injustice we see around us; and once stirred we cannot avoid the challenge of doing something about it, even though improvement can come only by millimetres.'[32]

Again, while it may only be implicit, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Macleod assumes that what is required of a Christian in the public sphere is more than intellect and judgement alone.[33] What is required is intellect and wise judgement infused with the kind of compassionate emotion that cannot help but be moved by viewing the sufferings of others. Such emotion, according to Macleod, drives the righteous man and woman to action. Macleod closed his essay, 'The Christian and the State' by addressing the criticism that in stepping into politics the church is in danger of losing sight of its priorities. On the contrary, he says that Christ both proclaimed the gospel and allowed himself to be available to the needs of the poor.

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[31] 'The few' in this case refers to the poorest of the poor. Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, November 14, 2014.
[32] Macleod, *WHFP*, October 31, 2014.
[33] To be only these two things, we might imagine a judge who makes right judgements but is able not to emotionally involve himself in the events in consideration.

> [The Church] must reflect its Lord's attitude to the whole range of human need. The most important area of need may indeed be spiritual. But men are weary and heavy-laden with other burdens too, crushed into the ground by oppression, hunger and poverty. The moment we begin to sympathize with them, we are moving into political involvement, however minimal, and to that extent letting the world set the agenda.[34]

To summarize, Macleod presents the view from below to as the normative position of those who seek to engage in the public square, and it applies to the church collectively as much as it does individual Christian. Crucially, this view from below seems to involve sympathy to the point of suffering such that in taking the view from below, we suffer with those who suffer.[35]

The God Who Suffers and Public Theology

What has been conspicuously absent in the summary of Macleod's public discourse thus far has been any mention of divine passibility. Part of the reason for this is because Macleod's view from below (which we have argued is the governing principle of the public theology evident in his journalism) does not *require* divine passibility as a constitutive element. The view from below is ostensibly a Christological model for public engagement which emphasizes the humanity of Christ and the ways in which Christ took the view from below in his incarnation. One could conceivably accept most of Macleod's public ethics without needing to affirm divine passibility as any kind of necessary first principle. True though this may be, in order to interpret Macleod rightly, it is equally important to recognize that in his own theological logic, the ethical call to view things from below and the idea of God as divine sufferer are intimately related, and in ways that are not always obvious.

[34] Macleod, 'Christianity and the State,' 74.

[35] While we have focused specifically on Macleod's journalism, there are pointers across his corpus to the importance of sympathy. For instance, in describing the pastoral vocation, Macleod says that sympathy is essential. 'Without humanity we are useless. We cannot even pray for people unless we feel with them. The Lord Himself, after all, had to be a compassionate and a faithful high priest; and He could only be such by being touched with the feeling of our infirmities.' Macleod, *Priorities for the Church*, 14.

Crux Probat Omnia

The clearest link Macleod makes in his theological writings between public theology and divine passibility is in two consecutive *Monthly Record* articles both entitled 'The Crucified God.'[36] Together they represent the heart of Macleod's Christocentric theological vision which is that the cross is the test of Christian theology and ethics. He writes, 'The fact of the crucified God must be not only the foundation but the judge of our Christianity. The cross, said Luther, is the test of everything (*Crux probat omnia*).'[37] The first of the two articles is largely a rearticulation of the historic Reformed orthodox view of the cross as an act of penal substitutionary atonement.[38] In it Macleod explores that doctrine with a special emphasis upon the subjective experience of Christ, describing, in turn, Christ's physical, emotional, social, and spiritual suffering at the cross.

It is with his second article on the crucified God that Macleod's distinct deductions from Reformed orthodoxy (and his challenges *to* Reformed orthodoxy) become apparent. He suggests two ways in which the idea of Christ as the crucified God should serve as a test of our Christianity. In the first place, he says that the cross is the test of the Christian life. 'The key-word so far as the Christian life is concerned is that spoken by Christ in Mk. 8:34: "Whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."'[39] Macleod says that bearing our cross means three things: (1) 'That we must identify with the deprived and the outcast,'[40] (2) that the church must carry out a 'prophetic ministry' (which includes, but is not limited to, speaking for the

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[36] Donald Macleod, 'The Crucified God (1),' *MR*, March 1982, 51-2; 'The Crucified God (2),' *MR*, April 1982, 75-6. To aid the reader, I cite these articles as they appear as one unified chapter in the 2021 edition of *From Glory to Golgotha*, 67-80.

[37] Luther's *crux probat omnia* is also an important emphasis in Moltmann's *The Crucified God*. Moltmann opens his work, saying, 'If it is true that the inner criterion of whether or not Christian theology is *Christian* lies in the crucified Christ, we come back to Luther's lapidary statement: *Crux probat omnia*. In Christianity the cross is the test of everything which deserves to be called Christian.' *The Crucified God*, 7.

[38] Granted, this rearticulation is not without its own peculiarities. At one point Macleod speaks of a 'severance of fellowship' between the Father and the Son at the cross. Later, he qualifies this severance not as an ontological fact but as a subjective feeling of the incarnate Christ. Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 70.

[39] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 72.

[40] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 72.

oppressed),[41] and (3) that the church must 'be willing to be nothing' through the service to others.[42] The principles Macleod presents here read like an early exposition of his 'view from below' before he began using that phrase, which is probably how they should be interpreted.

Macleod then seems to leave ethics wholly behind in the article as he moves on to suggest that the cross is also a test of our doctrine of God, specifically of our idea of divine suffering. Here he lays out arguments for divine passibility which by this point in the present research should come as no surprise to the reader. He calls the idea of a passionless God 'totally unscriptural.' Moreover, 'The idea that God is unaffected by occurrences outside Himself is inconsistent with the divine pity.'[43] His core argument is that an 'impassive and apathetic' God 'is inconsistent with the cross (which is the test of everything).'[44] He writes, 'We cannot say that Christ is our greatest word about God and yet say that we do not mean the crucified Christ. Nor can we say that the crucified *Christ* is the image of God and yet say that the *cross* is only a word about his human nature. It is precisely the crucified Christ who is the revelation; and what He reveals, in being crucified, is God.'[45] What is revealed is the incarnate God's capacity to suffer not only in his human but also in his divine nature.[46]

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[41] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 73. This prophetic ministry also includes stances not related directly to public ethics. He says the church must speak, for example, against places 'where traditionalism masquerades as orthodoxy or heresy as creativity.' *From Glory to Golgotha*, 74.
[42] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 74. This final point is a reference to Christ's *kenosis* in Phil. 2:7. For Macleod's longest exposition on the importance of *kenosis*, see his work, *The Humiliated and Exalted Lord.*
[43] He writes, 'Pity means by definition that one is stirred by the spectacle of human misery, temporal and spiritual. God cannot pity and yet remain unmoved…The pain and grief which we feel when confronted with inhumanity, deprivation and squalor must have its counterpart (and indeed its source) in the God whose image we bear.' Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 79.
[44] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 79.
[45] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 79.
[46] Emphasis Macleod's. In trademark Macleod fashion, the article includes a series of qualifications about what we mean when we say that God suffers: He cannot suffer any 'emotional disturbance or upheaval of the kind we experience as a result of unresolved mental conflicts and imperfect integration of our personalities.' God also cannot be passively overcome by suffering. 'He can only experience it if He takes it and goes towards it. For God, suffering can only be a form of action.' Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 78.

In the closing sentences of the article, Macleod makes several far-reaching dogmatic claims that suggest a key relationship between ethics and the doctrine of God in Macleod's thought.

> Calvary was not an isolated moment of pain or pity in the experience of God. Its roots lay in the primaeval and permanent concern of God for His creation. The cross does not inaugurate that concern. But it does show how deep and passionate it is and how far God was prepared to go.
>
> In the last analysis that concern is triune, shared equally by the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, as the history of the cross (involving the Father, the Son and the eternal Spirit) clearly testifies. The agony of each is different, yet equally real. And the resulting understanding of human grief is as much a reality for God the Father and God the Holy Spirit as it is for God the Son. The Trinity is touched with the feeling of our infirmities.[47]

Macleod's assertion here that through (or alongside of) Christ's incarnation the Trinity itself is touched with the feeling of our infirmities raises profound and rather obvious questions for his systematic theology, but the relevance to his public theology is clear.[48] According to his own logic, the view from below is not exclusively a Christological perspective; it is trinitarian, with each member of the godhead involved in a pain-filled sympathy for creation, a sympathy which seems to drive God's redemptive acts.

Through this, we can suggest three propositions in order to posit a relationship between divine passibility and the 'view from below ethics' appearing in Macleod's journalism. (1) Key to taking up the cross in the Christian life is 'identifying' with the oppressed and the outcast in a way

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[47] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 80. Macleod would not limit Christ's suffering to the event of the cross. He writes, 'the cross was but the climax of Jesus' suffering. His whole life from the cradle to the tomb, was suffering.' Macleod, *Christ Crucified*, 16. Presumably then, Macleod would posit that the Father and the Holy Spirit suffered with Christ in the whole of his ministry, in their own way.

[48] For instance, it would seem to challenge the idea that Christ *as* human has a unique ability to empathize with humanity. It seems to suggest that Christ' humanity is a medium through which empathy is transmuted into the Godhead.

Macleod published these ideas first in that 1983 article, but this passage as quoted above has reappeared several times across his corpus. Before these articles were republished in *From Glory to Golgotha*, Macleod inserted this same quote into his *Behold Your God* chapter, 'The Doctrine of God in Christian Discussion.' See, Macleod, *Behold Your God*, 237-8. Here he made an important addition with a paragraph added just after the quote above which asserts that suffering and blessing in God are asymmetrical. In part, he writes, 'The divine passion and the divine blessedness are not equal. They are asymmetrical, just as the suffering of the Christian and the glory of the Christian are asymmetrical (Romans 8:18). He is "the blessed God" (1 Timothy 1:11) and He chooses to encounter suffering precisely to protect that blessedness (and by implication, the blessedness of His creation). Probably, too, in a manner we can barely begin to perceive, He assimilates His passion into the very blessedness itself.'

that involves 'sharing' their sufferings and speaking for them.[49] (2) That identification is explicitly modelled upon the incarnate Christ.[50] Thirdly and crucially, (3) Christ's identification with the outcast (which is exemplary for Christian ethics) is rooted in God's eternal capacity and choice to suffer *as God*, and *as God* to sympathize with the oppressed. Thus, Macleod uses the doctrine of passibility to assert, albeit implicitly, that God, in his divine nature, takes the view from below, the very same view which is the morally normative for humanity. As a result, Macleod can present sympathy as pain-filled feelings which are morally normative for both God and man.

Two months before his first 'Crucified God' article came out in the *Monthly Record,* Macleod delivered a lecture at the Carey Conference in England where he offered what was a much lengthier exposition of the ideas that would eventually be condensed in those pieces. The hour-long lecture provides useful context to Macleod's thinking at the time. In it, he speaks with vivid imagery about divine sympathy as a painful experience for God and one which seems to lie behind his salvific actions. At one point he tells his audience of mostly ministers,

> It also seems to me that the whole concept of an unmoved God is not only bad theology, but it is thoroughly and totally immoral—the idea that God could contemplate the Belsens, the Auschwitzes, and the Aberfans of his universe unmoved—could survey them *logically*! That is not simply erroneous, it is monstrous. He beheld the city and wept over it…And no one has the right to contemplate him as unmoved by the spectacle of the plight of man…I'm not simply thinking of the Old Testament's emphasis on his passionateness, but the whole portrayal that so plainly indicates that he *does* feel and he *does* suffer. We're told that he heard the groaning of his people in Egypt, and the AV says that 'He had respect unto them.' And the Hebrew says that 'He knew.' It got right home. He heard their groaning, and he knew—in all their afflictions he was afflicted.

Here Macleod presents the Exodus story in such a way as to suggest that prior to God's mighty works of redemption were his mighty and pained feelings of sympathy. Clearly implied is that

[49] Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 72-3. Identifying with the outcast can be somewhat ambiguous because it can involved both a proximity to the sufferer (for example, moving to where those who suffer live). For Macleod it can also mean sympathizing with the sufferer and speaking on their behalf, even when that identification comes with its own costs. Macleod largely emphasizes the latter.

[50] Macleod writes, 'He identified fully with lost men, sharing their sufferings and making their cause, His cause. He became their spokesman, advocate, and at last their scapegoat.' Macleod, *From Glory to Golgotha*, 72-3.

God's pain-filled sympathy is not unrelated to his choice to respond. The logic would seem to be this: God's sympathy, which involves pain, moves God to action. At one point he pushes his language about divine sympathy even further by comparing God's experience of suffering in solidarity with creation to the human experience of love. When two people love one another, Macleod said,

> the psyche of one human being wraps itself around the psyche of another human being—gets its roots right in, and you can't separate them without the most appalling psychological harm, no matter how men may rationalize it. And God wrapped himself in, and God involved himself in—if I may use the beautiful language that describes David's love for Jonathan—the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David. You couldn't pull them apart. The soul of God in the passion of his love for his people—the soul is knit to his people.[51]

The ontological implications here are difficult to overstate (especially if one presupposes traditional Reformed orthodoxy). Taken by itself, the illustration would seem to imply that God has entered into a relationship of mutual dependence with his creation. These should also be read in the light of the qualifications Macleod later makes in his article, even if it is difficult to see how Macleod's varied statements here can be reconciled.[52] However, what is clear (and what is most relevant to the present chapter) is the way in which Macleod emphasizes God's capacity in his divine nature to take a view from below, from the perspective of his sin-oppressed people, and to rescue them because of his pain-filled compassion and pity for them.

Whose Empathy?

We should pause here to note an unresolved question in the way Macleod speaks about divine sympathy (or empathy) which is this: to what extent does God's compassionate sympathy depend on the incarnation or to what extent is the incarnation explained by a compassionate

[51] Macleod, 'The Crucified God', Carey Conference, 1982. At one point in his lecture, Macleod grounds this kind of interwoven relationship between God and man to the biblical image of God as husband in Hosea 2. 'We are told that in Hosea chapter two [verse nineteen], I will betroth thee unto me in mercies, in pities, in compassions. Compassions: looking and feeling. God brings to his marriage with his church the quality of compassion: sympathy, empathy, feeling with, feeling in his own people.'
[52] See FN 46.

sympathy which is logically prior to the incarnation? On the one hand, Macleod presents the cross as essential to the Trinity's ability to be touched by our infirmities which would seem to imply that the cross is necessary for God to have sympathy. On the other hand, he speaks of what would appear to be a logically-prior 'primaeval and permanent concern' which itself involved pain and which seems to be offered as an explanation as to why God went to the cross in the first place. Perhaps it is the case that for Macleod, God's nature allows him the capacity to suffer in the form of sympathy at some level but that the cross introduces a new capacity in God to feel an even closer empathy as he considers the suffering of his creation. Macleod is simply not clear here. Consider the way he describes this idea in his essay, 'The Doctrine of God and Pastoral Care'.

> The triuneness of God is the foundation of the divine compassion. Here we use the word in the strict etymological sense. God feels with us. He suffers with us. He is distressed with us (Isa. 63:9). This is different from mere pity. Pity sees and is moved, but it has not been there. It knows only by observation, not by experience. But compassion has been there. Even for God, the only way to learn sympathy is by experience. He has been there. In Christ, he has not only taken our nature. He has entered our history and lived our human life. He has tasted our vulnerability and pain.[53]

Here Macleod states that compassion, understood as God 'feeling with us' and 'suffering with us,' is something that is true of God even in the Old Testament (cf. Is. 63:9). However, he then goes on to suggest that God's compassion depends upon the incarnation. Perhaps Macleod would say that God's compassion (as he would define it above) is eternally true of God and yet is also contingent upon Christ's incarnation, a way of speaking we have seen him use before. Of course either approach would differ from a Reformed orthodox approach because Macleod assumes that compassion involves suffering

Related to this tension, it is also not clear how Macleod is able to hold on to the uniqueness of Christ's fellow-suffering if the whole Trinity can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

[53] Macleod, 'The Doctrine of God in Pastoral Care,' 252-3. He goes on to argue that this is an experience in which each person of the Trinity is involved (in their own way) to such an extent that 'the Father and the Spirit, too, taste death (Heb. 2:9).'

There are certainly points in Macleod's corpus—many points—where Macleod highlights the uniqueness of Christ sympathy. For instance, just a year before the 'Crucified God' articles were released, Macleod preached a sermon at Bon Accord Free Church on Galatians 4:4 where he says,

> How marvelous it is that he [Christ] remembers we are dust. Sometimes, don't you think, it is not difficult to contemplate the Son saying to God the Father in the intimacy of his exalted fellowship, 'Father, that struggling, that failing, that failing human being. He is dust. And I know that you, Father, through your omniscience, you know what it is to be dust. But I know what it is to be dust experientially.'[54]

Here Macleod makes a distinction between Christ's ability to experience empathy and God's (even if it is not clear how to understand the difference). Is it the case that Jesus does and always will have a unique ability to sympathize with our humanity or is it the case that through Christ, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit have an analogous capacity to empathize with the plight of man and in some sense 'feel' and 'suffer' with them. If the latter is true and yet only possible through the incarnation, it would seem to point to an imperfection within God that his divine nature could go from not having the capacity to suffer with his creation to being able to suffer with his creation? To put it in more broadly Reformed orthodox terminology, the implications of Macleod's logic might suggest that God needs the cross in order to fully actualize his love. Without it, he exists with the latent potential to experience in himself new forms of love, specifically the love of compassion.[55]

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[54] Macleod continues,

> And it may be tonight that someone understands what it is to be looking into an imminent providence or an actual providence and to feel the goosepimples rise, the feeling of the uncanniness and the eeriness of the providence of God—to know then that we are dust, to wonder then if we can cope. And surely as we contemplate it tonight there is in those situations no comfort but God's fellow-feeling, that by that umbilical cord that bound him to his mother he is one with us in compassion and understanding. It is terribly possible, my dear friends, even when one has many privileges and close associates—beyond most human beings—it is possible even then to feel terribly and frighteningly afraid and frighteningly alone. And there is at those moments no comfort but that—he can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities.

Donald Macleod, 'Galatians 4:4' (Sermon, Bon Accord Free Church, Aberdeen, October 17, 1982).

[55] A tantalizing third possibility has arisen with the forthcoming posthumous publication of Macleod's historical work, *From the Marrow Men to the Moderates*. In the final chapter, Macleod recounts a sermon that Hugh Blair (1718-1800) preached on Heb. 4:15. Blair takes up the question as to whether Christ's 'experimental knowledge of human weakness' could increase 'the benevolence of a nature which was already perfect' (Macleod's summary). 'No, answers Blair, but Christ submitted to become acquainted with the feeling of our infirmities, not in order to understand us better, but to give us even greater confidence in the goodness which he already possessed.' Macleod, *From the Marrow Men to the Moderates*, 306. In the context it is not clear to what extent Macleod was sympathetic to this position. These comments are set within what will probably be Macleod's last published comments on divine passibility. Over more than three full

These ontological questions notwithstanding, what is most important to the present chapter is to highlight the fact that for Macleod, God suffers with those who suffer and that is part of his glory. It is no surprise then that Macleod will sometimes portray God in his public commentaries as one whose sympathy for creation involves him in pain. Such was the case when, nine days after the Dunblane school shooting in 1996, Macleod wrote a moving editorial about how he was coping in the wake of such a tragedy.

> I tell myself, too, that God shares our anger and understands our pain. Once, when He saw the violence on earth, He said He was sorry He had ever made man. Did he groan again last week? He's had his own fair share of loss. He had to stand by in self-imposed helplessness, watching while men stripped His Son and beat Him and flogged Him and stabbed Him and hanged Him. The little ones at Dunblane were His children. Every bullet made God shudder. He couldn't look.[56]

Similarly, in a 2002 piece which spoke to questions of theodicy, Macleod says that man's willful disobedience has caused God pain. 'At first, the defiance hurt God to the quick. Then the pain He saw us inflicting on each other broke His heart. Then He came down to share our pain and to deliver us from the mess we had got ourselves into. We nailed him to a tree.'[57]

Even when Macleod speaks of Christ as God coming to suffer alongside his people, it often seems as if the implications we have just discussed are being applied and that what is being referred to is not only the empathy of Christ in his human nature but God in his divine nature. For instance, in one 1996 *WHFP* piece Macleod writes, 'This is the answer, surely, to our human sense of isolation. Wherever we are, God understands. In His Son, He became one of us… Only when I sin

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pages, Macleod critiques Blair's interpretation of Old Testament anthropopathism. *From the Marrow Men to the Moderates*, 306-9.

[56] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' WHFP. March 22, 1996.

[57] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, November 29, 2002. Consider also Macleod's comments in 1989 in the wake of the Lockerbie bombing: 'God, at Calvary, suffered the loss of His Son. He knows what it is to be bereft. His Son asked, Why? He knows what it is not to understand. He was crucified between two terrorists. His love extends to those without law. But does ours? Would *we* have given the gift of Pentecost to those who had crucified our son?' Macleod, 'Lockerbie: Darkness without Light?', *MR,* January 1989, 13. See also, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, December 21, 2001 where Macleod says that through Christ, 'There's nothing He [God] doesn't know about injustice, pain hatred, poverty and exclusion…God identifies with victims. He was a victim. In Christ, he asked us what we thought of Him and we told him.' In this piece Macleod engages with Moltmann's famous retelling of Elie Wiesel's holocaust story.

can I say God doesn't understand. For the rest, He is with us all the way. Solidarity! God with man! Giving way at last to the even greater wonder that God came not merely to share our situation, but to deliver us from it.'[58]

Conclusion

What we have shown clearly is that for Macleod, suffering has a moral value for both God and man, not in the Irenaean sense that God and man have in their nature a need to suffer in order to reach their full potential. Rather, suffering—in particular the suffering of sympathy or empathy—is morally imperative to right action in a fallen world. Both God and man have the ability to take the view from below and it is to their glory when they do so. In closing, however, it is important to recognize just how revealing these ideas are to Macleod and the theological context he has inhabited in the past fifty years.

In her essay, 'The Rise of Sympathy and the Question of Divine Suffering', Jennifer Herdt clearly argues that behind the twentieth-century shift away from divine impassibility in theological discussions was also a centuries-long shift in the way theologians have thought about sympathy (human and divine). In a statement which has thus far received too little attention in discussions around divine impassibility, Herdt writes,

> If we are to understand the roots of this modern reaction against divine impassibility, we must look to British thought of the preceding centuries, for it was during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, within the context of the moral sense school and sentimentalist thought more broadly, that sharing in suffering came to be seen as ethically valuable rather than ethically irrelevant or (as Stoic and neo-Stoic ethics insisted) morally weak. It was here that entering into the experiences of others, especially sharing in the sufferings of others, came to be regarded as necessary for an adequate response to suffering.[59]

[58] Macleod, 'Footnotes,' *WHFP*, December 27, 1996.

[59] Jennifer A. Herdt, 'The Rise of Sympathy and the Question of Divine Suffering,' *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 29, no. 3 (Fall 2001):369. The value of Herdt's article is that while she affirms the significance of early twentieth century events like World War I in shifting the mood on divine passibility, she also posits that such a shift rested on much earlier foundations.

This kind of compassion can be seen in the kind of analysis offered by Jürgen Moltmann when he says, 'Anyone who "has compassion" participates in the suffering of the other, takes another person's suffering upon himself, suffers for others by entering into community with them and bearing their burdens.'[60] It is also clearly the assumption of Macleod's fellow British evangelical leader, John Stott, who sounds like Macleod himself when he writes, 'If God's full and final self-revelation was given in Jesus, moreover, then his feelings and sufferings are an authentic reflection of the feelings and sufferings of God himself.'[61]

The value of Herdt's work is to suggest that in a cultural context where pain-filled sympathy is morally normative for humans, it is understandable why someone like Macleod and others in the twentieth century might find no moral qualms predicating suffering to God. After all, if it is commendable for a human to suffer at the sight of a human suffering, why would it not be for God? It is a reasonable question, but one which, to be answered faithfully, should also wrestle with the possibility presented by historic Christian articulations of divine impassibility which suggest that it is possible to conceive of a love which surpasses all other loves and yet does not require sympathy (or at least sympathy involving pain) in order to be perfect.[62]

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[60] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions* trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 201.

[61] Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 331.

[62] Herdt makes a striking summary in her conclusion: 'Our sentimentalist heritage has conditioned us to think that love is not love without sympathy, that love requires that we suffer with the suffering of those we love. Sympathy is a mediating principle; when others sympathetically share our suffering, we are reassured that we are not alone in that suffering. But perhaps God does not need sympathy in order to be intimately present with human beings in their suffering.' Herdt, 'The Rise of Sympathy', 394-5.

Conclusion: A Single Risky Opinion

In April 2023, one month before his death, Donald Macleod penned the Preface to his posthumous historical volume, *From the Marrow Men to the Moderates*. In it, he gives a parting account of the role of historical theology for the present day.

> Historical theology is invaluable because it means that we don't need to start at the beginning all over again. Others have gone before us: many of them, like Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin, among the most spiritually minded and brilliant intellects of their age. Between them they forged a long tradition of biblical exegesis and exposition…The result is that the modern Christian theologian is in a similar position to the modern scientist, who sees the data of the visible world, not only through their own powers of observation, but also in the light of the 'laws' already discovered by Archimedes, Copernicus, Isaac Newton, Michael Faraday, James Clerk Maxwell, Albert Einstein, and Marie Curie.[1]

This great tradition, Macleod argued, must be the assumed starting point for all theology. '[U]ntil they are falsified, the theological gains of the past remain as paradigms which we bring to the interpretation of every individual biblical text.' His own respect for that tradition is evident in the fact that his final completed book, a three-hundred-page account of eighteenth century Scottish Reformed theology. Indeed, Macleod always saw himself as a proponent of a wider catholic tradition and of the particular expression that tradition took within Scottish Reformed theology and Westminster federalism. His efforts to retrieve that legacy in his own context and to argue for its ongoing relevance will be among his lasting contributions.

That reverence for the past notwithstanding, Macleod concluded the Preface by saying that the contemporary theologian can never be satisfied with retrieval alone.

> The task of historical theologians is not finished when they have merely given a faithful account of the theological discussions of the past (including the social, economic, ethnic, and personal factors which have influenced these discussions). They must also venture, in all humility, to subject these discussions, and the conclusions they led to, to a theological evaluation. The authority of great names, or even Ecumenical Councils, is never enough. We have to move on and ask, Were their positions justified in the light of Scripture? And even as

[1] Macleod, *From the Marrow Men to the Moderates*, x.

> we ask that question, we are conscious that our own understanding of Scripture is fallible and subject to review by our peers. But we must still venture.[2]

These sentiments echo the critique Macleod made decades earlier about the work of his Free Church predecessor John Macleod which, for all its rigor, he said was 'merely antiquarian.'[3] Macleod's disappointment was palpable as wrote writes, 'One searches John Macleod's writings in vain for a single risky opinion.'[4]

Donald Macleod's doctrine of divine passibility is perhaps the chief example of his own efforts to escape that same epitaph. Here he sought to do more than to rearticulate orthodox tradition in contemporary jargon (a task which itself comes with no small risk!). Instead, he challenged the long-held assertion of the Westminster federalist and the wider catholic tradition which says that God cannot suffer. In doing so, he proposed a singular risky opinion—risky not only because it challenged tradition as such, but because it required new ways of speaking about God, His attributes, and His relationship to this world. Macleod believed the risk was necessitated by the Biblical data, even if it allowed in a number of logical paradoxes which some of the dominant streams of Christian theology, it their assertion of divine impassibility, had sought to avoid.

Probably the greatest of these (and probably the one under which all the other paradoxes are subsumed) is the challenge of holding together divine pain and divine blessedness. As we have seen, there are times when Macleod describes divine pain in such vivid terms that it is difficult to imagine how God could possibly maintain His sovereign blessedness in the midst of it. At other times he defines divine blessedness and qualifies divine suffering to such an extent that it is difficult to understand how he can affirm divine suffering in any meaningful way. Ironically, this latter tendency

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[2] Macleod, *From the Marrow Men to the Moderates*, xi.
[3] Macleod, 'The Free Church College 1900-1970,' 232.
[4] Macleod, 'The Free Church College 1900-1970,' 233.

opens Macleod up to the charge from a passibilist perspective that all too often he is guilty of the very impassibilist doctrine which he so often maligns.

God, as Macleod describes him, is indeed 'emotionally changeless' in the sense that he does not move from one emotional state to another. Mood swings are a reality unknown to Him. He is the Being One and as such, all of the dispositions within His trinitarian life and towards creation are eternal. Moreover, as strong as his language about the impossibility of *anomia* might come across, this God is one who is never caught unawares by the goings-on in the universe. Every event, good or evil, falls into place by divine decree. To the extent that Macleod can speak of change in God, it is certainly not change comparable to human beings. This God is timeless and to the extent that he can be 'hurt,' it is not like a physical wound that God must turn in on himself to address.[5] His sorrow and anger are eternally subsumed into the divine blessedness.

Given such a portrait, it has been necessary to ask whether there is more continuity between Macleod's doctrine of God and historic articulations of impassibility than may seem evident. In Chapter Three we highlighted some of those continuities. Thomas Weinandy offers a contemporary articulation of impassibility which seems like an alternative route Macleod might have taken in good conscience without losing much of his theological framework. For Weinandy, it is possible to predicate grief, sorrow, and anger (metaphorically and impassibly) to God, which allows him to speak in a way that reflects Scripture's own voice. Given that Macleod already recognizes a vast discontinuity between human and divine suffering, is it such a leap to join Weinandy and Aquinas in recognizing that negative emotions are to be predicated of God equivocally such that the terms are really attributable and yet wholly unlike their human meaning? Contrary to what Macleod sometimes

[5] One of Thomas Weinandy's critiques of divine suffering is that God if God can suffer, he cannot love in absolute freedom and altruistic love. 'If God did suffer, it would mean that God would need not only to alleviate the suffering of others, but also his own suffering, and thus there would be an inbuilt self-interest in God's love and consolation.' Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*, 160. This may be a legitimate philosophical point, but in fairness to Macleod's own construction, he never presents God who acts in any way out of selfishness. If anything, Macleod typically portrays God as one whose will is immutably steady despite his great pain.

suggested, the impassibilist position does not intend to lay aside God's heart, only his pain. Might we say that Macleod's mistake was that he never fully realized just how dynamic the impassibilist position was?

It is true that Macleod was at times guilty of presenting the impassibilist position as a caricature: God as a stone, unfeeling and unmoved by the suffering of the world. At the same time, his analogical predication of suffering to God was something that he simply would not set aside. He was adamant that passages like John 3:16 had no meaning if the cross did not involve a cost to God the Father analogous to human suffering. Whatever the difference, Macleod argued that there was genuine continuity between God's grief over His Son and what a human father might feel in the same situation. Macleod thought that such a costly love was at the heart of the gospel message. Divine suffering, for Macleod, was so clearly portrayed in the Scriptures that it had to be a presupposition to dogmatics never to be set aside, even in the face of apparent paradox.

Readers of the present thesis, having followed Macleod's logic to this point, are left to make their own judgements, which need not conclude with a simple 'right' or 'wrong.' Macleod's understanding of divine suffering is complex—worthy enough, we would argue, to merit a thesis—and therefore it requires judgement at a number of distinct points. The complexity of our judgements should match the complexity of the topic.

This research has sought to illuminate the role of this doctrine across Macleod's corpus. We have shown that, far from being an obscure opinion tangential to the rest of his work, the notion that God suffers is tightly interwoven into a wider network of ideas which are key to understanding Macleod as a theologian. To the question of 'why' or 'how' Macleod rejects divine impassibility, we have pointed to a number of factors. These include his complex attitude towards scholasticism, his particular understanding of the image of God in man, Christ as the image of God, and his view of sin and divine suffering as forms of *anomia*. We have also asserted that Macleod's theological vision

was shaped powerfully by his view of preaching in the task of theology. Finally, we showed that the influence of divine passibility can even be traced in Macleod's work as a journalist where he assumes the idea that suffering is ethically normative both for God and for man. In taking such a wide view of Macleod's work, we have been able to see the ways in which his view of divine passibility both informs and is informed by a wider constellation of thought.

Clearly then, the value of the present research for the future of Macleod studies extends well beyond what might otherwise appear as a narrow foray into theology proper. Because this thesis is the first major contribution to scholarship on the life and work of Macleod, we have had to set forth a number of original paradigms through which Macleod's work should be understood by future interpreters. To name a few, we have argued for a shift in Macleod's approach towards the idea of scholasticism over time. We have proposed the 'view from below' as the central organizing principle of Macleod's public theology. We have claimed the centrality of the doctrine of *anomia* across Macleod's corpus and have offered the first dogmatic sketch of his work there. We have proposed that his constructive appropriation of Karl Rahner's notion of kerygmatic truth is key to understanding the apparent discontinuities between his writings and homiletics. Finally, we have set forth the following paradigm: Macleod is rightly to be understood as the chief constructive inheritor of Westminster Federalism in twentieth-century Scottish Reformed theology. However, the way we understand that description must be carefully qualified, in the light of his assertion of divine passibility and the network of ideas which undergird that assertion in his work.

This final paradigm suggests the value of this thesis beyond understanding Macleod himself. Macleod was one of the most significant theologians of twentieth-century Scottish theology, shaping the direction of a whole branch of Reformed theology in the final decades of the twentieth century and into the next. As such, this thesis illuminates a much wider stream of Scottish theology. Macleod shaped a whole generation of preachers and theologians who have looked to him as a lodestar for

not only how to think about God but how to do the work of theology. It is precisely because his work continues to have a shaping influence on the theological contours of Scotland that his work needs to be studied in the coming years.

Given that this thesis has been completed only a few months after Macleod's unexpected passing, one is particularly aware of the fact that Macleod, who spent his life building upon, retrieving, and challenging tradition, has himself now become tradition. Thus, his own words, written when he was only thirty, bear a new significance as we look to future of studies in Scottish Reformed theology:

> We are standing in a continuous flow of tradition—receiving it, creating it, transmitting it. We cannot help that nor alter it. But we must ensure that it is a living tradition, and it is living only when it stands constantly under the correction of Scripture. This applies to every believer, to every denomination, even to every local tradition of piety. They need, if they are to love, the unceasing scrutiny and criticism of Scripture. And not only scrutiny and criticism but the deliberate and resolute determination to amend everything in which the tradition offends. We need continuous reformation because constant corrections alone will keep us on the course set by Holy Scripture.[6]

This was Macleod's project, and it has now come to an end. It is now the work of future theologians to adopt Macleod's insights where he has shed needed light and to challenge his legacy where more light is needed.

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[6] Macleod, 'Tradition,' *The Banner of Truth*. 98 (November 1971): 31.

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Appendix

The purpose of this appendix is to provide greater context for the way Macleod has used the theme of divine passibility in his preaching. In what follows are seven sermon excerpts which show how he articulated the doctrine of divine passibility from the pulpit and how he used it to illuminate other themes such as divine love.

Sermon 1

Genesis 22:1-2 – May 1, 1983 – Bon Accord Free Church

[Starting at 41:34]

Another thing pointed to by this great narrative is the affection between the Father and the Son. We take Abraham's love for Isaac as a parable of it. 'Thy son, Isaac, thine only son, whom thou lovest.' And Christ was all of these things to God. He was God's Son. He was God's only Son. He was God's beloved Son. And we're never going to understand the glory of Golgotha until we realize the intimacy and the preciousness—until we ask ourselves, would we have been prepared to give *our* son, *our* daughter, to the cross? And do we dare to think that we love our son or our daughter more than God loved His Son? Have we made our God so much of an abstraction—so inert, so immobile—that He has no passion left, He has no wrath, He has no jealousy, He has no pity? Had God no pity? As He saw His Son immolated and whipped and wounded and hanging dehydrated on that terrible cross. Had God no pity? Would you like to think that God wouldn't pity your son if it was your son on the cross? Would He not pity His own Son?

I am made in His image. But I could not hope, apart from grace, to retain my sanity in the context of such loss. And the God whose image I bear loved and pitied and felt because He loved His own Son. Calvary is not simply a fiction, or a collision between abstract principles. It isn't a case of justice and mercy having some kind of fabulous and mythical war. It's God's Son, God's only Son, God's beloved Son and God's eye pities, and God's heart is close to breaking because there is a forsaking and a desolation in the heart of God the Father as there is in the heart of God the Son. It is a mutual loss. It is a mutual deprivation. I do not think I could love an abstract god. I think that the humanity of Christ is the handle by which I lay hold of God and I believe that deep in God Himself there is *humanness* and that my own vestigial humanness and humanity is only the image and the vestige of His.

We have this human sacrifice, and we have this tremendously precious relationship between the Father and the Son. We have the marvelous picture which I could have taken in under my other heading possibly too, but time doesn't allow: They went both of them *together*. The father and the son towards mount Moriah. They went both of them *together*. And I feel that I see there God the Father and God the Son on that great road from Bethlehem to Calvary both of them *together*. I think that they're always talking. I see the Son carrying His own cross, a point at which the gospel is specific. And I hear the Son saying, 'I am not alone. The Father who sent me is with me.' And so, they went both of them together. At the baptism they are together. At the temptation they are together. In the desert, in the mountains, in the lake of Tiberius, they are all there together. In Gethsemane they are together. In the judgement hall they are together. And they went both of them together. And as he mounts the cross, they are together. 'I am not alone. But the father is with me.' And for some hours on the cross they are together. 'I am not alone. The father is with me.' He was being upheld and He was being strengthened by the eternal Spirit. But a point comes when that

ceases. A moment it may be. I cannot believe it was long. But for one terrible moment God the Father was not there. They were not together. 'My God my, God why? Where? Why hast thou forsaken me!'

And if I dared, if I dared one could go on to say of course God the Father was there—with a knife. But there was no comfort. There was a presence of God but it was the presence not of consolation but of anathema. The presence of his wrath. It was the presence which was not togetherness and in which there was no comfort and no relief and no joy.

But, and I'm going to close with this: You see the glorious words of verse five. 'I and the lad will go yonder and worship and come again to you.' Come again. That was the faith which sustained Abraham. God would redeem and God would salvage his promise that they would come again. But I'm taking it in another way. They went up that mountain both of them together, the father and the son went up, both together. And they came down together. Because the cry of dereliction is not the last word. 'My God, my God why?' But the last word is, 'Father into thy hands I do commit my spirit.' And in the resurrection from the dead there is again the restoration of togetherness, that Christ who says, 'I am going to my Father.' And that is where he is this morning. He went up to Calvary with Him as well. At Calvary his Father left him and His Father sacrificed Him and His Father did not spare him. But they came down both of them together. 'Glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory I had with thee before the world was.'

I am pretty sure today that you are left with no coherent impression. I am not sure that this can be made coherent. I can't pretend that I'm all that concerned whether the impression is coherent or not, I'm not very concerned that it should be. But there is something here that bombards my intellect, much that doesn't fit, much that pulls in different directions. But if there is no coherence, there is surely impression—an impression of a God who tests our faith, an impression of a God who loved His Son yet did not spare, a great picture of these two as they move from Bethlehem to Calvary, to God's Mount Moriah, but a great picture too of the two of them as they return. 'Glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory I had with thee before the world was.' At the most, the passage must speak to us impressionistically. It may be that there itself God may give us food for our souls. Let us pray.

Oh Lord we ask Thee to overlook all in us that is unworthy and all in us that is a contradiction of what Thou art. We bless Thee for thy Word and pray thee to bless it to us. Lord, we thank Thee for giving us some understanding and we thank Thee, Lord, for bringing us to a place where we see that there is so much that we do not and cannot understand. Oh Lord, for thy Son, our sacrifice, for His loveliness, for thy priesthood, for thy self-denial, for thy help given to Him on the road up to Calvary, for the way thou didst talk to Him and comfort Him and uphold him, we bless thee. Sanctify this day to us for His sake. Amen.

Sermon 2

Sermon on John 3:16 – July 7, 1996 – Buccleuch Free Church

[Starting at 18:33]

And then there is this, too. He loved so much that He gave His own, His one and only Son. That's the measure of it. And that love is proposed to you tonight in terms which all of you can understand: In terms of family ties, in terms of human relationship, in terms of the bonds of strong and deep earthly affection, the sacrifice of that which is most precious. There are many other measures of God's love: The common grace that showers upon us the blessings of culture, science, and art and civilization, an law and order and peace and quiet—God's gifts—the blessings of an environment, inspiring in its beauty and eloquent of the glory of God, the blessing of God's longsuffering, the blessings of all the human kindness and all the human encouragement that each of us has known, for which we are so enduringly grateful. God so loved us that He gave us those close to us to support us, [to] inspire, to encourage us. God so loved us that God sent His Truth into this world and sometimes God sent His angels into the world and sometimes God sent His Spirit into the world.

But the greatest thing of all is God sent His Son. That is the real measure. This thing that *I* would not have done. This thing that *you* would not have done. This thing that God called upon Abraham to do and the story of his doing it still pulls at our heart strings three thousand years later, all its poignancy and all its force. God did not spare that which was most precious. We consider who He was: The Son of God. That one in whom there was all the fullness and glory of God the Father's own nature. When God looked into the eyes of His Son, there He saw His own face. There was fellowship, mutuality, understanding, communion, intimacy, closeness. There was his own very, very kind. I have said before and perhaps you've heard me say it so I apologize for the repetition: The greatest human creativity cannot give us what is our own nature. Not the art of a Leonardo or a Michelangelo can create from our own substance, in our own image but God's Son—not created but begotten—in him there was all the glory of God. And God loved him. He was the only Son that God had. No angel was God's son in this sense. Not even the Holy Spirit was God's son in this sense, but only the eternal Son. And oh, the Spirit too was precious, but there is a uniqueness here. There is a bond here, peculiar to this one relationship. 'Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you loved.' The only son that he had.

Would we give ours? For our closest friends? Give our children for the world? God gave His only, His only Son. It may be that for some of you it opens wounds, the most poignant of all losses, the loss of a child, not something towards which any of us goes willingly. But God went towards it in grace and love because there is some point at which in agreement with His own Son He put me and my interests before the interests of His own Son. It was done mutually by covenant and agreement between them and yet it is a fact before which we stand and gaze in wonder. He gave His own one and only Son. And He gave Him so limitlessly, so unreservedly. I have often asked this text, 'Gave him to what?' And being rather annoyed that it doesn't tell me, doesn't define the giving, but I know now that it's best the way God left it because the giving is limitless, this giving of God's own Son to the humiliation of the incarnation: taking flesh, taking the form of a servant, taking the low condition, taking our earthly pain, our poverty, our temptation, our helplessness, to be there in the midst of the social problems of first century Palestine, and to feel the frustration of not being able to resolve them, to live within earshot of man's blasphemy and impiety, and because of assumed limitation, not be able to resolve and overcome, to go down to Gethsemane.

And at the risk of repetition again, the best light upon it is the light of that great verse in First Peter which tells me, 'which things the angels desire to look into.' They peered down and they peered down upon the career of the incarnate Son with increasing wonder, with growing incredulity as the story unfolded before their astonished eyes. And as one impossible occurrence was followed by another, and at how many points as they saw the Father sacrificing His own Son must those angels have said, 'This must be the end.'

I have learned the folly of saying things can't get worse. At what point did the angels learn that that was folly? Was it at Gethsemane when they saw Him bending and saw Him distraught and saw Him pleading with God that the cup might pass? Did they then breathe a sigh of relief and say, 'Well that's the end of the giving.' Or was it at the arrest? Was it at the trial? And what happened then at the moment when they nailed Him to the tree? The Maker, the Great Creator. What did they say then? 'It can't get worse.' Was it those first three hours as He hung there on that longest journey upon which a creature ever set out? The journey from the third hour to the ninth hour on the cross of Calvary—never a traveler so weighted and so burdened, never a journey so long as he carried our sin to that place of banishment that God had ordained for it. He had to go where he was out of sight of God. Can you ponder how far that was? 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' That was the giving. This giving to all that sin deserved, to that chaos, to that confusion, to that felt sense of anarchy, to that darkness, to that dark hole which alone could correspond to the anomalousness and the anarchicalness that was sin itself.

I sent a son today to Inverness and it was far enough. He gave His Son without limit. He didn't say to the powers of darkness and the forces of Hell or the executors of justice, 'So far and no further.' He said, 'Do all that must needs be done.' And did He then turn His own face away because the pain was unsustainable and unendurable?

Sermon 3

Mark 9:2-12 (The Transfiguration) – Location and Date Unknown

[Starting at 28:17]

We are told too that He [Christ] is beloved.[642] And this word interchanges in the Greek scriptures with the world 'only' or 'uniquely' or 'only begotten.' He is the only Son and He is the beloved Son. And God loves Him as he loves nothing else, as He loves no one else because He is His only Son. There is no one else in this relationship with God—not an angel, not even the Holy Spirit is in this particular relationship that only God the Son—and God the Father loves Him in a unique and special way. There is a bond here that is *peculiar*. Never had a father such a son or a son such a father.

As Christ moves into the darkness and goes down towards the abyss He is being reminded, 'Remember you are my son—and you'll always be my son. And every moment of this journey remember, I regard you as my son. And every moment I'm going to love you.' Indeed, I suspect the deeper He went the more God was loving Him—as the glory of the Son's own love manifested itself in its willingness to go ever deeper into the abyss. 'Remember I love you. And when they betray you and they arrest you and they flog you and try you and beat you and bruise you and wound you and nail you to that cursed tree, when they mock you, you remember you are my son and remember I am loving you. Remember I love you and—wait, wait, wait—I love you. You'll always be loved. There'll come moments when you'll know that I'm angry with you because you're carrying the sin of the world and you'll know I'm angry with the sin of the world and with you—with you as the bearer of the sin of the world. Remember I love you. And when it gets very, very dark and there is darkness over the whole earth, remember then that I love you. And remember when all the lights go out and you have no sense of my presence, remember then who you are, that you are my son and remember that I love you. That is the ultimate reality. That's what the universe is built on: The love of God the father for God the Son. The most important bond that is the foundation of all order. And Christ is being told that's who He is before He moves into the abyss and into the maelstrom and to the chaos, the black, black, black hole of Calvary. He is to go into it knowing that He is God's Son and that God loves Him and that's always going to be true. He must remember that.

And the disciples too must remember it because they're not going to understand. If only they had remembered the words and said that 'we heard God saying He was his Son and we heard God saying that he loved him so let's just hang on and let's just wait because it may not be the last word because God said that He loved Him.'

And it may be that some of you tonight are at the edge, in your own abyss, in your own black hole. You hang on. And if someone close to you is in that black hole you tell them to hang on because of the love of God, and always give them hope. 'You are my son, and I love you.' That's what God was saying to Him. And if there's anyone in this whole wide world that you love, you tell them the same thing. And you remember in your own darkness nothing separates you from the love of God. Nothing at all. Absolutely nothing at all. Not life, not death, not things present, nor things to come. When the kingdoms are moved, when the mountains and the hills heave and all is tempestuous and all is dark, then, hang on to the last thing. The last thing is, God loves us.

[642] Macleod translates Mk. 9:7b, 'This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him.'

So that's what is being told here. This is my Son and I love Him— such a love as you've never known. It's against that background that you and I are to ponder this fact of the pain of God on the Cross of Calvary for which sometimes we have to suffer so much ourselves. But really there is no way that God could have put Him through what God put Him through without cost to God Himself. Because God loved him as Abraham never could have loved Isaac and you image Abraham offering up His own Son, and don't you think for a moment it cost God nothing to put His Son through Hell. God only did it because He loved you. 'This is my Son, the Beloved One, and for your sake I'm putting Him through something you can't imagine. And you must never think it's because I don't love Him and you mustn't think it's because it cost me nothing.' We must never think it.

Sermon 4

Hosea 11:8 – Location and Date Unknown[643]

[Starting at 31:14]

And thirdly, this is the God who feels deeply, the God who feels deeply. Now I know that there's been a long tradition in the Christian church going back to about the second century—almost two thousand years ago—that God doesn't have feelings. God doesn't feel. And that came in because the church fell under the influence of a stoic philosophy to which feeling or passion was a sign of weakness and so they said that even the human nature of Jesus had to be without passion because passion was weakness.

And then I turn from that to this great passage in the Word of God itself! Not some philosopher, but here we are in the Word of God and there he talks in verse nine: 'I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger, for I am God and not man.' And He says there before that in verse eight, 'My heart is turned within me. My repentings are kindled together.' And you see the depth of the feeling there. The *fierceness* of *mine* anger. The fierceness of the anger of God.

And then as God contemplates this terrible situation with His church. 'How can I give thee over?' Well, in a way Justice is saying to Him, 'O, but you have no option but to give her over and to walk out on her. You have no option.' But He says, 'I am God! I'm not man!' He says. 'I am the Holy One in the midst of you and therefore my heart is turned within me. My repentings (or my compassions) are kindled together. And we have this marvelous picture of the heart of God churning and turning and this great conflict of emotions. 'My compassions are heaving! And my compassions are in turmoil.'

It's the Word of God. It's the language that God has chosen to describe Himself. This is not some indifferent God who doesn't care or who doesn't mind. This is a god capable of fierce anger and this is a god who is capable of the most tempestuous compassion, and this is a god whose heart is churning over in the intensity of emotion. That is the kind of god that he is. And that's the god who is present here tonight in His own Word and in the heart of each one of His children—this God who feels deeply.

While, where? He feels deeply our human sin, our inhumanity, our godlessness, our rejection of Himself. The response is the fierceness of His anger. God is so upset by it. And he feels keenly our human pain. He looks out tonight on this world with all its sadness, its violence, its cruelty, its poverty, its great AIDS pandemic, all the horrors of war and all the horrors of homelessness, and all the horrors of murdered children and abused children, all these horrors, and all the evils of those great refugee camps and those appalling concentration camps and God sees, and God feels.

Somebody said, 'God is the greatest sufferer in the universe.' I don't want you to take that as prosaic, literal truth. But I want you to know this from the Bible itself: 'He beheld the city and He wept over it.' Sometimes as we watch television, we find the news unendurable, so deeply disturbing. Those terrible soap operas with their constant recycling of human misery and degradation. Aren't they unendurable? 'My heart is stirred within me.' All the pain in the world. God says, 'in all their affliction, I am afflicted.' 'These,' He says, 'are my creatures. That's my creation. O, my poor, poor

[643] It is evident from references in the sermon that the sermon took place on Lewis and probably at a Free Church in or near Point. A reference to the AIDS epidemic also places the sermon sometime after 1981.

creation. My heart is stirred within me. My compassions are kindled together.' God says he feels our sin. And he feels our pain.

And when it comes to the day of judgement, He will feel it too. When that terrible moment comes when in the solemn exercise of His office as judge and in the pursuit of justice and equity God says, 'depart from me ye cursed.' In that moment when God says, 'take him down,' I think there is something awfully solemn there. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Judgement is a strange work, alien to God. Our sin has put our heavenly Father in the position where He has to say, 'Take him down. Take him down to Hell, down into the darkness, into that place of outer darkness.' That is for our sin to put God in a terrible position. Our sin has put Him there, when God has to do that which gives him no pleasure. And He will do it not because it gives him pleasure but because it is right. Because you chose to live a sinner and you chose to die a sinner and you have put God in a position where he must do what gives him no pleasure and he must do what he recoils from and you will hear those words going down to Hell: 'How can I give you over! My heart is stirred within me. My compassions are kindled together.'

And I think too of this God as he looked at the cross of Calvary, and the suffering and pain and death of His own Son. And I say to you if He found it so hard to chastise Israel as He eventually had to, how did He find it when He said, 'Awake O Sword against my shepherd and against the man that is my fellow,' when He had to take the knife, like Abraham, to His only Son whom He loved, when He had to bruise our savior. 'He has put him to grief.' Our sin brought that on God. Either He die or we die. And I think there is grief in that—grief and commotion in the heart of God. And what love must have been there when all the angels stood on the balconies of heaven and screamed at God, 'Don't do it! Don't do it! Don't do it!' And yet, He did it. God, his Son not sparing, gave him to die. I scarce can take it in.

I want to close by saying just two things briefly. One is don't be afraid to feel deeply. Don't be afraid of emotion. Some of you are hurting. Some of you are sore. Some of you are wounded. Some of you are sorrowed. Some of you are at the end of your tether. Some of you are full of joy. Some of you have known, perhaps, the revivals in this parish. Some of you have known moments of almost heavenly ecstasy, moments when you knew deep emotion and felt free to express it.

We're not stones. God didn't mean us to be stones. Let's feel deeply. There is much talk today of how to evangelize and how to witness and how to this and how to that. We're very much into the age of technologies, even spiritual technologies. What we need is not technology but passion. What I need, that I need desperately, is to feel deeply.

I have used often a quotation in which the poet Wordsworth defined poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. Christian witness is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. The feeling of joy, the feeling of thankfulness to the God who loved us. That's what we need: Powerful feeling overflowing in Christian testimony.

I'm told the story of the Lewisman in Glasgow converted and instantly beginning to preach in the open air and doing so in the broken English and Gaelic of Laxdale, disgracing all his Christian friends. And they took him aside and said, 'John do you need to? You don't need to stand on that box, this open-air preaching.' Maybe he didn't. But whatever he lacked in terms of academic excellence or posh accent he had grasped one fundamental principle. He said to these men who wanted him to desist. He said to them, 'He saved me, and he'll never hear the end of it.' [repeats in Gaelic]. That's the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings. And if we had them tonight every

one of us would have had with us in church an unconverted friend, because of that spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.

And my last point is this: This God who has feeling, we can cause intense emotion in heaven tonight, those of us who are here. There is joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, and you can be that sinner. And I tell you that if you bow tonight at the feet of Christ and cast your cares upon Him and ask Him to bear your sin and to act for you at the great throne of judgement, I can tell you there'll be rejoicing in the presence of the angels and there'll be ecstasy in the heart of God. There'll be such joy, such a thrill right through heaven. Oh, it may be that all the phones will be buzzing in Point as well and beyond Point as they say, 'Oh, so and so has been converted.' Let that be as it is. And maybe you'll feel some embarrassment going to the Meeting next week, to the Midweek Meeting, maybe you'll feel some embarrassment in that. But I tell you the great thing is they are going to be so absolutely thrilled in heaven: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit and all those angels, and this congregation too. There's nothing brings life and joy to them like a new convert. *Uan*, a lamb, a lamb! That's what they want! They want lambs and there'll be joy here, joy among the angels, joy in heaven. It's an amazing thing the power that you have: The power to cause joy in heaven. May God bless His Word to us.

1 John 4:1 – Location and Date Unknown

[Starting at 21:55]

And when we begin to ponder God's love for ourselves, that is its measure: that on that cross God is giving for us the most precious thing, the most precious being in the whole universe. And on that cross God loves Him. As the Father sees Him impaled upon that cross, He loves Him. As the Father sees Him hang, the Father loves Him. As the Father hears the cry, 'My God, My God, why?' The Father loves Him. As He witnesses all the pain and as He hears the cry for Himself, for His own comfort and His own help, then the Father loves Him. It is the core paradox and highest mystery of our gospel that at that point God is simultaneously bruising and angry with his Son and loving Him. Never was He more loveable. Never was He more loved than He was at that particular point.

It would do us who are made in His image no harm to go down in our own imaginations and listen to that cry as if addressed to ourselves by one of our own children. 'Why? Why?' Well, that's where we must begin to think about God's love: His love directed towards His own Son within the eternal Trinity, that love which never began but which simply was, that love for Christ the eternal Son, that love for Christ the humiliated Son, that love for Christ the crucified Son. Those of us who love Him, we may well ask how we would have felt if we had watched Him there. Maybe the mothers have pondered sometimes how they would have felt if it had been their son and they were in Mary's position at the cross from which unbearable sight it was John, this very apostle, who gently led her away. And let us ask then what it was for God as He saw His own Son. God His Son not sparing, that Son of His own love…

[Starting again at 35:40]

A long time ago in Scotland in the eighteenth century, God raised up a great band of men called the Marrow Men. These Marrow Men—of them Thomas Boston was the best known I suppose—they based their preaching upon a book called *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* and that book was a great and succinct statement of Reformation teaching. And one of its great features was that it pressed Christ upon every single man and woman. And the church of that day, it was so dead that it condemned Boston and his fellow preachers for being so explicit in offering and presenting Christ. And in that book, we read, 'Tell every man, Christ is dead for him. Christ died for mankind lost. Christ is there for you to come to.' And that's what God's love for every man means—that God is offering you Jesus. God is offering you Christ. And you know it isn't simply God in great and sovereign majestic detachment, but it is God in all the involvement of His own longing, in terms of Paul's words, 'He will have all men to be saved.' He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. And that's why God has sent men to *plead*, not simply to say matter-of-factly, 'Here is the gospel, A B C.' But men to say, 'We pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.' God's ambassadors.

Well, you know today, the superpowers, they are so touchy about their own honor. And you can't imagine the ambassadors of those great nations going on bended knee to the various courts on the diplomatic circle. We can't imagine Reagan pleading with Gaddafi on bended knee. And we would say, 'Well, the ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ, of the King of Heaven, he must keep his dignity. And he must simply proclaim the gospel and say to men, 'There it is whether you hear or whether you forbear.' But that's not how it is. God has sent us to *plead.* He has sent us to beseech, to bend the knee and to implore people to come to God. To every human being, tell them all, there is

good news. There's a savior suited for you. There's a savior ready for you. There's a savior and he says if you come He will in no wise cast out. And He has said to us, 'Plead with them. Beseech them to come.'

God loves all men in the sense of showering upon us the blessings of common grace. But even more He loves us in offering *you*, in offering you Christ as your savior. Let me say this, too. God's love for all men means that at last He will condemn, and He will damn only reluctantly. God, of course, will condemn and one day God will say to some—and shall I add to some of us—God shall say, 'Depart ye wicked to the place prepared for the devil and his angels.' Yes, God will say that. But His love means that He will say it reluctantly. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. God loves pardoning. God loves forgiving. God loves sinners coming in repentance to ask for forgiveness and cleansing. He has such pleasure in men's salvation. But when it comes to damnation, He has no pleasure in it. There is no joy in heaven when a sinner goes to Hell.

You remember the great picture given to us in Hosea chapter eleven. 'How shall I give thee over? I will not execute the fierceness of mine anger. I will not.' God as portrayed to us in His own Word by those great men led by Spirit—God on the threshold of judgement—God who will do what is right, but when He does what is right in damnation, we are told He does it reluctantly. 'How shall I give thee over? I will not. I won't.' He has no pleasure in it. There really is no symmetry as far as God is concerned between salvation and damnation. God loves saving. God is thrilled by salvation. God is so fulfilled in salvation.

Now of course God is glorified also. I know men's judgement. I accept that. But my Bible, not my human logic, but my Bible—God's own Word—says to me that here is something he does reluctantly, something [in] which he does not rejoice. He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked and we must accept that that is the way it's going to be. It's what God's word says to us. Rabbi Duncan said to us, Rabbi Duncan said, 'God sends men to Hell not in malice but in equity because it is the right thing to do.' Well, it gives the church of God no pleasure to see men and women, boys and girls living godless lives and it gives God Himself no pleasure to see men and women hastening towards damnation. He loves all men, pours His blessing upon all men, offers Christ to all men, has no pleasure in the condemnation of any…

[Starting again at 47:30]

So God loves us individually, God loves us knowingly, God loves us sovereignly. But above all this (as my time goes): God loves us extravagantly. There is really a prodigality about the love of God. There an exuberance. There is almost a wastefulness. There is a lack of a sense of proportion, almost a lack of balance about God's love for his people. It is so unmeasured. It is ridiculous what God does for his people. You and I would never dream of doing it for our best friends and God did it for his own enemies.

Well what did he do? Where is the extravagance? The ridiculousness of it? The incredibility of it? Where is it all so evident? Well it's evident in this: He gave His only begotten Son. Gave Him to die. Well that's extravagance. That's beyond reason! That is ridiculous! That God would go to such absurd lengths, that any love would do that. And yet God did it. Well we saw this morning in the Gaelic service the problems that that caused for the apostles. 'Far be it from thee! God's Son being crucified? God's Son even washing disciple's feet? God's Son born in a manger? That's absurd!' And yet that's the way God's love was. God gave His Son, gave His Son without limit: Gave Him to pain and shame and temptation and poverty, gave Him to death and to the cross and to the curse, gave Him in such a way that when He cried to God Himself, God wasn't able to help Him. No limits.

That's the prodigality. And when we begin to measure out to God what we shall give in response then we have missed the whole spirit of this gospel because this gospel is about not measuring. It's about not sparing. It's about not being wise. It's about not being reasonable. It's about not being predictable. It's about God going to absurd and unexpected, utterly unforeseeable lengths, in His determination to save His own people.

Sermon 6

John 3:16 – Date and Location Unknown

[From the Beginning]

One of the most amazing things as you look at the New Testament teaching with regards to our salvation is the way that so often the emphasis falls upon the love of God the Father and upon the initiative which He took in connection with man's redemption. I think that's important because we can in practice minimize both the love of God in general and the Father's involvement in particular. I think we tend to be very conscious of the Son's involvement and of the Son's love and self-sacrifice but very much less conscious of the Father's involvement and the Father's love and in many ways also of the Father's pain. And yet here [?] I propose the best known verse in the whole of scripture the emphasis falls so clearly upon the Father's involvement and upon the Father's love. And that [?] time and again in the New Testament. You find the same thing for example in Romans 8, in verse 32 where the apostle tells us that God did not spare His own Son but gave him up for us all. And there again the whole concern is to bring out as clearly as possible the Father's own engagement in our salvation and the Father's loving initiative. We have it also there in 2 Corinthians 5 where Paul tells us again that all things are of God, for He made Him that knew no sin to be sin for us.

And I would think that you could take that particular theme of the Father's initiative and the Father's love and commitment and involvement from any successive layer of New Testament teaching. The Father electing, the Father calling, the Father giving His Son, the Father preserving and keeping, the Father glorifying His own people. And as we saw last night with regard to our own election, there is nothing beyond the love of God. There is nothing deeper than the love of God. There are no reasons for our salvation beyond the love of God. And I [?] this morning stand in contemplation of Calvary, it is that context that we must clearly [?] the context of God's own love.

Calvary is not the place where Christ and the human race earned the love of God. It isn't the place where Christ secures God's love for His people. It the place where God expresses His eternal love for His people. It is not the atonement that secures the love. It is the love that provides the atonement. And we are back again with that great and final and indivisible fact: God is love. And the cross itself is not the procurement of that fact. It is an expression of God's extravagant and inexorable love for a lost world.

Now in those great words which in many ways defy our human understanding, the concern is to highlight for us the magnitude and the uniqueness of the love of God. It doesn't say here simply that God loved the world. It is saying to us that God *so* loved the world. God loved it in some extraordinary measure, in some extraordinary way. And it is upon that fact—upon this [?], upon this element of comparison, it is upon that that the whole emphasis of those words lie: The way and the measure in which God loved His own people. And I want to explore the text superficially along this particular line. In what way does God, especially upon the cross of Calvary express His own almost prodigal and to me in some ways God's ridiculous love for His people.

Well the first answer surely is this: that the love is expressed in the greatness of the gift. He gave His own Son. And it's only as we contemplate the identity and the status and the preciousness and the value of the one who is given that we can see something of what these words mean. The one who has given was God's own Son. He wasn't one created by God out of nothing. He wasn't God the Father's work of art or God the Father's manufacture. He was in no way an expression of God the

Father's creativity or God the Father's tremendous power to make things. But he was the Father's Son.

And you and I would make a mighty distinction between what we make and what we beget or what we bear. And God would make the same distinction. Because here is one in His own image. Here is one who bears his own nature. One in whom God can see His own character, His own exact and express likeness, and one to whom God can relate as person to person.

You go back into the story of Abraham and Isaac and the poignancy of the direction given to the patriarch, 'Take thy son, thine only son.' And his heart might well have said, 'Anything Lord but that.' But God demands Abraham. 'Take thy son.' And it is that demand and that necessity that God himself is facing in the situation posed by these words. The love is expressed in the gift of His son, the Son in whom there is the whole nature of God. Just as all my humanness is in my own family, so all the godness of God was in Jesus Christ. And it isn't simply that Christ was a Son, but Christ was His only Son. God gave His only begotten.

And we recall again the connections with the story of Abraham and Isaac. 'Take thy son, thine only son.' And the response of Abraham's heart, 'He's the only one I have.' And again, that same situation [is] posed here. God has many creatures, the whole physical universe with all its mighty forces and all its beauty and all its wealth and all the angels and the whole of mankind. But there is only one Son. God gave His own Son. God sent forth His own Son. God gave His only begotten Son. There is none who occupies this position apart from Jesus Christ. We might even say, if I were today to stretch your mind for a moment, that not even the Holy Spirit occupies this precise position because, precious and glorious as He is, He is not the Son of God. 'Take thine only begotten.' The only one that there is, the only one who is this exact sense is the Son of God, one who is not only a Son, not only the only begotten Son, but one who is the beloved Son. 'Thy Son whom thou lovest.' The Son in whom God saw all that was attractive and all that was lovable and all that was admirable. One who was an appropriate object of God's infinite capacity for affection. And you and I must never forget that before we ever speak of God's love for the world and God's love for lost mankind there is the eternal love that is within God. The love of eternal Father for eternal Son. So the gift is God's Son. The gift is God's only Son. The Gift is God's beloved Son. The gift is that He lost the one with whom God feels most at home, whose fellowship God most needs, whose nearness, whose association, whose company whose interaction was something of infinite moment to God. The Word was with God. We ourselves, in our humanness, we were not made for solitude, but for society and company. And we're made for society and company because we bear the image of God who himself is societal in His very nature. And God finds the fulfillment of that societalness in the fellowship between Father and Son. They had never been apart. The one had never been without the other. They'd never been separated. Not for one single moment had their fellowship been suspended or interrupted or even beclouded. They had always been together. And now God must jeopardize that fellowship. God must send away His fellow. God sent forth His own Son – sent Him away from and out of himself. And sent Him into the poverty of the Far Country. So, there is the greatness of the gift: this one who is God's Son, who is God's only Son, who is God's beloved Son, who is the Son whose fellowship was of such infinite moment to God.

And then secondly the love is expressed in this: in the unreservedness of the gift. The giving is not limited, and the giving is not qualified and the giving is not restrained. It is a terrible word, this 'God gave.' It's terrible because it's so absolute. It's so open-ended. It doesn't say given in what way or given for or to what thing, but simply given—a terrible, terrible given—a given which in all its horrendousness could only unfold gradually before the mind of the Son himself. It is given to the

extreme, to the extreme limit, to the very end of what was possible and to the very end of what was imaginable.

And it would not, I hope, be irreverent to remind ourselves as we face crises in our own lives, 'It may not be as bad as we think.' We say it to reassure ourselves. We say it to reassure others. And it is not impossible, so far as I can see theologically, that the Lord himself may have had that thought Himself cross His mind. 'It may not be as bad as you think.' But in the last analysis, it was all that He dreaded, and it was all that He feared. And I think it was more than He imagined and it was more than He feared because no man could ever know beforehand what was involved in that cross and in that dereliction and that abandonment when God gave without limits, where God did not spare, where God said, 'Awake, O Sword, against my shepherd, against the man that is my fellow,' said the Lord of Hosts.

He was given to the poverty of this world, sent into this far, far country to live in all the sensitiveness of his holiness, to live amid its squalor, amidst blasphemy, amidst godlessness, and its inhumanity, and its oppression, its injustices, its 'bent-nesses,' its degradations, and its corruptions. He was given to that without limit. He was given to physical pain of a most exquisite and sustained kind, into the details of which I need not go. He was given to the very darkest limits of our human emotions—to the depths of despondency, given to the [?] of fear and foreboding—his soul exceeding sorrowfully unto death, terrified by the imminent promises of God. He was given to satanic temptation. He was given to death. He was given at last to sin. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us.

And you can only see the grandeur of it if we bear in mind how unthinkable in the abstract it must have been that any of those things I've mentioned should have come close to God—that God should move into poverty, that God should move into pain, that God should know temptation, that God should taste death, that God should bear sin. You know, when the Lord told the apostles that he was going to be betrayed and was going to suffer, they found the whole thing unimaginable. 'Far be it for thee. That's impossible!' How can the messiah, how can He be humiliated? And how can He be betrayed and how can the messiah die? And they'd have said even more. How can these things come [?] to the Son of God? Cicero, in fact, tells us that the cross was unthinkable for a Roman citizen. It was unimaginable that someone who was a citizen of that great empire could suffer the ignominious pain of crucifixion. Let it never come near the body of a Roman citizen. A Roman must be spared. He could not be given with that absoluteness and that open-endedness. There must be limits, and had you and I sat down beforehand to plot the limits of any possible incarnation—had we sat down to work out those things from which God must be protected even should he become man, we'd have said, 'Of course, there'll be no poverty. Of course there'll be no pain. Of course there'll be no temptation. Of course there'll be no death. And of course he won't be anywhere near sin. We'd have said all these things.

But God came and God gave his only begotten Son, and the giving was without limit. It went right over the edge of reasonableness and beyond the bounds of the imaginable. It went to the inconceivable extreme. That's what God did in the giving of His own Son. His Son became a sacrifice. He became a burnt offering—a holocaust. Remember the holocaust: it had no protection, there were no limits. The fire consumed it. That's the way it was with Christ. There were no limits. The only limit was the limit that he by his own obedience would ultimately set. He'd have to find his own protection, build up his own barriers—the barriers of his own obedience. But on that cross the malice of men and the powers of Hell and the wrath of God, they have unlimited access to Him and they beat in all their horrific force upon His soul.

And we'd have said, 'Why, when the worst comes to the worst—amid all the poverty and all the pain and all the temptation and all the death and all the sin—He will at least have one great consolation for which He ought to be thankful. He'll have the presence of God and the help of God. And He'll know the love of God.' And of course we know what that is because in our own experience that's how it is. We have all these things. We have God's love and God's nearness. 'When thou goest through the waters, I will be with thee. And through the flood they shall not overwhelm thee, neither shall the fire kindle upon thee.' Thank you, Lord. Because whatever our providence, 'I am with you always to the end of the world.'

But Christ didn't have that. The one consolation left to the tortured and left to the martyred and left to the abandoned, the consolations and comforts of faith, the sense of euphoria deriving from the presence and comfort of God—these things which down the centuries have sustained so many who have bore witness to the truth—these things were not given to Christ. Because the extreme is that *at* the extreme, when He cries to God and He might say to God, 'Lord, I've heard that man's extremity is God's opportunity.' And He might hurl the great cliché at the God of heaven and earth. But there was no answer. He cried but God did not hear. Instead, it was the Lord who was bruising. It was the Lord who put him to grief. Instead, 'My God, my God, hast Thou forsaken me.' God! He wasn't there.

And of course, He had always been there. He had been there in eternity. The Word was with God. And he'd been there in all that great road from Bethlehem to Caesarea and Gethsemane, right up to the cross itself. God had always been there, and He'd been so accustomed to all the comfort of God's presence and God's nearness. And then at the extreme and at the bottom of the abyss, in the dark of the storm, at the most intense point in darkness when the need is most acute and the grief is most urgent and then He cried—and there is nothing. There is nothing but emptiness. There is no indication of anyone who cares, of anyone who can give any support. He is now simply the given one. He is the cursed one. He is the sin-bearer and that is the whole of his status and the whole of is definition. That is what he is. The love is expressed in the unreservedness of the giving.

Sermon 7

Luke 19:41 – Date Unknown – Partick Highland Free Church

[Starting at the beginning]

Now these words have sometimes been an embarrassment to some sections the Christian Church and there have been attempts, going back to very ancient times, to remove them from the actual manuscripts of the New Testament. And it is because men have felt that there is some kind of inappropriateness and some kind of impropriety in portraying the Lord Jesus Christ as weeping. Now of course this kind of caution is wholly misplaced because the words are a reminder to us of a pity and a compassion that lie right in the depths of the being of God himself. And it is perfectly proper that Christ, even as a divine person, should be portrayed in this way because this weeping expresses so admirably the depth of his yearning, the depth of his pity as he contemplates the plight of man. And of course, alongside of that it is in perfect accordance with the humanity of Christ that he should be portrayed as one who wept because our Lord had the same kinds of affections, the same kinds of attachments and loyalties and emotions as we ourselves possess and exercise as human beings. And it is also a reminder to us that Christ was not averse to the expression and even the [?] expression of the emotion which he was feeling. There was a pity. There was an expression of that pity in weeping. There was an application of that pity in the whole of his own mission and ministry.
…

Now I want to look tonight, fundamentally, at this. What were the reasons for our Lord's weeping? Why was his heart so broken? Why was his compassion so stirred? Why was he so emotionally overborne that what he feels in the depths of his heart must well up and find expression in this way. Why is the Christ of God weeping over Jerusalem?

He is weeping, first of all, because of the misery within that city. It has been said that a great city is a great evil. And Jerusalem was no exception. We find in the gospel narratives that every form of human misery was found within its walls. There was the usual [?] of disease and of bereavement. There were all the problems of the imposition of a conquered nation, the capital of an occupied country. There were broken homes. There were abandoned families. There was mental illness. There was oppression. There was poverty. There was unemployment. There was every kind of degradation, every form of misery. And Christ who had seen so much of it and who had tried to heal so much of it sees it, almost overwhelmingly at this moment, sees that city down below, sees with the eye of his mind all the misery that that great mass of humanity represents. And as he thinks, even on the temporal condition of these men and women, the conditions of their early life, the vanity, the frustrations, the hopelessness, the oppression, the poverty. We are told that he weeps.

And surely tonight, the church, which is his body, as it contemplates our own civilization, must be moved in the same way. We ought to reflect more than we do on the depth and the variety of the misery around. And the oppression, the poverty, the squalor that exists even in our own welfare state, to remember the heartaches, the agonies of bereavement, of estrangements and desolations and separations, of broken homes, of abandoned families, the temporal misery of so many of the elderly, the misery of so many children for whom nobody seems to care, the hopelessness of so

many of adolescents and teenagers who tonight are already well-established on the road to crime and to total moral abandonment. And it is so easy for us to cocoon ourselves in our own domestic security, in the coziness of our own congregational life, in the comparative purity of our own Christian evils, and be blind to the degradation and the misery and the poverty that characterizes so much of our urban civilization.

And you'll remember something else, that Christ doesn't simply weep over it, but Christ in his earthly ministry, gets to grips with it. The miracles are not simply demonstrations of his power. They are not simply signs of his divine grandeur and his messianic glow. They are also Christ's assault upon the misery that he finds around him. He has come to destroy the works of the devil. Now the Church tonight does not possess those miraculous powers. We cannot go and heal the sick. We cannot go and raise the dead. We cannot go and feed the multitude. But the Lord has called his church to exercise a ministry of compassion. The Lord has established the church—*in* the church—a diaconate for the care of its poor. The Lord has established in the church that there be almsgiving for the relief of human misery. It is a fundamental principle that in every local congregation care must be taken that there is none among us that lacks. Now we must be careful of it.

And of course, today the need is not so much for tangible economic gift. The great need is for the provision of solidarity, of fellowship, of comfort, and of support. We live here in this city piled on top of each other and yet there is so little real fellowship. There is so little rapport. And it is absolutely imperative for the church that it must be a fellowship. It must itself be a community of healing and a community of friendship. It is a place for the lonely, where they will find not solitude and not isolation, but they will find acceptance and they will find comfort and they will find that men will not measure them, and ask, 'Are they clever? Are they prestigious? Are they themselves morally attractive?' But we are prepared to accept. We have so little idea of the utter isolation of so many of the men and women who inhabit this city.

And the Christian church, it must be a great center of teaching. It must be a place in which testimony is borne to the principles of God's Law. It must be a place in which testimony is borne to the doctrines of God's gospel. It must be a place within which there is the salutary Christian discipline. But it must also be a community in which there is healing, in which there is fellowship, in which there is acceptance, in which there is mutual help, and there is mutual support. Christ beholds the misery. Christ weeps over the misery. Christ gets to grips with the misery and the Christian church in every age, depending upon its own environment and its own particular local context must in the same way get to grips with the misery around us and with the misery among us.

And then there is the second reason why Christ weeps. He weeps because the judgement of God lies over that city and because the expression of that judgement is imminent. He tells us, 'The day shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee and keep thee in on every side. They shall lay thee even with the ground. They will not leave one stone upon stone.' They will not leave one human being, one child alive—this great community, with all its historic privileges…[?]…That community which has stoned the prophets, and killed those who God has sent, and which at this moment is on the threshold of the rejection of its own messiah, the forsaking of its own mercies. And over that community there lies the imminent judgement of almighty God. And soon that sword will fall—fall in appalling temporal calamity so that not under the whole heavens has been done as has been done upon Jerusalem. The Lord sees that judgement, sees its

imminence, and as he reflects upon this, that it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God, his heart is overborne, and he weeps.

And perhaps tonight, without dogmatism or any pretense to any kind of prophetic vision, we might remind ourselves that the nations and civilizations that sow the wind, they reap the whirlwind—that as a nation sows within history, so that nation will reap. Those wheels of God grind slowly but they grind exceeding [?]. And whatever the future may hold for our Western civilization, it is beyond argument that they deserve that judgement. God may suspend it, and God may reserve it, but the judgment of nations takes place within history. And we must acknowledge before God in our own corporate solidarity, in our identity as a nation, in our identity as a civilization, that we ourselves deserve [?]. There is always a proviso that God doesn't deal with us as we deserve but we must reflect upon the solemn possibility that already, latent, within the march of our civilization and the progress and the path which events are taking, if we move further and further into secularism, into the repudiation of Christian values, then we expose ourselves to the judgment of God.

But there was more. Because the judgement over that city wasn't simply a temporal judgment. It was a temporal judgement indeed, but that itself was symbolic of something more solemn, and something more awe-inspiring. These were the branches of the vine. They had borne no fruit. And they were to be cast into the fire and burned. Our Lord looked at a godless city. He knew that it must walk very soon through the appalling holocaust of God's judgment, but he knew more: that the vast majority of its inhabitants must spend their eternity in an outer darkness. They were men accountable to God. They were men of immense spiritual privilege, but all the privileges had proved unfruitful. And so, they lay under the anathema of the Lord. And Christ contemplates the implications of that. And he weeps.

You remember William Chalmers Burns, used mightily by God in Dundee, while McCheyne was in Palestine, was the instrument of great revival. He went afterwards to China as a missionary and he was one day walking the streets of this city and it came home to him with overwhelming force that dozens and hundreds of men and women were passing and it dawned on him that so many of these were in the same condition—without God, without hope, lying under the judgement, lying under the condemnation. And he was so overwhelmed that he had to turn aside into a close because he couldn't bear to see the multitude.

We must ask ourselves tonight, where do we stand in doctrine of judgement? Do we believe that one day we'll stand before the throne of God ourselves? Do we believe that many of those whom we meet in our own neighborhoods and localities, our own professional colleagues, our own social acquaintances—do we accept indeed that these men and women lie under God's judgement? And do we know and believe that unless they repent, they shall all likewise perish?

And do we ourselves react to it as the Christ did, as we lay our great strategies for our families and we form our ambitions, we [?] careers and we wish for them all kinds of temporal comforts and eminence and prosperity. And do we as parents really contemplate the solemn possibility that they may leave this world with knighthoods and leave this world with peerages and go into a lost eternity? And what then shall be the value and relevance of every earthly distinction? And can we tonight contemplate our own neighborhood, even those little children who are often such nuisances around our church. And do we realize that they too are to be wept for? And are to be wept over because

they have no protection. They have no argument. They have no case. They have no [?]. They have immortal souls and they have immortal lost souls. And Christ as he sees them, he weeps.

And unless we can recover this kind of compassion. Unless we can stand with Paul and say that we know the terror of the Lord, unless we can learn to weep for men and women then we can never motivate ourselves in an evangelistic direction. And what right have we, to play at being churchmen, to play at being Christians, if we are negligent of this great primary concern that there are lost men and women to be wept over and that here again, we cannot be content with it.

But we must go beyond that. We have no right simply to try and rouse emotions in the church on this great question. We have no right simply to go home and pray for it. We have to get ourselves involved in pointing a lost world to the Lamb of God who bears the sin of the world. And we have no right to say to ourselves we can't do it well. We haven't gifts. We haven't eloquence! We must be prepared to lisp and stammer for Christ. Men should realize it is tremendously difficult but if it is worth doing it is worth doing badly. And it is only pride that so often prevents our getting involved. We don't want to expose our stammer. We don't want men to know that we've got a lisp, that we're not good at writing with words, that we're not very clever. We must learn to stand on that, because these men's souls are more important than our feelings and our dignity. We must learn to lisp for Christ. We must learn to stammer for Christ. We must learn to point men to that lamb of God who alone bears the sin of the world.

Let me put it otherwise. You see the great problem is this. for the moment, not only are these children, whose voices you can hear at this very moment outside the building, not only are they lost, but there are those in this building itself that are in the same situation. And they are to be wept for.

And I tell you more. They are being wept over at this moment because the heart and the tenderness and the pity of Christ is not changed. He is tonight a living savior. He is the glorified savior. But he is still tender and loving and compassionate. He still beholds this city and weeps over it. He looks down upon those elderly men and women who tonight are without God and without hope and he's full of pity. He looks at the middle-aged, at the adolescents. He pities you, for all your problems. You may have domestic or economic or professional difficulties—Christ is weeping over them all.

But above all, your estrangement from God, your appalling spiritual peril, the fact that you lie under the anathema, that you've no hope. The great peril that you may land in the blackness of darkness forever. That moves him. This great weeping. It is the weeping of a savior's love. He so loved that he came to save. He so loved that he mourned, he so loved that he invites and that he pleads and that he says, 'How I would love to gather you under the shelter of my wings to bring you within the efficacy of my ministry, to bring you within the covering of my sacrifice. How I would love to serve you! How I'd love to help you!' Because the weeping is the weeping of love. It's the weeping of pity. It's the weeping of longing. It's a weeping that means that if we come, we shall in no wise be cast out. And it doesn't matter tonight who we are. It doesn't matter what the record is. It doesn't matter what all the debts in the ledger amount to. It doesn't matter how much in the remembered past you were utterly ashamed of us, despicable and contemptible. There is a weeping that means that if you come, you will in no wise be cast out.

But I say it again, little children, because perhaps you feel it's only for the older ones. But I say, remember, you too are going to be judged. Remember the little children, those who can understand

me, you little children, can be lost too. Perhaps you've no shepherd, perhaps you've no savior. Perhaps you're not born again. Perhaps you don't pray. Perhaps you haven't got your sins forgiven. And perhaps then you're lost. And Christ is weeping over you. Because Christ is so sorry you're lost. And Christ is so concerned that you might be eternally lost, and Christ wants us to come. And he doesn't want us to come when we're seventeen, or to come when we graduate or when we get our qualifications or when we marry, or when we've sown our wild oats. But he wants us to come now, whoever we are. And he is weeping because we're not saved. He is weeping because we're lost. And he is giving to the very young listener this great, great assurance. If you come, I won't cast you out. The great fact of the divine pity.

I would say to you, children. I don't know what picture you have of God. There are some men, and they think of God as a force, difficult to conceive. Others who are very much closer to the mark, think of God as an old man with white hair. That's closer, but again that's not the real truth. But I would say to you this. If you want to have just one great idea of God, one and no more. If you were told by somebody you can just have one picture of God—one concept, one idea— then I would say to you, write this one on your memories. Never forget it. Remember that once upon a time you heard a particular man, and he drew your attention just to one great thing and he said to you as a little child, if you're going to have one concept, one idea of God, then have this one: A man who weeps over people who are lost. God who became man and who as man wept over people who were lost. A god you can always go to, a god who wants you to go to him and a god with whose mercy we trifle at our own peril.

So we have this Christ weeping because men and women and boys and girls are lying under God's terrible judgement. And I want you to perhaps keep that great picture in view, that great idea, that great [?] of God weeping over people who are lost.

So, there are two great reasons why Jesus weeps. He weeps because of the misery in the city. He weeps because of God's judgment over the city. And I would mention then just one third reason. He weeps because these people have refused the only way of salvation. They were miserable. And they were condemned, but God had done great things for them. He had sent His Son to them, to teach them and to plead with them. And His Son had told what God had told him to tell. And the son had told them of the righteousness of God, told them of the mercy of God. The Son had pled with them to repent and to ask God for forgiveness and the great tragedy, the thing that really at last Christ found insupportable was that they rejected the salvation, the last hope, the only possibility. The only door there was they slammed it shut upon themselves. And that, above all, was what moved the Savior's tears.

There are two great problems. First of all, this: we're told in verse 42, 'The things of their peace were hidden from their eyes.' Christ was crying because they were so blind. There was the mercy of God. There was the glory of God there was the glory of the eternal life, and they couldn't see it. And how like ourselves. We have such clear vision—for everything that is economic, for everything that is social, for everything professional. We are so sharp as to our own interests at so many points, quick to spot our own advantage. And then God comes. We don't know it. The hope of salvation comes and we don't recognize it. There is the most tremendous possibility of being an heir of God and we don't recognize it because we're blind and as Christ fought with the blindness of these people, the energy they expended, the efforts they made, the lengths they went to for little [?] and yet when God

in glory and Christ and salvation stood before them, they were like blind men. It meant nothing to them.

You have that great picture of the Roman soldiers at the foot of the cross, sitting down, they watched him there. It was nothing to them. We can imagine these soldiers talking about everything under the sun, but Jehovah Tsidkenu, as McCheyne said, he meant nothing to them. God in Christ. There was the most marvelous spectacle in the whole universe. There was something taking place which wasn't simply historically unique. It was more than that. It was something inconceivable. The blood of God was being shed. And it was nothing to them!

As we go through this life, many men will you many great things and portray for you many possible advantages you could well seek for yourself. Now tonight as I lisp and stammer from this pulpit, I know that for all the inadequacy in the delivery, that I am offering you something so grand and so glorious that nobody can ever surpass it. Men can preach the gospel better, but not a man can preach a better gospel than this: A weeping savior. But we are so blind and Christ weeps over that blindness.

There was more than that. There was obstinate unbelief. 'I would have gathered but you would not. You were unwilling.' How do we speak? I think more and more that a question we very often use is a highly improper question in our situation and it's this: Are you converted? I don't find it in scripture. I'm not saying it's theologically improper. But I think it is often pastorally unwise because it means we're putting the blame on God. We're asking has God converted you? But God has taught me, and God has warned me, and God has pled with me, and God has besought me, and God has been on his knees to me. God has said to me, 'Come.'

Now I would say to you go home and think on it. I would say don't even go home, but think on it here and now—that God is not to blame for your lost condition, but you were unwilling. You can say you don't feel things. You don't see things. You find the most marvelous and almost modest excuses for not being a Christian, but I tell you, if you're putting the blame on God in any way whatsoever, be careful. I would say that if God has pled with you, then you must see your non-Christian standing as simply this: you're unwilling. Don't say anything more about it. You're unwilling. And that's all. You would not. There is a weeping savior. This God in Christ saying come, and whoever comes will in no wise be cast out.

Now again the time is gone tonight. We shall close with a benediction: Bless thy word, O Lord. Bless our following Gaelic service and thy servant who conducts it. Help us, O Lord, to become willing to come to thee and to accept thy salvation. And now may grace and mercy and peace from God be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.