



God Suffers for Us: A Systematic Inquiry into a Concept of Divine Passibility

J.Y. Lee

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Dietrich Bonhoeffer, writing in his cell in a Nazi prison, expressed a most remarkable idea. "Men go to God in His need. " This is the insight, he observed, which distinguishes the Christian faith from all other religions. It is a universal belief that God, or the gods, should come to help man in his mortal, human need. But this is not the God and Father of Jesus Christ. Even as Jesus in Gethsemane chided his disciples for their sloth in not keeping watch with him during his agony, so God the Father must look to His creatures for their faith and sympathy. Therein lies the basis for the Christian answer to man kind's perennial complaint: Why do men suffer? Not all theologians, believing Christians, or believers in a personal God can share this idea. Traditionally the Eastern Orthodox thinkers have adhered to the rule of apophatic theology: that is, there are boundaries of knowledge about God which the human mind, even when enlightened by revelation, cannot cross. So who can say that God the Eternal One is susceptible to what we call suffering? It is better to hold one's silence on so deep a mystery. Still others are loathe to acknowledge God's passibility for varying reasons. God is ultimate and perfect; therefore he cannot know suffering or other emotions. God is impersonal; therefore it is meaningless to ascribe personal, anthro popathic feelings to Him. Many angels may fear to tread on the ground of this most difficult question.

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