

Immutability, Impassibility and Divine-Temporal Relations

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Building on the examination of simplicity and eternity offered in the previous chapter, I will now examine divine immutability, impassibility and divine-temporal relations. This will first involve an investigation of the classical texts in order to establishing a consensus among patristic and medieval writers supporting the classical position. Then, I will describe the openness critique of immutability and impassibility followed by a classical evaluation of the openness doctrine of divine change and divine passibility. Furthermore, I will provide a summary evaluation of the open doctrine of divine-temporal relations to demonstrate the classical position to be a superior mode of relating since God's unchangeable pure actuality makes him the most dynamic of all relational beings.¹ The most sophisticated open theology on immutability, impassibility and divine-temporal relations offers no detailed analysis of the best literature coming from ancient and medieval sources.² Because of this, there are significant misunderstandings that are pervasive throughout their works. Furthermore, to date, I am unaware of any open theologian who is competent in ancient Greek Philosophy, distinguished in the field of patristic thought or familiar enough with Thomistic philosophy who has published and/or addressed the arguments and interpretations from some of the most erudite and competent modern scholars on the subject such as Etienne Gilson,³ Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange,⁴ David Burrell,⁵ Brian Davies,⁶ Rudi Te Velde,⁷ Thomas Weinandy,⁸ Andrew Louth,⁹ Henry

¹ The biblical insufficiency of the open view will be addressed in chapter 7 by dealing with their approach to religious language and analogy.

² There has been very little source documentation offered by open theologians substantiating their critique of Aquinas, Augustine and others on this subject, despite the fact that most open works published on the issue do make reference to the important figures addressing immutability and impassibility.

³ Etienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy; History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955); *The Christian Philosophy of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956); *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1952).

⁴ Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange, *God: His Existence and Attributes*, Two Volumes (New York: B. Herder Book Co., 1934, 1936); *The One God* (New York: B. Herder Book Company, 1943).

⁵ David B. Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

⁶ Brian Davies, *Philosophy of Religion: A Guide and Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁷ Rudi Te Velde, *Aquinas on God: The 'Divine Science' of the Summa Theologiae* (Aldershot, Hants (UK): Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

⁸ Thomas Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); *Does God Change?*

⁹ Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981).

Chadwick,¹⁰ Jaroslav Pelikan,¹¹ G.L. Prestige,¹² J.N.D. Kelly,¹³ Joseph Owens,¹⁴ Paul Gavrilyuk,¹⁵ Simon Oliver,¹⁶ Michael Dodds¹⁷ and Leo Elders.¹⁸ Moreover, open theology has largely overlooked the vast orthodox patristic and medieval opinions of God's immutability and impassibility.

On God's Immutability and Impassibility: The Patristic and Medieval Consensus. By surveying patristic and medieval thought on the matter, it is difficult to discover a single orthodox father who denied the unchanging nature of God. Pelikan notes that the early Christian notion of God "was controlled by the self-evident axiom, accepted by all, of the absoluteness and impassibility of the divine nature".¹⁹ Most early discussions concerning immutability and impassibility grew from an attempt to reconcile these attributes with the incarnated Christ. Robert Grant suggests that there existed a common assumption among early thinkers such as Plutarch that the Jews and the Syrians share a "universal notion that God is not perishable and does not come into existence".²⁰ Grant further states there existed a shared "common understanding of two cardinal attributes of God....First, he is immutable....Second, he is the ultimate cause of all things or, as one might say, the ground of being".²¹ It appears it is from this two-fold starting point—God as first cause of all being and his unchangeable impassible nature—that the patristic notion of God was formed.

Early and middle second-century apologists such as Aristides, Athenagoras and Theophilus argued against the pagan notions of deity in favor of an immutable God. As he

¹⁰ Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

¹¹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993).

¹² G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought* (London: SPCK, 1952).

¹³ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1960, 1965, 1968, 1978 [revised edition]).

¹⁴ Joseph Owen, *A History of Ancient Western Philosophy* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc. 1959); *The Doctrine of Being in the Aristotelian Metaphysics* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1963); *An Elementary Christian Metaphysics* (Houston, TX: Center for Thomistic Studies, 1985).

¹⁵ Paul Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)

¹⁶ Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (Oxford: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁷ Michael J. Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love* (Fribourg: Editions Universitaires Fribourg Suisse, 1985).

¹⁸ Leo J. Elders, *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1990).

¹⁹ Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition I: The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)*, (Chicago: University Press, 1971), 229.

²⁰ Robert M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1966), 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

articulates his reasons for rejecting the deity of the natural world, Aristides distinguishes the changing natural elements from the unchanging God of the Christian faith when he says:

Let us proceed then, O King, to the elements themselves that we may show in regard to them that they are not gods, but perishable and mutable, produced out of that which did not exist at the command of the true God, who is indestructible and immutable and invisible.²²

In contrast to man who is “subject to anger and jealousy and desire and change of purpose and has many infirmities”, God has none of these.²³ Like Aristides, Athenagoras declared that God is “uncreated” and “immovable, and unalterable”²⁴ and should be understood as distinct from the changing created elements. He adds that God is “uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible” and “illimitable”.²⁵ Theophilus offers an extended list of the attributes of God in this way:

For in glory He is incomprehensible, in greatness unfathomable, in height inconceivable, in power incomparable, in wisdom unrivalled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness unutterable....²⁶

He continues:

And He is without beginning, because He is unbegotten; and He is unchangeable, because He is immortal....But He is Lord, because He rules over the universe; the Highest, because of His being above all; and Almighty, because He Himself rules and embraces all.²⁷

Furthermore, when offering a critique of Plato’s view of uncreated matter in relation to the platonic concept of God, Theophilus asserts:

But if God is uncreated and matter uncreated, God is no longer, according to the Platonists, the Creator of all things, nor, so far as their opinions hold, is the monarchy of God established. And further, as God, because He is uncreated, is also unalterable; so if matter, too, were uncreated, it also would be unalterable, and equal to God; for that which is created is mutable and alterable, but that which is uncreated is immutable and unalterable.²⁸

In each instance, these apologists juxtapose God’s immutability and impassibility with the backdrop of the inanimate world and finite limitations of man, removing any concept of divine

²² Aristides, *Apology* [Greek Version], IV, in Allan Menzies, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 9 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1896, 1897, [reprint edition]), 266.

²³ *Ibid.*, VII, in *Ibid.*, 268.

²⁴ Athenagoras, *A Plea For Christians*, XXII, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 140.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, X, in *Ibid.*, 133; Cf. *A Plea For Christians*, XVI.

²⁶ Theophilus, *Autolytus*, I.3, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1885 [reprint edition]), 89-90.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I.4, in *Ibid.*, 90.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, II.4, in *Ibid.*, 95.

identity inherent in the natural order. Therefore, we may deduce that the crucial point of separation described God by examining what cannot be joined to the divine nature. God must not be like the pagan deities that are ascribed changing emotions, minds and natures. On the other hand, immutability and impassibility ensure that God possesses those qualities that are reserved to his nature alone and not inherent in the creature. While the early apologists certainly did not attribute changing emotions and nature to God, they did protect his emotional attributes by describing God as possessing anger and love. The orthodox notion of immutability and impassibility were not in opposition to God's passions, but delineated an ontological line of demarcation between creation and the Creator. That is, they set the unique mode and negative limit to God's passions. In this sense, then, God's passions and immutability are primarily founded on what he is not.

Irenaeus viewed human vocabulary as unfit to literally describe the unchanging and impassible nature of God. For him, God is "without beginning and without end, and being truly and forever the same, and always remaining the same unchangeable Being".²⁹ God is "He who is impassible".³⁰ His distinction between the changing natures and passions of men and the altogether otherness of God stand in stark contrast to the Gnostic notions of God participating in change via intermediary aeons. In an attempt to avoid God's radical detachment from the material world offered by the Gnostics and to allow for the divine mode of passions to relationally operate among creation, he eliminates all creaturely literal modes of passionate predication in this way:

By their [Gnostics] manner of speaking, they ascribe those things which apply to men to the Father of all, whom they also declare to be unknown to all...while at the same time they endow Him with human affections and passions....His thought are not like the thoughts of men...For the Father of all is at a vast distance from those affections and passions that operate among men....And so, in all other particulars, the Father of us all is in no degree similar to human weakness.³¹

Through his elimination of all things limited and changing from the nature of God, Irenaeus accomplished several important things. First, he set God's nature apart from all that had a beginning, something that had not been done in the Gnostic worldview. Moreover, he presses the logic of distinct natures when he exposes an inherent flaw in the Gnostic worldview when he says:

²⁹ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.34.2, in *Ibid.*, volume 1, 411.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II.12.1, in *Ibid.*, 371.

³¹ *Ibid.*, II.13.3-4, in *Ibid.*, 374.

Now, if the beings generated by the Father be similar to their Author, then those who have been produced must remain for ever impassible, even as is He who produced them; but if, on the other hand, they are of a different substance, which is capable of passion, then whence came this dissimilar substance to find a place within the incorruptible Pleroma?³²

Through his *ex-nihilo* view of creation and his understanding of analogy between cause and effect, he effectively prevented the deification of man and the demotion of the nature of God. Second, Irenaeus provided a context in which his Christian readers could overcome the mistaken notion that a transcendent immutable God could not relate to his creation with real emotions. Unlike the Gnostic tendency to bifurcate God's love and justice as two separate attributes possessed by two different Gods,³³ Irenaeus unites the two attributes in one simple, immutable and impassible God, which is a far more radical supposition than what his opponents offered. How can he do this? It appears that God's anger which often manifests itself in wrath, and his love/goodness which often manifests itself in salvation, are corollaries of each other. For without God's anger with evil, he could not demonstrate his love, goodness or sacrificial justice:

For He is good, and merciful, and patient, and saves whom He ought: nor does goodness desert Him in the exercise of justice, nor is His wisdom lessened; for He saves those whom He should save, and judges those worthy of judgment. Neither does He show Himself unmercifully just; for His goodness, no doubt, goes on before, and takes precedence.³⁴

Irenaeus is an important link in the ongoing tradition that placed God in a decidedly biblical vein where his immutability and impassibility were the marked characteristics that afforded a synthesis between the transcendent and relational aspects within Christianity.

Origen offers a challenge to the traditional perspective of immutability³⁵ and impassibility due to his radical statements on the transcendence of God. God's transcendence appears to remove from man any direct knowledge of God and removes from God the traditional passions often ascribed to him such as anger. Origen's belief in God's "wholly otherness" (*totaliter aliter*) led him to claim:

We speak, indeed, of the 'wrath' of God. We do not, however, assert that it indicates any 'passion' on His part, but that it is something which is assumed in order to discipline by stern means those sinners who have committed many and grievous sins. For that which is called God's 'wrath,' and 'anger,' is a means of

³² Ibid., II.17.3, in Ibid., 381.

³³ See the example of Marcion of Pontus recorded in Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I.27.2.

³⁴ Ibid., III.25.3, in Ibid., 459; see Ibid., IV.14.2.

³⁵ Origen says, "The doctrine of the Jews and Christians, which preserves the immutability and unalterableness of the divine nature" is "an article of faith that God has said, 'I change not'" (*Against Celsus*, I.21, in Ibid., volume 4, 405).

discipline....Moreover, that 'wrath' is no passion on the part of God, but that each one brings it upon himself by his sins...³⁶

Origen is clear when he asserts that "God is altogether impassible, and is to be regarded as wholly free from all affections of that kind [i.e., human affections and passions]".³⁷ When we read of the "anger" of God, "we do not take such expressions literally, but seek in them a spiritual meaning, that we may think of God as He deserves to be thought of".³⁸ Perhaps this was due to Origen's attempt to reconcile his Platonic and Neoplatonic philosophical environment with biblical revelation. More importantly, through his allegorical approach to scripture, Origen may have been giving an unsophisticated and inarticulate delineation between the changing passions of man and the unchanging passion of God. We must conclude that Origen held that God was impassible, albeit to an extreme, but we cannot say that he believed God had no emotion at all. These emotions are seen in his *Homilies* where he describes God as "rejoicing" and "lamenting" and having "affections", though these are metaphorical and human descriptions of the divine mode.³⁹ From this, it is clear that God's passion demonstrates itself in his relation with creation in some sense, even if its form is purely linguistic or pedagogical and, therefore, it would be imprudent to deny of Origen's thought any sense in which God had unchanging passions. At very least, Origen is consistent with the broader patristic tradition of immutability and impassibility since he made the important distinction between God and his creation on the level of being, which appears to meet the minimal requirements of classical thought on the subject.

Novatian's (c. A.D. 210-280) extended discussions of immutability and passions in the Trinity express the idea that changeable natures and passions are characteristic of man's vice and often destroy well-being through death or corruption. However, as Novatian declares, this cannot be the case with God's unchangeable essence or emotions:

He [God], then, is always like to Himself; nor does he ever turn or change Himself into any forms, lest by change He should appear to be mortal. For the change implied in turning from one thing to another is comprehended as a portion of certain death. Thus there is never in Him any accession or increase of any part or honour, lest anything should appear to have ever been wanting to His perfection, nor is any loss sustained in Him, lest a degree of mortality should appear to have been suffered by Him. But what He is, He always is; and who He is, He is always Himself; and what character He has, He always has. For increasing argues beginning, as well as losses prove death and perishing. And therefore He says, 'I am

³⁶ Origen, *Against Celsus*, IV.72, in *Ibid.*, 529.

³⁷ Origen, *On First Principles*, II.4, in *Ibid.*, 277.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, in *Ibid.*, 278.

³⁹ See Origen's *Homily on Ezekiel*, VI.6; *Homily on Numbers*, XXXIII.2; *Homily on Exodus*, VIII.5.

God, I change not;’ in that, what is born cannot suffer change, holding His condition always. For whatever it be in Him which constitutes Divinity, must necessarily exist always, maintaining itself by its own powers, so that He should always be God. And thus He says, ‘I am that I am.’ For what He is has this name, because it always maintains the same quality of Himself....For whatever, at any time, is changed, is shown to be mortal in that very particular which is changed. For it ceases to be that which it had been, and consequently begins to be what it was not....And what is not born cannot be changed: for only those things undergo change which are made, or which are begotten,⁴⁰

Regarding the distinction between God’s passions and man’s passions, he writes:

Moreover, if we read of His wrath, and consider certain descriptions of His indignation, and learn that hatred is asserted of Him, yet we are not to understand these to be asserted of Him in the sense in which they are human vices. For all these things, although they may corrupt man, cannot at all corrupt the divine power. For such passions as these will rightly be said to be in men, and will not rightly be judged to be in God. For man may be corrupted by these things, because he can be corrupted; God may not be corrupted by them, because He cannot be corrupted. For that God is angry, arises from no vice in Him. But He is so for our advantage; for He is merciful even then when He threatens, because by these threats men are recalled to rectitude....For the diversity in us of the materials of which we consist, is accustomed to arouse the discord of anger which corrupts us; but this, whether of nature or of defect, cannot subsist in God, seeing that He is known to be constructed assuredly of no associations of bodily parts. For He is simple and without any corporeal commixture, being wholly of that essence, which...constitutes His being, since He is called spirit. And thus those things which in men are faulty and corrupting, since they arise from the corruptibility of the body, and matter itself, in God cannot exert the force of corruptibility, since, as we have said they have come, not of vice, but of reason.⁴¹

For Novatian, God’s passions are very real; they are anchored in, and a corollary of, the simple, invisible, immaterial, incorruptible and unchanging nature of God, being exercised for the welfare of humanity. To be sure, Novatian is not attempting to remove God’s passions or nature from its relational capacity and dynamic effect on humanity, but he is ensuring these qualities will never cease to be what they are in their absolute perfection. It is crucial to understand the divine passionate action as an analogical predication of human emotions, not a univocal one, lest we remove the necessary boundary between the changing and unchanging attributes and discard the clear and unequivocal assertions of the early church tradition on this matter. Perhaps the greatest danger of misunderstanding this tradition, as Novatian sees it, is the application of words to God in their most literal sense, thereby destroying any difference in the divine and creaturely mode of being and operation.⁴²

Thus far, the patristic witness has been strong when it speaks to the immutability and passions of God. However, there appears to be no accepted patristic formulation of the doctrine or extended discussion of the matter in print, except for the work, which is attributed to Gregory

⁴⁰ Novatian, *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, IV, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1886 [reprint edition]), 614.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, V, in *Ibid.*, 615.

⁴² *Ibid.*, VII, in *Ibid.*, 616-617.

Thaumaturgus (c. 213-270). In his *Ad Theopompum de passibili et impassibili in deo*, which only exists in Syriac and Latin translations,⁴³ Gregory addresses the subject at length, which is in part reproduced in Mozley's *The Impassibility of God*. There is little doubt regarding Gregory's belief that God's nature remained unchangeable and impassible when he says:

If any one affirms that He who suffered is one, and that He who suffered not is another, and refuses to acknowledge that the Word, who is Himself the impassible and unchangeable God, suffered in the flesh which He had assumed really, yet without mutation, even as it is written, let him be anathema.⁴⁴

Since Gregory's belief affirmed the sufferings of the incarnated Son along with identifying his divine nature as the same as the Father, further questions by Theopompus would challenge the notion of impassibility altogether. Mozley summarizes the heart of Theopompus' two-fold question to Gregory as: 1) whether or not God's *will* is precluded by his impassibility and 2) whether God's impassible nature prevents himself from suffering.⁴⁵ That is to say, would impassibility, which is a "constant fact of God's nature", effectively eliminate the possibility of God's choice to suffer?⁴⁶ To be certain, Gregory does not want to eliminate Christ's sacrificial suffering as God, nor does he see discarding divine impassibility as a viable option. Therefore, he makes a distinction between human sufferings and divine *passio* when he elucidates:

Suffering then is truly suffering when God plans anything useless and of no advantage to Himself. But when the divine will is aroused with a view to the healing of the wicked thoughts of men, then we do not think of suffering as involved for God in the fact that of His supreme humility and kindness He becomes the servant of men...In God those are not to be accounted as sufferings which of His own will were borne by Him for the common good of the human race, with no resistance from His most blessed and impassible nature. For in His sufferings He shows His impassibility. For he who suffers suffers, when the violence of suffering brings pressure to bear on him who suffers contrary to his will. But of him who, while his nature remains impassible, is of his own will immersed in sufferings that he may overcome them, we do not say that he becomes subject to suffering, even though, of his own will, he has shared in sufferings.⁴⁷

Gregory shows innovation here in that for the first time, he opens a wider discussion of impassibility and immutability as they relate to external influences (e.g., sufferings) and the will of God. To place sole focus on whether Gregory's answer to Theopompus is satisfying is to miss the point, which is namely that Gregory viewed God's immutability and impassibility as

⁴³ Mozley, *Impassibility of God*, 63. All English quotes of *AD Theopompum* are taken from Mozley's *Impassibility of God*, 63-72.

⁴⁴ Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Twelve Topics In the Faith*, VI, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1886 [reprint edition]), 51.

⁴⁵ Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 66.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

consistent with the divine will and that there is a real sense in which God's suffering is of an entirely different order than that of creatures. Moreover, it is Gregory's insistence that there is in some way a necessity to include impassibility as the antidote for privated creaturely passions, since victory over suffering can only be achieved by that which is above, immune and removed from it. Thus, there is no hint of abandoning the concept that God is unchangeable and impassible; rather, it would reach its mature expression in the works of Augustine.

Like those who came before him, Augustine viewed immutability and impassibility as corollaries with God's simple, uncreated and timeless nature. He writes, "God is the supreme existence...and is therefore unchangeable",⁴⁸ but those things that God created are "not simple, and therefore not unchangeable".⁴⁹ God as Creator is alone "immutable" and has created his creatures as "mutable, though good".⁵⁰ When speaking of the will of God he declares:

And consequently, when God is said to change His will, as when, *e.g.*, He becomes angry with those to whom He was gentle, it is rather they than He who are changed, and they find Him changed in so far as their experience of suffering at His hand is new, as the sun is changed to injured eyes.⁵¹

Concerning the divine will in his *Confessions*, he avers:

For the will of God is not a creature, but before the creature; because nothing could be created unless the will of the Creator were before it. The will of God, therefore, pertaineth to His very Substance. But if anything hath arisen in the Substance of God which was not before, that Substance is not truly called eternal.⁵²

The changelessness of God is consistent with his eternity and will:

Will you say that these things are false, which, with strong voice, Truth tells me in my inner ear, concerning the very eternity of the Creator, that His substance is in no wise changed by time, nor that His will is separate from His substance? Wherefore He willeth not one thing now, another anon, but once and for ever He willeth all things that He willeth; not again and again, and now this, now that; nor willeth afterwards what He willeth not before, nor willeth not what before He willed. Because such a will is mutable, and no mutable thing is eternal; but our God is eternal...Moreover, all thought which is thus varied is mutable, and nothing mutable is eternal...I find that my God, the eternal God, hath not made any creature by any new will, nor that His knowledge suffereth anything transitory.⁵³

Augustine opens his treatise *On Patience* with a contrast between God's impassible patience and human patience:

⁴⁸ Augustine, *City of God*, XII.2, in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 227.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, XI.10, in *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, XXII.1, in *Ibid.*, 479.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, XXII.2, in *Ibid.*, 480.

⁵² Augustine, *Confessions*, XI.10, in *Ibid.*, volume 1, 167.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, XII.15, in *Ibid.*, 180.

So, although in God there can be no suffering, and ‘patience’ hath its name *a patiendo*, from suffering, yet a patient God we not only faithfully believe, but also wholesomely confess. But the patience of God, of what kind and how great it is, His, Whom we say to be impassible [*nihil patientem*], yet not impatient [*impatientem*], nay even most patient, in words to unfold this who can be able? Ineffable is therefore that patience, as is His jealousy, as His wrath, and whatever there is like to these. For if we conceive of these as they be in us, in Him are there none. We, namely, can feel none of these without molestation: but be it far from us to surmise that the impassible nature of God is liable to any molestation. But like as He is jealous without any darkening of spirit, wroth without any perturbation, pitiful without any pain, repenteth Him without any wrongness in Him to be set right; so He is patient without aught of passion.⁵⁴

Augustine set forth a common theme—God’s passion is not like human passion since he remains free from outside influence and control. His descriptions are again decidedly apophatic in nature, thus removing whatever cannot be appropriately applied to God. Augustine offers his idea of the meaning of impassibility in the following way:

And therefore that which the Greeks call *apatheia*, and what the Latins would call, if their language would allow them, ‘impassibilitas,’ if it be taken to mean an impassibility of spirit and not of the body, or, in other words, a freedom from those emotions which are contrary to reason and disturb the mind, then it is obviously a good and most desirable quality, but it is not one which is attainable in this life....When there shall be no sin in a man, then there shall be this *apatheia*....But if by apathy a condition be meant in which no fear terrifies nor any pain annoys, we must in this life renounce such a state if we would live according to God’s will.⁵⁵

In his response to the Stoic concept of passions, which had become deprecated, Augustine distinguishes between moral and immoral passion, thus removing the notion that all passions are evil. He says:

If these emotions and affections, arising as they do from the love of what is good and from a holy charity, are to be called vices, then let us allow these emotions which are truly vices to pass under the name of virtues. But since these affections, when they are exercised in a becoming way, follow the guidance of right reason, who will dare to say these are diseases or vicious passions?⁵⁶

It is clear that Augustine distinguished between those passions and affections that are correctly exercised in accord with the Christian life and the intellect and those that flowed from the lower part of the soul towards the animal appetites (e.g., sex, food, etc.).⁵⁷ Aquinas made similar distinctions between passions in God and their existence and mode of operation in man when he declares, “The passions of the soul, in so far as they are contrary to the order of reason, incline us to sin; but in so far as they are controlled by reason, they pertain to virtue”.⁵⁸ Freedom emerges as an important notion in which Augustine understands impassibility since it appears to be the

⁵⁴ Augustine, *On Patience*, I.1, in *Ibid.*, volume 3, 527.

⁵⁵ Augustine, *City of God*, XIV.9, in *Ibid.*, volume 2, 270.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, in *Ibid.*, volume 2, 269.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, XIV.6, in *Ibid.*, 266.

⁵⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia.IIae.24 ad 3.

actual *state* of being free from perturbation, which makes it improbable that this freedom could be interpreted in terms of *choice*. Thus, God could be said to be free from disturbance in accord with his nature, leaving us the question of whether God could voluntarily suffer. However, it seems clear that Augustine viewed God's impassible nature as the eternal and immutable source from which all emotions flowed continually and without limit. That is, God is forever and unchangeably angry at immoral behavior and eternally and unchangeably delights in righteousness, leaving creatures responsible for positioning themselves under the appropriate attribute of God. Just as when one takes the position of cool shade on a hot summer day as opposed to positioning oneself in the direct heat of the sun, so also creatures align themselves either under the unchanging wrath or mercy of God, both of which flow from God simultaneously.⁵⁹ In this way, Augustine conforms to the unbroken chain of patristic witnesses that appears to be discarding the changing negative consequences inherent in creaturely passions, which are unmanageable in this life.

Anselm would make a unique contribution to the articulation of God's immutable and impassible nature, though not as Augustine did by arguing from God's atemporal Being, but by viewing the divine essence as simple perfection. This discussion would often involve an analysis of the relationship between substance and accidents, which often included discussions on mixed relations as they existed in the incarnated Christ. According to Anselm, a perfect Being has no changeable accidents, though one may describe the perfect nature as having accidents. He says, "This essence is, as is clear, entirely the same as itself, substantially. But is it not sometimes different from itself in terms of its accidents?"⁶⁰ Anselm distinguished between two kinds of accidents: Those that bring change in the subject by gaining or losing some quality and those accidents that do not cause change in that of which it is predicated.⁶¹ The former accidents are likened to "colours" and the later to "some relations". For example, the birth of a child does not cause some change in his father, though change in one's own complexion and color of skin does imply a real change. Since the divine essence "is never different from itself, not even accidentally", Anselm concludes:

⁵⁹ Augustine uses the sun as an example of unremitting rays in relation to man's changing states in *City of God*, XXII.2, in Schaff, ed., volume 2, 480.

⁶⁰ Anselm, *Monologion*, 25, in Davies and Evans, eds., *Anselm of Canterbury: The Major Works*, 41.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

There is nothing, therefore, that can be accidental to the essence of the supreme nature so as to allow us to infer mutability. Sometimes, true, something maybe predicated of it, in line with those accidents that do not impugn supreme immutability. This the supreme nature allows, just as it, in its simplicity never allows room to any accidents that causes change. Hence the further conclusion: it is not subject to any accident. Accidents that effect change really are accidents. In virtue of their effect they happen to the things they change. Those, however, that do not have this effect are only accidents improperly so called...Whatever the rules are for using the term 'accident' properly, this is true and beyond doubt: nothing may be predicated of the supreme and immutable nature which might suggest that it is mutable.⁶²

To be sure, Anselm divides being into two kinds of substances: Unchangeable and changeable, which serve as the ontological dividing line between God and all other things:

As for all other things, it is correct to deny that they exist absolutely perfectly, and without qualification. It is correct to assert that they almost do not, and hardly do, exist. This is because they exist in a changeable way: in some respect they now are not what they were, or will be, and are what they have not been, or will not be. What they were, no longer exists. What they will be, does not yet exist. What they are in the fleeting, extremely brief and barely existing present, barely exists.⁶³

These distinctions appear to emerge from Anselm's attempt to defend the incarnation of Christ as being compatible with unchangeable divine attributes. He says, "For it is not the case that the divine nature and human nature are mutually interchangeable so that divine nature may become human or human, divine...If they were mixed so that a third nature was produced as the consequence of inter-contamination of the two natures, the result would be neither man nor God".⁶⁴ The mixed relations in Christ would inevitably include discussions of the mutable sufferings of Christ (i.e., in relation to the immutable divine nature). Anselm attempts to consistently apply this attribute to God's passions when he declares:

For we affirm that the divine nature is undoubtedly incapable of suffering, and cannot in any sense be brought low from its exalted standing, and cannot labour with difficulty over what it wishes to do. But we say that the Lord Jesus Christ is true God and true man, one person in two natures and two natures in one person. In view of this, when we say God is suffering some humiliation or weakness, we do not understand this in terms of the exaltedness of his non-suffering nature, but in terms of the weakness of the human substance which he was taking upon himself. And thus it is seen that there is no rational objection to our faith. For we are not, in this way, implying lowliness on the part of the divine substance, but are making plain the existence of a single person comprising God and man. Therefore, in the incarnation of God it is understood that no humiliation of God came about: rather it is believed that human nature was exalted.⁶⁵

Based on the preceding statements, to conclude that Anselm held to anything other than God's full immutability and impassibility would be unfair to Anselm and the history of thought that

⁶² Ibid., 25, in Ibid., 42.

⁶³ Ibid., 28, in Ibid., 44; also see *Why God Became Man*, II.10, 16, in Ibid., 327-328, 342, which describes God's immutable will.

⁶⁴ Anselm, *Why God Became Man*, II.7, in Ibid., 320-321.

⁶⁵ Ibid., II.8, in Ibid., 274-275.

preceded him. The real existence of two distinct natures in Christ—one divine and the other human—not only ensured that the incarnation was a reasonable doctrine of faith, but also that two entirely different ontological categories must be applied to statements concerning each domain. Therefore, Weinandy is correct in his assessment that Anselm does not interpret “become” as a change in the divine nature; rather, it is viewed as “come to be” “which upholds both the ontological unity of person and the unchangeable distinction of natures, thus allowing for a correct understanding of the communication of idioms”.⁶⁶ The result for studies in Theology Proper becomes clear in that two distinct ontological categories necessitate some sort of analogical predication, which include *apophatic* qualifiers when speaking of the immutability and impassibility of God. This medieval tradition would continue in the work of Thomas Aquinas.

Open theology has made it clear that Aquinas’ view of immutability as described in the *Summa Theologica* renders real divine-human relationships impossible, or at very least, suspect.⁶⁷ That is to say, the openness assumption that “only what is mutable can be personal” is the driving philosophical mechanism behind the belief in God’s mutability. However, this is mistaken for several reasons. First, for Aquinas, immutability does not mean inert, static, immobile, aloof or impersonal since God is known as the “I AM” (Ex. 3:14) meaning “to be”. Furthermore, he is the pure and simple act (*actus purus*) of being-itself (*ipsum esse*), not *becoming*.⁶⁸ Thomas goes on in the *Summa* to explain the implications of his view of

⁶⁶ Weinandy, *Does God Change?* 71.

⁶⁷ Sanders, “Historical Considerations,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 87. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 70-71.

⁶⁸ Pinnock rejects this definition of Exodus 3:14 (*Most Moved Mover*, 116-117) when he comments, “Instead of taking this to mean that God is the living and faithful God who keeps covenant and never forsakes his people, it was taken to mean that God is Being itself. . . . So what was originally a historical promise became a metaphysical definition in the abstract of God’s essence. It introduced into Christian thinking the concept of God as an infinite, unbounded ocean of being and as a subsistent Being in which all beings share, one who is infinitely and qualitatively different than the world”. There are several reasons why Pinnock is mistaken here. Although others have enumerated this, they have not been evaluated in any detail by open theologians. First, all major patristic, medieval and reformation scholars affirmed that God’s self-existence (aseity) is in view. Second, the Septuagint (LXX) translates the phrase as “he who is” (*ho on*), which agrees with the classical view. Third, Pinnock’s rendering of the verse as “I will be who I will be” is grammatically possible, though it appears late in history rising out of process thought. Fourth, rendering the phrase in the classical sense of self-existence runs contrary to the Greek philosophical notion that separated their metaphysical first principle from their object of worship. In classical tradition, the “I AM” is the first metaphysical cause and the object of worship. Fifth, “I AM” was God’s response to Moses’ question asking God’s “name”. One’s “name” in oriental culture most often referred to character, nature or essence, of the individual. Sixth, the classical interpretation of the verse is consistent with Genesis 1:1, which declares God created all things *ex-nihilo* as even open theism agrees. If God brought into existence all things, then he himself must be uncreated. If he did not gain his existence from another, he must be a self-existing necessary

immutability, saying it is not simply the act of being without motion or movement, it is more profoundly noted as being in the sense of “existential act” of all substantial and accidental being and becoming among finite creatures. Thomas says:

God alone is altogether immutable...For all creatures before they existed, were possible, not by any created power, since no creature is eternal, but by the divine power alone, inasmuch as God could produce them into existence. Thus, as a production of a thing into existence depends on the will of God, so likewise it depends on His will that things should be preserved; for He does not preserve them otherwise than by ever giving them existence; hence if He took away His action from them, all things would be reduced to nothing.⁶⁹

To fully appreciate Aquinas on divine immutability, one must take into consideration his view of God’s being. For Aquinas, God’s essence is his *esse*, and, therefore, it is the foundational being of all other being. Etienne Gilson says, “Because it is act, ‘to be’ is something fixed and at rest in being: *esse est aliquid fixum et quietum in ente*”.⁷⁰ Otherwise, there is no unchanging foundation for all acts. If the foundational pure act (God) were to change, it would require potentiality, which necessitates another purely actual being who is being in itself with no potentiality at all. Therefore, if God as *esse* is the Creator of all other *esse/essence*, as open theology admits, there must not only be some conserving unchangeable being to secure the *continued* existence of all finite act, but an independent and necessary *esse* on which finite act finds a sufficient cause for its coming to be.⁷¹ Therefore, God cannot change since any change to pure and simple act is impossible without the potential to change, but if it could, a simple being would be non-act, which is essentially non-being (nothing). Ultimately, Thomas concludes that the creature could only be created by God’s being, and if the creature is only related to the act of God, then God is present and exists within the created being.⁷² Thomas anticipates objections to God’s presence in all things as their cause when he explains:

It seems that the mode of God’s existence in all things is not properly described by way of essence, presence, and power. For what is by essence in anything, is in it essentially. But God is not essentially in

Being of pure actuality without any potentiality. Seventh, Jesus’ “I AM” statement in John 8:58 is inconsistent with the open view of “I will be who I will be”, but is consistent with the classical interpretation of Exodus 3:14 (see Norman Geisler, *Creating God in the Image of Man*, 75-80).

⁶⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.9.2.

⁷⁰ Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, 368. See footnote 96 on page 711, which says, “This text applies to every actual being”.

⁷¹ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I.9.2; I.8.1; I.104.1, and Aquinas, *On the Power of God* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004 [originally published by The Newman Press, 1932]), 5.1, to affirm that creation and preservation are one in the same; see Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 38.

⁷² Weinandy, *Does God Change?* 92.

things; for He does not belong to the essence of anything. Therefore, it ought not be said that God is in things by essence, presence, and power.⁷³

Aquinas provides an answer that is both profound and simple as he suggests that God's *esse* is indeed present in all finite creatures, though not by the creature's essence as if he was one of them, but by his own essence as the cause of their being.⁷⁴ For Aquinas, God is "to be", which is a verb, not a noun as in creatures who possess an essence (i.e., cats, dogs, elephants), making him so imminently dynamic and active that it necessitates his immutability.⁷⁵ This implies that God cannot be static, inert, or immobile as open theists contend. God is supremely immutable because he is existentially dynamic and active to his creation—nothing could be closer to the creation.⁷⁶ This would imply that since God is *esse (actus purus)*, his very nature is "to exist" and, therefore, he cannot endure in a static "state" or merely an inert object of the mind, but rather his act is pure dynamic energy that is constantly present to and in all creation as its Creator and Sustainer.⁷⁷ Thus, God's being of dynamic impulse is described as immutable since God cannot be in any greater Act than he is, and thus, his relation is dynamically perfect.⁷⁸ Michael Dodds insightfully states:

The true significance of the attribute of divine immutability in the theology of St. Thomas consists, not in the fact that it indicates the invariable self-identity of God, but in the fact that it indicates the dynamic and boundless perfection of God as *ipsum esse subsistens*...Far from implying, therefore, that God may be somehow static or inert, the attribute of immutability directly signifies that God, as pure *esse*, is pure dynamic actuality.⁷⁹

⁷³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.8.3, ad 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Weinandy, *Does God Change?* 78.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ See Gerald Phelan, "The Existentialism of St. Thomas," in A.G. Kirn, ed., *Selected Papers* (Toronto: 1967), 77. Immutability can be viewed in at least two ways—either describing the unchangeableness of material things such as Mt. Everest, which is said to be inert or static incapable of action and personal relationship, and that of God who is said to never change because it is impossible to be any more dynamic and personal than he already is. That is, there are different ways in which things are immutable: 1) because things are mostly in potential with very little act (e.g., Mt. Everest) and 2) because something (e.g., God) is so eminently dynamic and active without any potential to be more so. Both are said to be immutable for different reasons. It appears open theism has viewed God's immutability in terms of the former and thus concludes it is a liability for God to be changeless.

⁷⁸ See Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 124, when he writes, "it is precisely God's immutability as *actus purus* that guarantees and authenticates his pure vitality and absolute dynamism".

⁷⁹ Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love*, 227.

Leo Elders understands Aquinas' view of dynamic immutability as something much different from open theism's description of immobility, by describing it as the "Way of Eminence". He writes:

In his reply to the first objections St. Thomas intimates that this immutability is not the immobility of a crystal: God is full of intellectual life and love. His immutability transcends our capacity for understanding. God is life in an infinitely eminent way. The question of God's immutability belongs to the Way of Eminence.⁸⁰

Any change in the supreme dynamic nature of God would not sufficiently account for substantial and accidental change in dependent/contingent beings, let alone account for God's own change. Commenting on Aquinas' view of God, Gilson replies, "God is the being whose whole nature it is to be such an existential act".⁸¹ As such, all God's attributes, including those identified by way of negation such as immutability, are qualified by this kind of being. To identify God with "this" or "that" is tantamount to reducing the *esse* of God to the essences of the created order.⁸²

In addition to God's *esse* being the efficient, conserving and ever-eminent cause of all contingent things, Aquinas offers clarification of his concept of change as it relates to God's immutability in order to eliminate its more modern usage as "unresponsive" or "motionless". He addresses an objection raised by one who would use Augustine's comments to argue that God is in some sense mutable. The objection reads, "It seems that God is not altogether immutable. For whatever moves itself is in some way mutable. But, as Augustine says (*Gen ad lit*, viii. 20), *The Creator Spirit moves Himself neither by time, nor by place*. Therefore, God is in some way mutable".⁸³ Thomas' answer clarifies and distinguishes between those forms of "motion" that are benign and others that are incompatible with what it means to be immutable in a Thomistic sense. He explains:

Augustine there speaks in a similar way to Plato, who said that the first mover moves himself; calling every operation a movement, even as the acts of understanding, and willing, and loving, are called movements. Therefore, because God understands and loves Himself, in that respect they said that God moves Himself, not, however, as movement and change belong to a thing existing in potentiality, as we now speak of change and movement.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Elders, *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 176.

⁸¹ Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, 368.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.9.1 Obj 1.

⁸⁴ Ibid., I.9.1.1

Unfortunately, open theology has misinterpreted what Aquinas means by change, opting to see all divine “intention” and “operation” as change and failing to make a distinction between the Platonic view of achieving and striving with the Aristotelian concept of change. Thomas was so familiar with this concept and often refers to in the context of divine immutability.⁸⁵ David Burrell insightfully claims:

So Aquinas explicitly removes intentional activity from the ambit of change, as Aristotle had taught him to do. Unchangeableness does not keep us from speaking of God in terms implying activity; it only interdicts those associated with striving and achieving.⁸⁶

Aquinas makes it clear that only movement that shifts from potentiality to actuality is inimical to the classical doctrine of God, while simultaneously preserving God’s unchanging intentional activity, which has no transition from potency to act. Any theology that fails to recognize this distinction is destined to develop a God of change, seeing no other option for divine–temporal relationships. For Aquinas, God is what he is, neither having motion in potential, nor is he completely “still” or “inert”.⁸⁷ Any “motion” or “intention” God has must be in accord with his nature as pure and simple act. As such, he argues that all change that passes from potency to act acquires something new that it previously did not attain. But this is impossible for pure limitless perfection (Act) since God is already extended to all being through the perfection of himself.⁸⁸ Aquinas’ view of simple unlimited being without passive potency abruptly confronts the open view of God’s immutability of character and the mutability of divine knowledge, emotions and will.⁸⁹ Obviously, Aquinas would disapprove of the concept, quickly noting that potentiality would disqualify the being as a necessary efficient and sustaining cause of all other being. The notion of an “immutable mutable” is not only challengeable on logical grounds, it necessarily divides God into parts. There is a “part” of God that changes and another “part” that remains the

⁸⁵ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 37. For Plato, the first mover did not will the principle object outside itself, or it would have needed to be moved by another. Rather, the divine will is His good essence, thus, the will is moved by itself (see *Summa Theologica*, I.19. rep. 3).

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 38.

⁸⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.9.1. At this point, we must recognize that the biblical authors use language familiar to our changing world to speak of God. Open theism has difficulty with change-talk due to their overly literalistic approach to biblical language and refusal to consistently apply analogical predication. Burrell correctly states that since God’s nature is “to be”, “this should help us see that ‘unchangeable’ is not an empirical predicate, but rather announces a logical requirement to be met by any statement which purports to be about God” (*Aquinas: God and Action*, 38).

⁸⁹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 85.

same. However, this is precisely what Aquinas says when he distinguishes God's infinite being from finite creaturely-motion and existence:

This first being must be pure act, without the admixture of any potentiality, for the reason that, absolutely potentiality is posterior to act. Now everything which is in any way changed, is in some in potentiality. Hence it is evident that it is impossible for God to be in any way changeable. Secondly, because everything that was moved remains as it was in part, and passes away in part; as what is moved from whiteness to blackness, remains the same as to substance; thus in everything which is moved, there is some kind of composition to be found.⁹⁰

Aquinas follows Augustine's lead, though he would not address divine impassibility in a formal manner. In his dealing with whether love exists in God, Aquinas viewed man's passion in terms of the will and the objects towards which the will tends.⁹¹ Accordingly, man's will is moved by the knowledge of some good or evil, and in this sense, man has changeable passion.⁹² However, Thomas distinguishes man's changeable passion, from God's stable passion of love, which is uncaused by external forces. This is consistent with his reply to an objection that denied the possibility of love in God. He replies, "For in God there are no passions. Now love is a passion. Therefore love is not in God".⁹³ Aquinas' response emerges from his view of God's simplicity and immutability, saying, "We must needs assert that in God there is love"⁹⁴ and in another place he replies, "There must be love in God according to the act of His will".⁹⁵ Since love is a passion, one can assume that Thomas agrees that there is passion in God. However, for God, love is not a passion in the temporal human sense of movement by sensual appetite requiring change; rather, God manifests passion all at once and simply as it exists in God.⁹⁶ For Thomas, God's passion is operating through the pure and simple unchanging act and in accordance with his ontological status in himself by his own intellectual appetite.⁹⁷ Since God's act is perfectly good and loving in himself,

⁹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.9.2

⁹¹ Ibid., I.20.1; see Weinandy, *Does God Change?* 79.

⁹² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.20.1.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.; also Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.90

⁹⁵ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.90.1.

⁹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.20.1 ad 1.

⁹⁷ With respect to the "intellectual appetite", Aquinas writes, "From this it is manifest that joy or delight is properly in God. For just as the apprehended good and evil are the object of sensible appetite, so, too, are they of intellectual appetite. It belongs to both to seek good and avoid evil, whether truly or by estimation. There is the difference that the object of intellectual appetite is more common than that of the sensitive appetite, because intellectual appetite has reference to good and evil absolutely, whereas sensitive appetite has reference to good or evil according to the sense.... Differing in that in the sensitive appetite there are passions because of its union to the bodily organ, whereas in the intellectual appetite there are simple operations; for just as through the passion of fear, which resides in the sensitive appetite, someone flees a future evil, so without passion the intellectual appetite does

he must love, delight, joy and grieve, in the eternal oneness of his being, without need to move his will toward any other good. God's passion of sorrow, pain, anger and grief is treated by Aquinas in his attempt to discover the cause and manifestation of anger in God. In his reply to an earlier objection Thomas responds, "Because the sinner, by sinning, cannot do God any actual harm" and that God is angered "in so far as he [i.e., the sinner] harms himself or another; which injury redounds to God, inasmuch as the person injured is an object of God's providence and protection".⁹⁸ Here he hints at the nature of God's anger by suggesting that God experiences no lack or harm in himself, but is concerned instead for the object of his love. That is to say, God's anger is not due to a change in God, for he is always the same in his eternal and immutable anger at sin and evil. Rather, it is the change in the creature and what that change entails for the sinner. To put it another way, the creature may position himself in relation to God's attributes, much the same way varying positions in relation to an umbrella on a rainy day can be achieved. If the creature relates to the umbrella in a way that either benefits (keeps dry) or harms himself (becomes wet), it is not due to any change in the Umbrella or rain, but is a result of change in the creature's relation to the them. God is the same, namely in that he is *always* angry and saddened at sin and evil. Likewise, he also is *unchanging* in his delight and joy of the righteousness of his creatures. That the creature experiences God's emotions, whether it is anger, grief or delight is not due to some change in God, for God immutably reflects his moral character. Rather, it is accounted for by the relation man has to God, namely, his position or subsequent re-positioning in relation to the divine attributes. God is not saddened or angered due to his own lack of good or perturbation, but rather because of an aspect of his unchangeable love for his creatures,⁹⁹ which arguably is what is meant by Aquinas when he said "inasmuch as the person injured is an object of God's providence and protection".

It is evident that a survey of patristic thought on the subject of immutability and impassibility favors the classical concept of God's attributes. Though the testimony supporting this thesis

the same thing. Since, then, joy and delight are not repugnant to God according to their species, but only in so far as they are passions..." (*Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.90.3). Contrary to the open assertion that the God of Aquinas cannot experience delight, joy and love, while existing as impassible, here, Aquinas is simply denying any "human passion" derived from sensible or corporeal appetites. Instead, he opts for "intellective appetite" to explain how God loves, delights and enjoys since these are not contrary to God's nature. That is, Aquinas is not denying passion in God *per se*, but only rejecting the *process* that requires sensible and temporal passion, which involves change. God loves, enjoys and delights through the simple pure act that he is, meaning God loves wholly all at once without being aroused to love, making God's love perfect in permanent actuality.

⁹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II.47.1 ad 1.

⁹⁹ Weinandy, *Does God Change?* 80. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I-II.73.8 ad 2, where Aquinas writes that "although no man can do God any harm in His substance, yet he can endeavor to do so in things concerning Him, e.g., by destroying faith..."

emerges mostly from separated sporadic statements by the fathers, it is arguably the common belief throughout the history of the orthodox church. This conclusion is primarily due to the early ontological distinction between creation and Creator, which necessitated negative language that was often in line with the Greek philosophical categories of the time, though with a decidedly biblical guide as to which meaning was used. Even if some of the ancient descriptions of God fall short of adequate descriptions of him, it certainly cannot be denied that a radical ontological difference between God and man existed, which called for a strong orthodoxy regarding change and passion. It is precisely this ontological difference that open theism fails to recognize.

The Open Theistic Critique of Divine Immutability and Impassibility. Vital to sustaining the open view of dynamic divine-temporal relationships is the notion that God must change in some respect while simultaneously remaining unchanged in other respects.¹⁰⁰ According to Boyd, change in the divine nature is essential to all vital relations when he says that, “Practically, a God of eternal static certainties is incapable of interacting with humans in a relevant way”.¹⁰¹ However, there is a sense in which God does not change, Pinnock asserts, “God is immutable in essence and in his trustworthiness over time”.¹⁰² Apparently, Pinnock uses “nature” and “essence” to refer to God’s character of faithfulness, reliability and love, yet through experiencing successive moments. We are told to discard the notion that “unchanging” means beyond the passage of time or in any sense metaphysically characterizing any part of God’s being. According to the open view, God’s unchanging character endures ontologically through the passage of time, and known from our previous chapter as “temporally everlasting”, which enables him to learn and change his plans in response to human decisions.¹⁰³ This means that in Pinnock’s view, “essence” does not carry the traditional meaning as conveyed by Augustine and Aquinas who described God as purely actual (with no passive potency), leading him to identify God’s essence as identical with his existence (*esse*).¹⁰⁴ Therefore, when Pinnock speaks of God’s “changeless nature”, it is analogous to the *consistent* reliability of a loyal friend who is genuinely

¹⁰⁰ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 85.

¹⁰¹ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 18.

¹⁰² Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 117

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁰⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.4.

responsive and interacts with the world.¹⁰⁵ Pinnock describes his concept of “changeable faithfulness” when he writes:

In God’s case, we might say that *who* God is does not change, but *what* God experiences changes. God’s nature does not change but his activities and relationships are dynamic. God’s character is stable but God is not static when it comes to associating with creation. I would say that God is unchangeable in changeable ways, i.e. unchangeable in essence but ever changing in the relationships of love that he values. God is characterized by changeable faithfulness and is not immutable in every respect...God changes in relation to creatures. In the Christian story, God changed when he became creator of the world; God changed when he made human beings in his image and began to deal with them as free persons; God changed when he entered into a covenant with Israel. God changed when the Word became flesh and came close in the form of a man; God changed when he felt the bitterness of the cross; God changes when dealing with his friends. God does not change when it comes to his nature but changes when it come to associations with the world. That is why I say that God is characterized by changeable faithfulness and is not immutable in every respect.¹⁰⁶

Apparently unaware of the logical and philosophical problems associated with an “immutable mutable” Being who is the Creator and Sustainer of the world, Pinnock attempts to circumvent the difficulties by making a distinction between what he considers acceptable *voluntary* and unacceptable *involuntary* change. He says, “I do not mean that God is subject to change involuntarily, which would make God a contingent being, but that God allows the world to touch him, while being transcendent over it”.¹⁰⁷ Rather than positing change itself as being the determining factor of contingency, God’s *choice* or *volition* justifies the coherence of change in God and thereby removes him from becoming a dependent being in need of a cause. Regarding the essence of God’s immutability and change he avers:

Immutability is about God’s unchanging Trinitarian nature and relational faithfulness. God’s changing experiences are due to God’s decision to make the kind of world he did. Because God is aware of what is changing in the world, his awareness undergoes the changes that are caused by the reality of which he is aware. The element of dynamism must be introduced into the category by distinguishing between God’s unchanging essence and God’s changeable relationships. God is necessary and changeless in some respects, then, but free and changing in others. God is changeless in nature but his nature is that of a creative agent and personal God. God is changeless in the perfections he possesses but constantly changes in the ways in which he realizes them. God’s immutability is personal, not static. God has an unchanging intention to love but that involves relational mutability; God can make the adaptations and responses necessary to carry it out. God’s changing is central to the perfection of the biblical God.¹⁰⁸

Pinnock is not alone in his emphasis on the relational metaphysic of God. Richard Rice declares:

¹⁰⁵ Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 118; Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 85.

¹⁰⁶ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 85-87.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 86.

We can attribute both change and changeableness to God if we apply them to different aspects of his being. God's existence, God's nature and God's character are just as changeless as he could possibly be. These aspects of divinity are completely unaffected by anything else....When it comes to God's concrete relation to the world, however, the situation is different....Everything that happens in it has an effect on him. Because God's love *never* changes, God's experience *must* change. In other words, it is part of God's unchanging nature to change.¹⁰⁹

Boyd concurs when he asserts, "There is simply no reason to interpret language about changeable aspects of God less literally than language about unchangeable aspects of God....When a person is in a genuine relationship with another, willingness to adjust to them is always considered a virtue. Why should this apply to people but not to God?"¹¹⁰ According to Sanders, classical immutability was imposed on Christian theology through negative pagan influences. He concluded that:

The faithfulness of God has customarily been discussed as a category of divine immutability. This would not be so bad if the personal aspects of God's relationship to us had been kept in mind. Too often, however, immutability has been defined apart from what we know of God in history and has been seen to imply that God is absolutely unchangeable in every respect....The essence of God does not change, but God does change in experience, knowledge, emotions and actions.¹¹¹

Pinnock, as well as other proponents, assert that the traditional concept of God strayed when some in church history took "immutability far in the direction of immobility and inertness".¹¹²

Closely related to God's immutability is the question of God's passion—namely, whether God is moved in his intellect, will and emotions by external factors. Are passions a necessary part of his unchangeable nature? Open theism clearly posits God's passibility, arguing that God is moved and influenced by his creatures. If this were not the case, no genuine personal relationship could occur between God and creation. In their collaborative landmark book, *The Openness of God*, the contributors unanimously agree that the concept of divine passibility is one of several foundational elements to their position. Rice asserts:

The view of God and his relation to the world presented in this book provides a striking alternative to the concept just described [i.e., the traditional view of God]. It expresses two basic convictions: love is the

¹⁰⁹ Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 48.

¹¹⁰ Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 77-78. When open theists claim that God's love never changes, they do not mean that it is timelessly eternal and immutable in the traditional sense, only that it is "constant" in a temporal way analogous to friend who has constant loyalty. Hence, practically and philosophically since God love is *responsive* and endures through temporal succession of moments, it is mutable and always in potential (see Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 88; Rice, in "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 15-16, 25, 48).

¹¹¹ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 186-187. In chapter 6, footnote 74 of this work, Sanders says, "I agree that the essence of God does not change, but I think we can only affirm this as a consequence of the faith".

¹¹² Pinnock et al. *The Openness of God*, 117.

most important quality we attribute to God, and love is more than care and commitment; it involves being sensitive and responsive as well. These convictions lead the contributors to this book to think of God relation to the world in dynamic rather than static terms. This conclusion has important consequences. For one thing, it means that God interacts with his creatures. Not only does he influence them, but they also exert an influence on him....He learns something from what transpires. We call this position “the open view of God” because it regards God as receptive to new experiences and as flexible in the way he works toward his objectives in the world. Since it sees God as dependent on the world in certain respects, the open view of God differs from much conventional theology. Yet we believe that this dependence does not detract from God’s greatness, it only enhances it.¹¹³

Rice continues:

God is the ultimate power in reality, but God’s activity consists in large measure in responding to human decisions and actions. What he actually decides to do depends directly on the actions of human beings.¹¹⁴

Rice argues that God’s loving nature demands that he “be sensitive and responsive to the creaturely world. Everything that happens in it has an effect on him”.¹¹⁵ In perhaps the clearest statement of God’s passible nature, Pinnock adds;

God, as a loving person, is involved in the world and is affected by creatures. This challenges the traditional view of the impassibility of God. Far from being aloof or abstract, God maintains a personal and intimate relation to the world. He is moved by what happens and reacts accordingly. God is a subject and events arouse in him joy and sorrow, pleasure and anger. He experiences pathos, for example, he loves, laughs, repents, can be delighted and become angry. It is said that when God was sorry that he made mankind, it grieved him to his heart (Gen. 6:6). Love leads to suffering. God feels the pain of rejection. He suffers because of his people and also with and for them. The world affects God emotionally and he is moved by the sufferings of his creatures. The fact that God is love rules out the doctrine of impassibility, which entails that God has no desires that can be thwarted; he cannot suffer or be in any way vulnerable....It is astonishing, when you think about it, that impassibility could have become orthodox belief in the early centuries. Here perhaps more than anywhere else we find the bankruptcy of conventional theology.¹¹⁶

Rice declares impassibility implies that God is “unaffected by creaturely events and experiences. He is untouched by the disappointment, sorrow or suffering of his creatures. Just as his sovereign will brooks no opposition, his serene tranquility knows no interruption”.¹¹⁷ Similarly, Pinnock defines impassibility as God being “apathetic, unaffected by our joys and sorrows”¹¹⁸ and describes it as follows:

Impassibility is the most dubious of the divine attributes discussed in classical theism, because it suggests that God does not experience sorrow, sadness or pain. It appears to deny that God is touched by the

¹¹³ Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 15-16.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 48.

¹¹⁶ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 88-89.

¹¹⁷ Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 12.

¹¹⁸ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 117.

feelings of our infirmities, despite what the Bible eloquently says about his love and his sorrow. How can God be loving and not pained by sorrow?¹¹⁹

There appears to be several key motivating factors in the open view of immutability and impassibility, most noticeably, the preservation of divine responsiveness to his creation, which necessitates change in God. Since all relationships involve change and give and take, it is argued that it is impossible for an unchanging God to relate to the changing world. Therefore, all relational aspects of God such as knowledge, will, emotions and actions must change as events transpire. In addition, God is passible and necessarily affected by what occurs in the world, even being conditioned by real events and decisions made by the creature. What is more, Boyd seems to introduce a hermeneutical factor as a reason for adopting the view—an overly literalistic interpretation of key passages of scripture that describe change. Moreover, open theologians introduce a radical separation between God’s unchangeable “nature” or “essence” (often equated with “character”) and those changeable attributes such as knowledge, will, actions and emotions. They say these are not a part of this unchangeable “character”.¹²⁰ There is a unanimously agreed upon idea that equates God’s immutability with immobility (i.e., static, inert, apathetic, unconcerned). This appears to arise from their pervasive misunderstanding of both analogy of being and language and from the classical literature on the subject, particularly that of Aquinas.

An Evaluation of Open Theism’s Doctrine of Divine Change and Passions. Several implications follow from the open notion of God’s changeability, which ultimately reveal a God closer to finite-godism than to the biblical revelation. First, open theism lacks an ontological mechanism that can adequately account for efficient and sustaining causality of not only the being of God himself, but also the world. At this point, open theism fails to understand the necessity of the first causal agent being wholly “being” without passive potency.¹²¹ Reginald Garrigou-LaGrange

¹¹⁹ Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 118.

¹²⁰ This radical bifurcation is seen in Rice’s statement, which sees no essential connection between God’s character and existence. He says, “Most of the biblical references to divine changelessness pertain to God’s character rather than his existence” (Rice, “Biblical Support for a New Perspective,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 47). In addition, if God’s will is changing, the open assertion that God is *not arbitrary* is false since whether or not God is arbitrary refers directly to the nature of his will, which appears to be what voluntarism admits.

¹²¹ If, as the open theists claim, there are *changeable*, *dependent* and *contingent* aspects of God (e.g., mind, will, emotions, knowledge), the cause of their *beginning* to-be and *continuing* to-be must be accounted for. If it is God’s unchangeable nature that created them, then these contingent aspects are not part of God, but are distinct essences, in which case they are subjected to the ravishes of contingent finitude. If these contingencies are secondary mediums through which to relate to the world, then God lacks direct relations with creation and currently maintains detached relationships with his creatures. It would be absurd to say these contingents created themselves since they would have to exist and not exist at the same time in order to bring themselves into existence. To argue that these

describes the necessity of an unchangeable being when he says that God “maintains all things in existence by means of his preservative act which is His very being. As God creates immediately and not through the medium of a creature or of an instrument, so His preservative act, which is the continuation of His creative act, extends immediately to the very being itself of all created things, to that which is innermost in each of them”.¹²² Offering a partly changeable God, as open theism does, appears to place God and man in the same ontological (*genus*) realm, differing only in a quantitative sense.¹²³ Second, if God possesses “parts”, he must have been composed since things do not tend to unify unless there is a first uncomposed causal agent (composer), otherwise an actual infinite regress ensues.¹²⁴ To reject this line of thought essentially agrees with the notion that multiplicity precedes unity and that disorder precedes order, which is unknown to our experience since all multiplicity is measured against unity and all disorder is measured against order. Third, if there is any admixture of potency in God, it is possible God can not-be since what can-be can also not-be.¹²⁵ Among other characteristics, God’s knowledge, will, emotions and love are said to be changing and responsive with what happens in the present tense.¹²⁶ If this is the case, then it is possible for God’s knowledge

dependent realities of God eternally existed with God would certainly be theoretically possible since God could have been creating from all eternity, though it would not answer the question of the apparent lack in God requiring these to be created. Besides, it is impossible to bring in to being One’s own existence. At best, open theism offers a concept of God totally foreign to orthodox Christianity and that is aligned much closer to the metaphysical dualism seen in Plato’s view of the *Agathos* and *Demiurgos*.

¹²² Garrigou-LaGrange, *God: His Existence and Nature: Volume I*, 50; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.8.1.

¹²³ Aquinas argues in *Summa Theologica*, I.3.5, that God cannot be contained as a species in a *genus* since it would require composition of being and essence thus necessitating potentiality in God, which is impossible. Aquinas argues, “First, because a species is constituted of genus and difference. Now that from which the difference constituting the species is derived, is always related to that from which the genus is derived, as actuality is related to potentiality....Secondly, since the existence of God is His essence, if God were in any genus, He would be the genus “being” since genus is predicated as an essential it refers to the essence of a thing....For every *genus* has differences distinct from its generic essence. Now no difference can exist distinct from being; for non-being cannot be a difference. It follows then that God is not in a *genus*. Thirdly, because all in one *genus* agree in the quiddity or essence of the *genus* that is predicated of them as an essential, but they differ in their existence....But in God they do not differ, as shown in the preceding article. Therefore it is plain that God is not in a *genus* as if He were a species”.

This distinction between God and creatures will be particularly important in understanding why Aquinas describes Creator-creature relationships as “real to an idea”, and remains a problematic issue in the open view of God, which practically offers God as simply another species in a *genus*. See Elders, *The Philosophical Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 154-155.

¹²⁴ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I.18.5.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, I.16.2-3.

¹²⁶ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 184-188. See Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 81-82; see *Ibid.*, 85, where he says classical immutability “does not express the responsive and vulnerable love of God that is central to the Christian story”; This poses a problem for open theism since love is also said to be God’s “essence”, even the closest thing to defining God himself. In the collaborative effort given by open proponents, Richard Rice says, “The statement that God is love is as close as the Bible comes to giving us a definition of the divine reality....Love is not something God happens to do, it is the one divine activity that most fully and vividly discloses God’s inner reality. Love, therefore, is the very essence of the divine nature. Love is what it means to be God”. Rice also makes

will and love to existentially cease. The only way to ontologically guarantee their continued existence would be to ontologically join God's unchanging character of pure act with these other relational attributes. Further, to assert that God has an unchanging character, while *simultaneously* possessing a changing knowledge and will, would imply that either God's attributes are not essential to his nature—in which case God has taken on distinct essences identical to the creature—or if knowledge and will are part of his unchanging nature, he would be utterly immutable, which offers no difference from the classical view. To be sure, one must know and will in accordance with one's own being. It is nonsense to assert that an unchangeable essence can know and will changeably, and vice versa, namely, a changeable essence to know and will immutably. That is, even if one were to grant the open assumption there are immutable and mutable aspects of God, God's being would be restricted to what his own changeable properties are.¹²⁷ This would ensure the world only a temporal and mediated relationship with God that was subject to the possibility of decomposition/corruption on God's part. Here again, when dealing with the issue of immutability, the breakdown in the open understanding of the analogy of being is visible, and in particular, failing to distinguish between an intrinsic and an extrinsic causal relation between an unchanging cause (God) and the changing effect (creation). Unfortunately, open theism has incorrectly assumed that to relate and exist with changing creatures, God, too must operate in a changing and temporal way. Certainly, God can know and do all the good that man does, but he does not accomplish it in the same *way, manner or mode* that finite creatures accomplish it. If God did, how then would he differ from the finite creature? What is more, patristic fathers and classical theologians through the centuries have *always* interpreted God as dynamic, loving, relational and involved with his creation in an immutable way, despite the challenges to intellectually comprehend and communicate the full scope of the relationship between the eternal and temporal domains. Informed by biblical revelation, they were careful to note the difference from non-relational pagan concepts of immutable causes and deities (e.g., Aristotle's

statements implying the divine nature is dependent in certain respects when he says that this love involves "being responsive as well" and the world exerting "an influence on him [God]" and that God is "dependent on the world in certain respects" (*The Openness of God*, 16, 19, 21). However, if God is *essentially* love, and God's essential nature cannot change, it seems inconsistent to conclude that God must change in relation to the world because he is love? It leaves one unclear as to exactly what are the unchanging aspects of God since "essence" and "nature" refer to what cannot be changed and must be "essential" to one's nature, and if they cannot be changed they cannot possibly be "vulnerable" or "responsive" as open theism defines it. It appears they would need to say God's unchanging nature is itself open to change, which is logically and metaphysically absurd since if love is what God *is*, and not just what God *has*, it would require a change of nature every time God changed in his love. And if love is what God *has*, how then is he ontologically different from the creature?

¹²⁷ Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy*, 368. Open theism cannot have it both ways, either God is changing, temporal, finite and contingent, or is unchanging, timelessly eternal, infinite and necessary.

unmoved mover that had no personal relationship with the world) from the God of the Christian story, which was existentially involved in his creation, preservation and redemptive work.¹²⁸ Indeed, it is strange logic to assume that a relationship to an unchanging God of perfection, love, faithfulness, knowledge, emotion and power, who always keeps his word, is somehow *inferior* to a relationship with a changing God who makes mistakes, does not know the future, learns from the creaturely life he is supposed to be guiding and who does not need to keep his word.¹²⁹ One who relates perfectly need not change since to change implies losing and gaining something new, something which perfect relations neither have nor need.¹³⁰ With every divine change, the open view implies God's relationship to creatures was not perfect or qualitatively all it could be, but lacked in some respect, which required adjustment. Only those who relate imperfectly need to change and align themselves with unchanging dynamic loving perfection. Whatever novel and "new benefits" are available for relating to a changing God, they have already been realized by millions of people in the church without giving up the traditional metaphysical girdle that holds these benefits together. Though the particular issues within the open debate are substantive and worthy of discussion, the overall relational reward offered by open proponents to the scholar and laity are simply redundant at best.

In regard to God's impassibility, there are several reasons why open theism falls short of both understanding the doctrine and accounting for the scripture's descriptions of God's will and passions.

¹²⁸ Open theism has yet to provide documentation of any major orthodox church father or reformer who believed that the immutability of God rendered him inert, aloof, capricious, immobile or incapable of divine-human relations. On the contrary, there are several works that demonstrate all major orthodox fathers and reformers held to dynamic immutability. See H. Wayne House, *Charts on Open Theism and Orthodoxy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2003); J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*; G.L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*; David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998); Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology: God and Creation Volume II*; J.K. Mozley, *The Impassibility of God: A Survey of Christian Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1926); Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 83-112.

¹²⁹ See Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 51, footnote 66, where Pinnock says, "We may not want to admit it but prophecies often go unfulfilled....God is free in the manner of fulfilling prophecy and is not bound to a script, even his own. The world is a project and God works on it creatively; he is free to strike out in new directions. We cannot pin the free God down". Instead of instilling confidence and security in a loving perfect God, the open view of God resembles the lifestyle of a free-wheeling bachelor that cannot be tamed.

¹³⁰ The fallacious assumption of open theology is to see change as superior to immutability in God. Change can be good, especially when change is needed as in the case of imperfect finite creatures aligning themselves with truth or perfection. However, when the creature aligns herself perfectly with the good, any further change would be detrimental. The same is true with God. Nothing good can come from change in a perfect being since it implies ontological lack, but God cannot lack in any way or else he would not be God. Even if there is a part of God that is unchanging as open theists claim, the changing parts (i.e., knowledge, will, emotion, love, action, etc) are not immune to this criticism. Any change in God then implies imperfect knowledge, will, emotion, love and action.

First, open discussions consistently misunderstand the traditional view of what it means for God to be impassible. The notion of a cold and distant Creator is a mischaracterization of how the church viewed God. With these distorted descriptions, one is left with the idea that God is detached from the human plight, stoic and unconcerned, and unable to genuinely love, will and express divine emotions. It appears that open theism has arrived at these conclusions not from an analysis of patristic and medieval literature, but from illegitimate deductions based on both Greek and pagan concepts of God (cf. chapter 1) and significant misinterpretations of traditional impassibility. As we previously saw, Augustine and Aquinas held that since God is simple and eternal, impassibility meant God's will and emotion remain *uncaused* by creation or anything else external to God himself, which is far from saying God has no passion whatsoever.¹³¹ Unlike open theism, it is evident that Augustine viewed divine emotion in real terms of anger, patience, jealousy, delight, joy, love, wrath and concern, though clearly placing the change in man and not God, which is consistent with an immutable divine will.¹³² Augustine is careful to distinguish the emotions of God from the manner in which they operate in man.¹³³ There is no sense in which Augustine viewed passion or emotion as something inherently evil or to be denied in the Christian life if they were consistent with the rational intellect and the will of the inner soul. Like Augustine, Thomas judiciously allowed for the operation of passion or movements within man's soul and went so far as to call them "virtue". This stands in striking contrast to the open notion that classical theology viewed *all* movement, passion and change as inherently negative, which led to the classical dismissal of passion operating in the nature of God. On the contrary, movement, passion and change were allowed to be the soul's vehicles of virtue and goodness if applied in proper relation. What in fact was denied of God was that these passions are *changing* and morally base or that they in some sense, tended toward base appetites, which did not accord with the nature of God.

Moreover, no patristic father,¹³⁴ orthodox medieval scholar¹³⁵ or reformer,¹³⁶ ever described God's impassibility as open theology does (i.e., as necessitating the notion of indifference,

¹³¹ See Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 14, where he describes the common classical notion of impassibility when he quotes Theophilus of Antioch as saying that God is "'unchangeable, inasmuch as He is immortal' we must regard him as meaning that no outside force can so act upon God as to alter the essential constancy of His nature". Italics added.

¹³² Augustine, *On Patience*, 1ff., in Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 3, 527f.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 1, in *Ibid.*, 527.

¹³⁴ For how the patristic fathers interpreted impassibility see Ignatius, *Letter to Polycarp*, 3, in Roberts and Donaldson, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1; Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies*, 7:15, in *Ibid.*, volume 2; Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.4.4, in *Ibid.*, volume 4; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 2.13.3, in *Ibid.*, volume 3; Athenagoras, *Writings of Athenagoras – A Plea for the Christians*, 8, in *Ibid.*, volume 2; Dionysius of Alexandria, in

carelessness, detachment, or apathy, concerning the affairs of man). Prestige comments on the orthodox patristic concept of impassibility:

It is clear that impassibility means not that God is inactive or uninterested, not that He surveys existence with Epicurean impassivity from the shelter of a metaphysical insulation, but that His will is determined from within instead of being swayed from without.¹³⁷

The idea of “indifference” is totally foreign to patristic and medieval thought. A more accurate view understood impassibility as involving the impossibility of pure act (perfect being) being affected by some outside influence.¹³⁸ Gerald Bray distinguishes between the pagan and Christian usage of *apatheia*:

This pagan concept was not really what Christians had in mind when they spoke of God’s impassibility. *Apatheia*, as John of Damascus understood it, meant the inability to suffer, *i.e.* impassibility in the strict sense. The emphasis was not on tranquility in a state of indifference, but on the sovereignty of God, whose being could not be attacked or harmed by any outside power.¹³⁹

Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 72, also see pages 7-38 for a historical survey of impassibility from the apostolic fathers to Irenaeus; Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Twelve Topics on the Faith*, 6, in Robertson and Donaldson, ed., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 6; Novatian, *Concerning the Trinity*, 5, in *Ibid.*, volume 5; Methodius, *Three Fragments – Homily on the Cross and Passion of Christ*, 3, in *Ibid.*; Arnobius, *Seven Books of Arnobius Against the Heathen*, 2.64, in *Ibid.*, volume 6; Salvian the Presbyter, in Andrew Louth, ed., “Genesis 1-11,” in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture – Old Testament*, 1.127; John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, I.14, in Schaff and Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 9, 17; Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 6-9, 11.

¹³⁵ See Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo*, 1.8, in Anselm, *St. Anselm: Basic Writings: Proslogium Monologium, Gaunilon’s, On Behalf of the Fool, Cur Deus Homo*. Translated by S.W. Deane. Second ed. (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1962); Augustine, *On Patience*, 1, in Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 3; Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.20.1; I-II.1-2; I-II.47.1; I-II.73.8.

¹³⁶ See Jacob Arminius, *Disputations*, 15.7, in Jacob Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, Volume 2. Translated by James Nichols and W.R. Bagnall (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1956); John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Translated by Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), I.17.12ff; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1.206.11

¹³⁷ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 7.

¹³⁸ William G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, edited by Alan W. Gomes (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003 [3rd edition]), 695. Pinnock seems to understand this approach to impassibility, however strangely. Pinnock suggests that being unaffected by external causes necessarily means that God has no emotions at all. For example, he says, “The impassibility of God was an axiom of Platonic theology, God being incapable of suffering from an external or internal cause. Hence God cannot experience sorrow, sadness or pain. This is the most questionable aspect of conventional theism.” (*Most Moved Mover*, 56, footnote 77). It simply does not follow that God has no emotions because he cannot be affected from without or within since God could have unchanging and uncaused emotions from all eternity. For example, God could eternally and immutably be saddened and grieved by evil and unrighteousness as well as joy in goodness.

¹³⁹ Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 98.

To assume that the meaning of “impassibility”, as the patristic fathers used it in the sense of *apatheia* or *apathes*,¹⁴⁰ has identical employment as our modern English words “apathy” or “apathetic” is mistaken.¹⁴¹ In referring to the patristic meaning of “impassible”, Jaroslav Pelikan asserts that “despite the obvious etymological connection, not ‘apathy, apathetic,’ in the sense in which these terms are employed in modern English”.¹⁴² Simon Oliver succinctly summarizes the classical orthodox position of *apatheia*. In this way:

‘Apatheia’ means unaffected. But to be unaffected by something does not entail that God is unloving or uncaring. It simply means that God is not put at risk, improved or diminished by anything that happens in creation. In other words, God is not concerned for us because of what it might entail for him, but purely for what it might mean for us, his creatures.¹⁴³

Far from eliminating the emotions and dynamic nature of God, *apatheia* is the *apophatic* notion that guards creation against idolatry. This is accomplished by limiting the influence of causality and predication when speaking of the divine nature. Moreover, negative God-talk allows God to be free from the constraints often associated with positive human language, giving God an ontological independence to think, create, be, act, know and relate on an entirely different ontological plain from his creatures.¹⁴⁴ In this sense, then, *apatheia*, and more broadly *apophaticism*, is a form of worship. Through astute analysis of the relationship between Christianity and classical culture among the Cappadocians, in particular that of Gregory of Nyssa (A.D. 335-395), Pelikan sees no tension in their theology of *apatheia* and *dynamism* when he writes:

For the Cappadocians’ celebration of *apatheia* as ‘likeness to God’ did seem to substantiate such an impression of a static reality (as though *apatheia* in Patristic Greek were synonymous with ‘apathy’ in modern English, though it definitely is not)...But in a long and far reaching discussion, Gregory of Nyssa sought to show that such a definition of God in absolute terms was not incompatible with dynamism.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ See Mozley, *The Impassibility of God*, 14, where he says, “Theophilus [of Antioch] goes on almost immediately to say that God is ‘unchangeable, inasmuch as He is immortal’ In this sense he could have used of God, as Justin did, the adjective *apathes*...”

¹⁴¹ See Jaroslav Pelikan, *Classical Christianity and Classical Culture*, 86.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 328.

¹⁴³ Simon Oliver, personal correspondence, May 12, 2008.

¹⁴⁴ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 4.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 164. See Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, V; *Homilies on the Song of Songs*, II.

The standard patristic lexical works describing *apatheia* do not imply the notion of cold indifference and inactivity ascribed by open theism; rather, it suggests spiritual activity,¹⁴⁶ which involves the incapacity for suffering.¹⁴⁷ Prestige adds, “There is no sign that divine impassibility was taught with any view of minimising the interest of God in His creation or His care and concern for the world that He had made”.¹⁴⁸

Second, the open notion that God must really suffer with his creatures in order to demonstrate genuine compassion (lit. *to suffer with*) on them unnecessarily requires an emotional identification with the sufferer.¹⁴⁹ It is not always the case that compassion must accompany real suffering on the part of the compassionate one. What is offered by the philanthropist to the poor, such as money or clothing, does not require her to feel the same things the poor feels or experiences, but only that she *understands* and develops some sense of *appreciation* for the situation that “moves” her to action. Throughout the gospels, the explicit mention of the word “compassion” is always associated with some sense of 1) understanding the situation of the sufferer and 2) a movement to action.¹⁵⁰ In half these cases, the biblical author uses vocabulary such as “saw” and “moved” to describe compassionate understanding, which is followed by a specific action. In the other occurrences of “compassion”, understanding the situation of the sufferer is implied, and in all cases, action to relieve suffering is present, giving good reason to believe that *understanding* and *moving to action* are necessary conditions for genuine compassion. In no case was it apparent that the compassionate one suffered emotionally or incurred any physical harm, implying that suffering is not a necessary condition for true compassion. For one can be stirred in the heart, and even suffer as

¹⁴⁶ See Georges Florovsky, *Collected Works* (Belmont, MA: Nordland, 1972), 3:88; Geoffrey W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961).

¹⁴⁷ “*Apathes*” in Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1979), 79. Lampe describes a range of usage for *apatheia* as “impassibility, insensibility, freedom from emotion, freedom from sin”. According to Lampe “these senses are not always clearly distinguishable”. Within this range, however, *apatheia* can be used of God, as it was in Gennadius I Constantinopolitanus, as “by nature incompatible with the propensities of the flesh” (see “*apatheia*”, in Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Fascicle 1, 170). In addition, according to Lampe, *apathes* can be used in the classical sense to refer to God himself and to his love, demonstrating that impassibility and love can coexist in one being, removing it from the open notion of inert, aloof, and indifference (see “*apathes*”, in Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Fascicle 1, 171). Moreover, Lampe is careful to distinguish the earlier Stoic usage of these words from the Christian sense. The usage of “impassible” by the early fathers and apologists was primarily *apophatic* in the context of demonstrating the Christian God as far removed from the human affections often attributed to the polytheistic deities of the second, third, and fourth-centuries (see Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, VIII; X; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.12.1; II.13.3-9).

¹⁴⁸ Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, 11.

¹⁴⁹ Gavriilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 8.

¹⁵⁰ See Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32; 18:27, 33; 20:34; Mark 1:41; 5:19; 6:34; 8:2; 9:22; Luke 7:13; 10:33; 15:20.

the one to whom compassion is directed, and yet not be moved to action. This sort of “compassion” cannot be said to be superior to the compassion that accompanies movement to action since nothing has changed in the life of the sufferer. In this case, even the life of the compassionate one may incur greater suffering. Unfortunately, as a whole, suffering with someone in this sense leads to additional suffering, which is existentially undesirable. Suffering on the part of the compassionate one may, or may not accompany compassion, thus giving us good reason to eliminate it from being a necessary condition for a truly compassionate state.¹⁵¹ For example, any voluntary acts that are philanthropic or heroic movements of compassion *may* require or have the *potential* for suffering when intervening into the circumstances of the suffering one. Similarly, for God to have compassion on creatures does not require God to acquire the sufferings in the same sense, but merely to understand the situation and act in accord with his unchanging nature. Paul Gavrilyuk insightfully argues that there is some sense in which any compassionate person must be *above the suffering* in order to help another overcome their helpless plight. He elucidates:

The compassionate person may indeed suffer by entering the situation of the sufferer, but his suffering must never simply be the same as that of the sufferer. He suffers voluntarily, as a consequence of his compassionate intention, whereas the victim suffers unwillingly. The compassionate person is not conquered by suffering, whereas the sufferer is weak and helpless. The compassionate person is able to help precisely because he is not susceptible to suffering to the degree to which the victim is. In this sense the compassionate person must remain impassible, unconquered by suffering.¹⁵²

To argue, as open theism does, that genuine compassion and relationship requires suffering on the part of God fails to account for the ways in which man can suffer but God cannot.¹⁵³ God does not have, as open theism readily agrees, a physical body through which to experience pain and suffering wrought by disease.¹⁵⁴ He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18), feel lonely or commit evil acts (Hab. 1:13; Jms. 1:13, 17) to experience the condition of isolation and guilt. Moreover, God has never experienced the anguish and maladies associated with drug abuse or adultery. The classical solution can explain how God can relate to these issues through an impassible nature of love, understanding and action.

¹⁵¹ Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 13.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹⁵³ See Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 119, where Pinnock seems aware of this point acknowledging a limit to which God can suffer, even granting that God must in some sense offer an “imaginative response” to the creature since “he [God] does not suffer in the exact ways that we do”. He describes this response when “God sympathizes in his relationship with us”. Pinnock offers no elaboration on these claims and appears to collapse on occasion to the classical view. If what he means is essentially the classical position, there is no reason to deny the classical view of God’s impassible compassion. If there is in any sense an identity between the open and classical view points, there is no reason to deny the classical view of God’s impassible compassion, making the open perspective irrelevant.

¹⁵⁴ Pinnock, “Systematic Theology,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 119.

Namely, God *knows how* it feels to have anguish, disease, guilt, commit evil, sin and even lie, but does not know them the *way* in which creatures know them. That is, God knows these things intuitively, eternally, immutably, simply and completely all at once, though the creature knows them through *temporal experience*. What is more, to assume that in order for God to have relationships and compassion on creatures he must relate and know in the same manner they do is unnecessary and philosophically unsound, yielding profound implications. According to this logic, God must be finite, physical, tired, temporal, sinful, changing, prone to mistakes, limited and creaturely in order to relate to creatures in a compassionate way. Open theism must admit there are some ways in which God is not at all like creatures, yet he continues to occupy the capacity for relationships. If this is indeed the case, the classical notion of God's impassibility must at least be possible, and at most true.

Again we see the breakdown in the analogy of being, which despite the similarities between cause and effect, requires one to act and be in accord with their own nature. It is precisely here that open theism is at the crossroads of (in)coherency. According to open theism, God is not like creatures in certain respects (e.g., God's unchanging perfect character/nature). If this is the case, how then does God, who has no character flaws, compassionately relate to the creature who has character flaws? Open theism offers no mechanism by which God can relate to changing creatures as they do for God's changing attributes. The painful dilemma confronting the open notion of divine compassion, and more broadly to that of all Creator-creature relationships, is that if it is true that God can relate to the creature's changing character while himself possessing an unchanging character/nature, why cannot classical theism say God can relate to changing, temporal and finite creatures while possessing an unchanging, eternal and infinite nature/emotions? The question implies that either the open God cannot relate or that it is indeed possible for an unchanging being to relate, even compassionately, to changing creatures, which is what classical theism has been arguing. Any attempt to change the nature of God to bring him in line with the creature's changing character violates the analogy of being and risks God's distinguished divine nature. Likewise, any change in the nature of the creature to match God's unchanging character deifies the creature, and hence, removes the crucial ontological distinction between God and creatures that the patristic church fought so hard to maintain.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ For more on analogy see the final chapter of this work on analogy and religious language.

In order to avoid this dilemma, Pinnock offers a solution when he says, “We could say that God is impassible in nature but passible in his experience of the world”.¹⁵⁶ However, this is unconvincing since “nature” describes the essence of a being. How is it that God’s nature is free from passions in one respect, and yet his will, knowledge and relation to the world are subject to them? For will and knowledge are inherent in one’s personal nature. An impassible being must show compassion impassibly; otherwise the absurd notion that an impassible being can relate passibly would result. The only way to escape this dilemma is for Pinnock to argue that God possesses two distinct natures: One of pure actuality, which is impassible and another nature of act and potency, which is passible, each of which operates according to its own ontological status. Rice favors this *dipolar* notion of God in his description of the similarities between the open and process views when he says:

The openness concept of God shares the process view that God’s relation to the temporal world consists in a succession of concrete experiences, rather than a single timeless perception....It also shares with process theism the twofold analysis of God, or the ‘dipolar theism’....It conceives God as both absolute and relative, necessary and contingent, eternal and temporal, changeless and changing. It assigns one element in each pair to the appropriate aspect of God’s being – the essential divine character or the concrete divine experience.¹⁵⁷

Pinnock and Rice offer no apologetic or mechanism to explain how these two poles avoid the traditional criticism applied to ontological dualism and panentheism.¹⁵⁸ Further, God’s interaction within the divine being, and subsequently, its relation to the world, is left by open theism unexplained. The initial criticisms are obvious.

First, how could an act/potency and pure act nature exist as the same person without positing two distinct natures? It is logically contradictory to affirm contraries (e.g., contingent/changing and necessary/unchanging) of one being at the same time and in the same sense. Open theists could argue that they have separated God into a bipolar nature with isolated attributes that are unique to each pole. However, this would not explain how each pole would relate to the world and each other, being mutually exclusive. Since open theism has argued that the changing cannot relate to the unchanging in any meaningful way, how does the unchanging and changing pole in God relate to each other in a bipolar environment? Open theism must admit that there is an unchanging pole of

¹⁵⁶ Pinnock. “Systematic Theology,” in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 119.

¹⁵⁷ Richard Rice, *God’s Foreknowledge and Man’s Free Will* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1980, 1985), 33. See where Pinnock cites Rice favorably on this point (*Most Moved Mover*, 143-144).

¹⁵⁸ See H.P. Owen, *The Christian Knowledge of God* (London: University of London, Athlone Press, 1969); Gruenler, *The Inexhaustible God: Biblical Faith and the Challenge of Process Theism*.

God that cannot relate to the world, nor to himself, which would make it difficult to understand how the open notion of God's relation to his creatures is somehow superior than the classical view, which asserts God's whole being is involved in the world.

Second, because of the ontological difference between these two poles, it would necessitate two natures in God, resulting in either metaphysical dualism, which is more closely aligned to Greek Platonic dualism than to biblical theism that asserts God is one (Deut. 6:4). Third, positing a purely actual pole in God appears to be counterproductive to open theism since it would be subject to the same criticisms (e.g., Greek and Hellenistic negative influence) applied to classical theism's concept of a purely actual God.

Fourth, the act/potency pole would be a finite God that could not guarantee or fulfill final victory or compassion any more than the creature could.

Fifth, despite open assertions that God is ontologically distinct and independent from the world in his unchanging pole¹⁵⁹ (practically and metaphysically), the act/potency pole, which contains will, knowledge and compassion, would be of the same *genus* as the created order, resulting either in the deification of man or the anthropomorphic nature of God. Aquinas powerfully argued that all composition is finite, contingent and susceptible to the ravishes of corruption, which requires a cause since complexity does not come together except for the action of a preexisting uncaused agent.¹⁶⁰ In addition, if passibility is a perfection in God, and impassibility is an equally noted perfection in him as open theism suggests, each attribute would lack what the other possess, thus implying a lack of perfection in God. However, God cannot lack, hence, there can be no such dichotomy in God. One could argue, as open proponents do, that God's dichotomy is essential to preserve the whole person of God, by positing an unchanging essential character and a relational nature that does change, both working together to maintain the whole personality of God as a viable means of relationship to creatures. For both passibility and impassibility are the ingredients to healthy relationships. That is, passibility allows real give and take relationships to exist and allows the latter to maintain these relations according to the virtuous nature of God. Despite noble attempts to reconcile the two attributes, the crucial ontological component of how they relate to each other remains a mystery. It does not seem apparent how God's passible and impassible natures could relate to each other in God since open theology has already dismissed the possibility of the

¹⁵⁹ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 79.

¹⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.3.1-7; *On the Power of God*, 7.1

unchanging relating to the changing. At best, open theologians could maintain that God knows and relates to his creatures through his changing passible nature, while the impassible nature remains ignorant and without relation. This leaves God partially ignorant to his changing creation and not fully aware of his changing self. This conclusion implies a lack in God and leaves the question of how it is possible for the unchanging to relate to the changing unanswered. On the other hand, the logic is clear. If open theism holds that God can relate to the world through its impassible nature, why is it impossible for the classical God to relate to the world through his impassible nature? And if the open bipolar God cannot relate to the world through his impassible nature, how would this be an improvement over the classical position that argues for the totality of God's ontological relational value? If open theism argues that the impassible part of God does not relate to the world, then there is a part of the open God that cannot relate. Hence, God is not in full compassion and relationship with his creatures in the totality of his being. If there is an impassible part of God that cannot suffer, as openness contends, there is no reason to logically deny or assume it a detriment that God is totally impassible.

The early fathers endorsed the notion of immutability and impassibility as an *apophatic* concept that primarily guarded the divine nature from applications of passions and emotions not in accord with the ontological status of a purely actual God. Justin, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Clement and many others used immutability and impassibility as a key factor that distinguished God's unchanging emotions from the changing immoral passions and anthropomorphic characteristics of humans and pagan deities of the second, third and fourth centuries.¹⁶¹ Of paramount concern to early Christians was the preservation of the transcendent, wholly other notion of God,¹⁶² which was in contrast to Zeus, Rhea, Hera, Kronos, Isis and Osiris, who were characterized by finite imminence, human emotions and genealogical pedigrees.¹⁶³ Basil of Caesarea (A.D. 329-379), when arguing the orthodox relationship of the substance of the Son to the Father in his *Letters*, emphatically endorsed the obligation and notion of *apophatic* language in this way:

It is indeed characteristic of poor and carnal intelligence to compare the things that are eternal with the perishing things of time, and to imagine, that as corporeal things beget, so does God in like manner; it is rather our duty to rise to the truth by arguments of the contrary, and to say, that since thus is the mortal, not thus is He

¹⁶¹ See the excellent work of Gavriilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 47-63; Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 83-112; Mozley, *The Impassible God*, 7-104.

¹⁶² See Pelikan's treatment of *apophatic* language to establish divine transcendence as the fathers' primary motivation (*Christianity and Classical Culture*, 86-87).

¹⁶³ Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, XII, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2, 141.

who is immortal. We must neither then deny the divine generation, nor contaminate our intelligence with corporeal senses.¹⁶⁴

What is more, in *A Plea For the Christians (Legatio Pro Christianis)*, Athenagoras forcefully argues against polytheism by distinguishing God from the multitude of lesser deities with his *apophatic* description that “God is uncreated, and, impassible, and indivisible”.¹⁶⁵ Later in regard to Christian worship, he elevates God above mere ritual when he asserts:

That we are not atheists, therefore, seeing that we acknowledge one God, uncreated, eternal, invisible, impassible, incomprehensible, illimitable, who is apprehended by the understanding only and the reason, who is encompassed by light, and beauty, and spirit, and power ineffable, by whom the universe has been created through His Logos, and set in order, and is kept in being.¹⁶⁶

In similar manner, Irenaeus uses impassible vocabulary when answering the Gnostics and their view of creation, which advocated a continuum of Aeons, one of which created the world. Contrary to scripture, the Gnostics identified the Judeo-Christian God as one in a series of aeons and subject to the passions and relegated to the created realm. In order to transcend, separate and elevate the Christian God above these temporal categories, Irenaeus avers:

As to defect, this happens as follows: first of all, because they reckon the Propator among the other Aeons. For the Father of all ought not to be counted with other productions; He who was not produced with that which was produced; He who was unbegotten with that which was born; He whom no one comprehends with that which is comprehended by Him, and who is on this account [Himself] incomprehensible; and He who is without figure with that which has a definite shape. For inasmuch as He is superior to the rest, He ought not be numbered with them, and that so that He who is impassible and not in error should be reckoned with an Aeon subject to passion, and actually in error.¹⁶⁷

Irenaeus, who was governed by the scriptures and his intense desire to overcome the Gnostic tendency to assign creaturely affections and passions to a series of emanations from the Nous, continued to distinguish between human and divine passions. Irenaeus replies to the heretics with his *apophatic* qualifiers:

¹⁶⁴ Basil, *Letters*, LII.3, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 8 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1895 [reprint edition]), 156. Pelikan says of this passage that Basil is “invoking the *apophatic* language of negation, which was the proper language of transcendence. At that level and by that method, faith and reason were mutually complimentary, and faith was confirmed by reason” (*Christianity and Classical Culture*, 36).

¹⁶⁵ Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians*, VIII, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Father*, volume 2, 132.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, X, in *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁶⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.12.1, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 371.

These things may be properly be said to hold good in men, since they are compound by nature, and consist of a body and a soul. But those...are... to be blamed as having improperly used these productions...as describing the affections, and passions, and mental tendencies of men, while they [thus prove themselves] ignorant of God. By their manner of speaking, they ascribe those things which apply to men to the Father of all; and they deny that He Himself made the world...while, at the same time, they endow Him with human affections and passions. But if they had known the Scriptures, and been taught by the truth, they would have known, beyond doubt, that God is not as men are; and that His thoughts are not like the thoughts of men. For the Father of all is at a vast distance from those affections and passions which operate among men. He is a simple, uncompounded Being, without diverse members, and altogether like, and equal to Himself, since He is wholly understanding, and wholly spirit, and wholly thought, and wholly intelligence, and wholly reason, and wholly hearing, and wholly seeing, and wholly light, and the source of all that is good.¹⁶⁸

Certainly, Irenaeus does not appear to recognize any tension between God's impassibility and the relationship of the divine sight, light, hearing and goodness to the world. Weinandy's important insight regarding the relationship between Irenaeus' articulation and Greek philosophy should not go unnoticed:

Irenaeus' view of God and his relationship to the created order is then quite the antithesis to that of Greek philosophy, his Gnostic opponents having much in common with it. Rather, Irenaeus, while frequently employing words prevalent within the Hellenic philosophical tradition, such as immutability and impassibility, radically alter their signification so as to conform them to and to give affirmation of the Hebraic and Christian truth about God and his love and goodness.¹⁶⁹

To read into *apophatic* language any more than to establish ontological transcendence and deny qualities that are not fitting to God's nature goes beyond what the fathers intended. Open theism's univocal interpretations of *apophatic* designations has led them to define God's nature as "inert" and "static", which are far from the patristic understanding of God. Instead of interpreting "impassible" in the *causal sense* of God's emotions being uncaused, unaffected, unmoved or unchanged, open theism has adopted an *essential/substantial* reading that eliminates the divine emotional *nature* altogether. This understanding would be contrary to the vast majority of early fathers and medieval theologians and contrary to what Gregory of Nazianzus (A.D. 329-389) assumed to be the proper usage of negative language:

For in Himself He sums up and contains all Being, having neither beginning in the past nor end in the future; like some great Sea of Being, limitless and unbounded, transcending all conception of time and nature, only adumbrated by the mind, and that very dimly and scantily...not by His Essentials, but by His Environment.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., II.13.3, in Ibid., 373-374.

¹⁶⁹ Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 94-95.

¹⁷⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations*, XXXVIII.7, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, volume 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1894 [reprint edition]), 346; also see Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, II.142-144. For the classical concept of God, all negative descriptions presupposed positive prior knowledge of God's *actus purus*, thus avoiding the self-defeating position of total agnosticism prevalent in the Neoplatonism of Plotinus.

To suggest the patristic notion of impassibility was equivalent to being apathetic, immobile and indifferent. Further, to preclude any sense in which God's emotion could be dynamically active in the world among his creatures, simply overlooks the massive patristic witness,¹⁷¹ which suggests that no widespread tension existed between the impassible God and his real unchanging passion.¹⁷² In his *Of Learned Ignorance (De Docta Ignorantia)*, Nicholas of Cusa (A.D. 1401-1464) explains that negative theology is necessary to describe the "absolute maximum" (i.e., God) since all positive language we use to describe our inferential knowledge of him is known to us only by way of its similarity and comparison to creatures. As D.J.B. Hawkins describes in his introduction to Nicholas' work:

Since no two things are exactly similar, the description which we apply to the thing indirectly known [e.g., God] can only apply to it approximately and inadequately. Hence our partial knowledge of it implies at the same time a confession of partial ignorance, and without such enlightened ignorance we should be guilty of genuine error in claiming to know of it more than we really know.¹⁷³

According to Nicholas, we know God exists and that he is the perfect maximum. From this understanding, we can use apophatic language that is known to creation, but even these terms imply their opposites (i.e., the minimum), which in turn stand in contrast to God. However, nothing can stand in contrast or opposition to God since he is wholly other and has no like kind in the created world. Therefore, God remains ontologically distinct from the realm from which the terms originate and correspond. This is what Nicholas calls the "coincidence of opposites" or the "reconciliation of contraries" (*coincidentia oppositorum*). For Nicholas, reason is the medium through which contraries and opposites are identified, therefore, placing God's nature above reason. That is, if God is called unity, there cannot be opposites such as multiplicity associated with it, or else we have not

¹⁷¹ Mozley says, "The divine substance, as simple and eternal, was necessarily impervious to the disintegrating tendencies of the passions.... To suppose that Christian thinkers carelessly passed over all that seems to us involved in our belief in God's loving care, His fatherly providence, and His moral purposefulness, would be the greatest injustice both to their words and to their thought" (*The Impassibility of God*, 46).

¹⁷² Unfortunately, the univocal approach to language employed by open theism has led to an illegitimate transfer of many forms of terminology and philosophical vocabulary used by Greek and Hellenistic sources into the classical philosophical support system without acknowledging any substantial difference in their respective usages. For example, Pinnock sees the Greek notion of immutability as being equivalent to our modern English usage as apathetic. Though he uses the word "unaffected" to describe his relationship with the world, he really means *without emotion* and completely *unrelational* (*Most Moved Mover*, 117).

¹⁷³ Nicholas of Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, translated by Fr. Germain Heron (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007 [previously published by Yale University Press, 1954]), xvii-xviii.

transcended the realm of creation. For Nicholas, God must be Unity of which there is no opposite. He explains in this way:

The reconciliation of contraries is beyond reason, so to every name reason naturally opposes another; e.g. reason natural opposes plurality or multitude to unity.... The names we affirm of God are given Him on account of a particular meaning they have when applied to creatures, and for that reason they can only apply to Him as diminutives that fall short of His real name. Since a term that is particular, that marks a distinction and that suggests its opposite, can only apply to God in the way we have described, affirmations, as Denis says, are unsuitable. If, for example, we call Him Truth, its opposite, falsity, comes to mind; if we call Him Virtue, vice is suggested; if we call Him Substance, we are confronted with accidents; and so it is with the others. He is a substance, but a substance which is all things and to which nothing stands in opposition; He is the Truth, but truth which is all things without any distinction; these particular names, in consequence, can only be applied to Him as infinitely weak diminutives.¹⁷⁴

The coincidence of opposites places God's immutability and impassibility *beyond* the opposed temporal categories of "motion" and "rest" and is, therefore, decidedly negative and apophatic. This implies that open theology's kataphatic descriptions of a "static" and "inert" God propose to give us positive information about what God is essentially in himself, which falls well short of supporting the classical and open contention that God is at least in some sense wholly other and best described in apophatic terms.

There does not exist a uniform concept of impassibility within the Hellenistic tradition, making identification of the classical doctrine of God with any particular tradition extremely difficult or altogether impossible. The open claim of Greek and Hellenistic infection is overly simplistic and sweeping without regard to the diversity of opinion between thinkers.¹⁷⁵ As far as we know, impassibility (*apatheia*, *apathes*) was not applied to God in the existing Presocratic literature (with the exception of Anaxagoras), nor in Plato or the Stoics, though it did appear in the works of Aristotle in reference to his mover for the first time.¹⁷⁶ In his reasoning concerning the nature of the moved, the instrument of motion and the mover, Aristotle introduces approvingly Anaxagoras' notion of impassibility when he says, "Anaxagoras is right when he says that Mind is impassive and unmixed since he makes it the principle of motion; for it could cause motion in this way only by being itself unmoved, and have control only by being unmixed".¹⁷⁷ Aristotle is clearly using *apathes* here in rejecting the possibility for the mover to be affected by external causes, hence the title "unmoved mover". Due to its relative paucity in any extant literature and the absence of any

¹⁷⁴ Nicholas of Cusanus, *Of Learned Ignorance*, I.25.

¹⁷⁵ See Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 72, where he describes "apathy" as a Hellenistic construct imported to Christian theology without identifying its lineage, usage or in precisely what way this influence took place.

¹⁷⁶ Gavriyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 34.

¹⁷⁷ Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII.5, in Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, 429.

mention or knowledge of Aristotle's impassible mover in the early father's writings, the classical Greek philosophers could not possibly be blamed for classical theism's doctrine of impassibility. Gavriilyuk argues that there was no consensus regarding the divine emotions immediately following Aristotle. He cites Cicero (106-43 B.C.) and Sextus Empiricus (A.D. 160-210) who attest to the confusion and multitude of opinions prevalent on the subject.¹⁷⁸ Gavriilyuk characterizes the diversity of thought regarding impassibility during the Hellenistic age when he writes:

The Epicurean gods shared pleasurable emotions and remained unconcerned, the Stoic deity was impartial and at the same time extended providential care to the whole cosmos, whereas the Platonist God transcended everything, human emotions included, and was directly involved in the world through intermediaries....I repeat there was no *consensus philosophorum* amounting to an affirmation of divine indifference and non-involvement. On the contrary, competing philosophical schools were keenly aware of profound differences in these matters. The Fathers could not possibly agree with the philosophers simply because the philosophers did not agree among themselves.¹⁷⁹

To be sure, if impassibility was assigned to a particular deity, it did not necessarily preclude divine emotions or involvement in the world. Rather, it was used in the sense of prohibiting external forces from affecting the divine mind. In Christian usage, impassibility not only carried the idea of one being ontologically unaffected, but also carries the notion of God's transcendence. This is seen in Irenaeus' *Against Heresies* when he argues the uniqueness of biblical creation and God's special ontological status far above all created things.¹⁸⁰ Immediately after describing God as unaffected by human passions, Irenaeus articulates crucial distinctions between Creator and the creation in a manner that characterized the entire patristic age, He says:

He is, however, above [all] these properties, and therefore indescribable. For He may well and properly be called and Understanding which comprehends all things, but He is not [on that account] like the understanding of men; and he may most properly be termed Light, but He is nothing like that light with which we are acquainted. And so, in all particulars, the Father of all is in no degree similar to human weakness...He is spoken of in these terms...but in point of greatness, our thoughts regarding him transcend these expressions.¹⁸¹

In addition to Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, despite being influenced by Stoicism and his doctrine of radical transcendence and impassibility of God,¹⁸² extols the relational care, which is evident in the divine "love [for] man, the noblest of all objects created by him, and a God-loving

¹⁷⁸ Gavriilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 21-23, cites Cicero, *De Natura Deorum*, 1.1.2-3; 1.2.5; Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.151.

¹⁷⁹ Gavriilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God*, 35-36.

¹⁸⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.13.1, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 373.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, II.13.4, in *Ibid.*, 374.

¹⁸² Refer to Clement's *Stromata* II.11; IV.23; V.11-12; VI.7; VII.13; *The Instructor* I.8.

being. Therefore, God is loving....God does all good. And He does no good to man without caring for him, and He does not care *for* him without taking care *of* him....And to do good purposely, is nothing else than to take care of man. God therefore cares for man, and takes care of him”.¹⁸³ Obviously, God’s love and providential care for man would be impossible if he could not exercise it *in* the world and *to* his creatures. While the church fathers may have been zealous to portray God as totally other by using terms that may be borrowed from Greek and Hellenic sources, they certainly did not capitulate to any one philosophical tradition, nor did they eliminate the divine *pathos*. The fathers’ preoccupation with the special nature of God made it abundantly clear that Creator and creation were different in the very core of their being.

The open claim that God’s invisible nature is temporal, really suffers, is affected emotionally, increases in knowledge and wisdom, does not know the future and is involved in give and take relationships looks beyond God’s provision of these very things in the person and work of the incarnated Christ and makes them irrelevant, while simultaneously leaving several questions unanswered. Why did Christ need a physical body if the Father could suffer while in his heavenly abode? And if God could suffer, is it not *possible* that God could die from heaven since death results from the most extreme suffering? If God cannot suffer unto death, how can one say that God can relate to those who suffer unto death? It could be argued that the incarnation was for the sole purpose of revealing God to humanity (Jn. 1:18) and did not require the suffering of Christ. However, this brings into question the necessity of redemption through Christ’s passion, which neither open nor classical proponents desire to challenge. Furthermore, Christ’s incarnation cannot be for the sole purpose of revealing the Father since natural creation (Rom. 1:19-21), inner moral conscious (Rom. 2:15) and pre-fallen Adam and Eve who were made in the image of God could have easily revealed the nature of God through their own respective domains. It is only through the incarnation of Christ and his passion on the cross that one can say with confidence that “God suffered”, while leaving the divine nature unaffected. In other words, the passion was accomplished exclusively through the human nature and by the second person of the Godhead—the Son. Thus, in the truest sense of suffering, the Son knows it intimately and, therefore, can sympathize with the creature’s weaknesses (Heb. 2:9-18).

¹⁸³ Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, I.8, in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers 1885 [reprint edition]), 225.

A Summary and Evaluation of the Open Doctrine of Divine-Temporal Relations. For open theism, impassibility is a symptom stemming from a greater problem—immutability. While making impassibility possible, it is the particular attribute that eliminates the sacred Creator-creature relationship. After all, how can a God without feelings know and relate to the changing world any more than a rock relates to the creatures around it? The critics of immutability see change, interaction, give and take, learning and dependence as necessary ingredients to a healthy dynamic two-way interaction with the divine. In order to establish precedence, Sanders summons several early fathers as examples of how God’s “responsive” nature is in some sense dependent on man’s choices.¹⁸⁴ In regards to Justin, Sanders argues that he is careful not to allow his strong view of impassibility, immutability and transcendence to interfere with the biblical picture of “God as patient, compassionate and loving”.¹⁸⁵ Since Justin rejects fatalism and favors human freedom and the idea that God foreknows all free decisions, this knowledge helps explain the prophecies in the scriptures. According to Sanders, for Justin, God’s foreknowledge does not lead to determinism “because God only foresees the free choices of individuals and bases his election on their choices. In this respect God’s decisions are in some sense dependent on human choices. Consequently, God is ‘responsive’ for Justin....He believes God is in some respects conditioned by the decisions humans make...and that God genuinely responds to us”.¹⁸⁶ However, a closer reading of Justin’s view in *The First Apology*, which is cited by Sanders, mentions nothing of God’s “dependence”, “conditioning”, “responsiveness” or that man’s decisions serve as a “basis” for God’s election.¹⁸⁷ In these passages, Justin emphasizes God’s providential care *for* and involvement *with* man. In addition, the portion to which Sanders is referring records Justin’s rejection of fatalism and argues forcefully for freewill as the necessary ingredient for divine praise or blame for any particular human action or decision. Justin describes his position on the relationship between God’s foreknowledge and creaturely actions when he says:

So that what we say about future events being foretold, we do not say it as if they came about by a fatal necessity; but God foreknowing all that shall be done by all men, and it being His decree that the future actions of men shall all be recompensed *according to* their several value, He foretells by the Spirit of prophecy that He

¹⁸⁴ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 142-147.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Refer to Justin’s *First Apology*, XXVIII; XLIII-XLV.

will bestow meet rewards *according to* the merit of the actions done, always urging the human race to effort and recollection, showing that He cares and provides for men.¹⁸⁸

There is no sense in which Justin's words can be taken to mean that God is dependent, conditioned and responsive in the open sense of the word. Rather, Justin clearly articulates that praise or blame will be recompensed and rewarded *according to* the kind of action in question as eternally foreknown. There is nothing to suggest Justin meant anything different from what the traditional view offered, which is namely that future contingents and their consequences would fall out *according to* the manner in which God necessarily, immutably and eternally knows them. That is to say, God's foreknowledge and effects are coextensive, meaning there is no *chronological* or *logical* priority of election and foreknowledge (cf. Eph. 1:5, 7; 1 Pet. 1:2). This is contrary to what Sanders implies when he says that God bases his election on their choices. Since Justin believed God was eternal, immutable, impassible and simple, his knowledge must also function in the same manner according to his being, making God's knowledge simultaneous and exhaustive without the remote possibility of being "based" or "conditioned" on anything temporal. Mistakenly, Sanders chooses to interpret Justin's view of human decisions as *causal* of God's knowledge. This is different from the way in which Justin viewed God's attributes, to which God's knowledge must be coordinated. Sanders offers similar arguments for Irenaeus, Clement and others, which are subject to the same criticism. For example, he says Irenaeus "rejects any predetermination on God's part concerning human decisions".¹⁸⁹ Though quoting his *Against Heresies*, Sanders fails to see that Irenaeus did not necessarily reject "any" predetermination concerning man's free decisions, but only disputed any *coercive* determination that would interfere with human freedom.¹⁹⁰ This is clearly seen in Irenaeus' assertion, "God made man a free [agent] from the beginning, possessing his own power, even as he does his own soul, to obey the behests (*ad utendum sententia*) of God voluntarily, and not by compulsion of God. For there is no coercion with God, but a good will [towards us] is present with Him continually".¹⁹¹ Since Irenaeus viewed God in terms of traditional attributes, including God's knowledge and will, as simple, immutable and eternal, there is no reason to accept the open notion that Irenaeus rejected "any" and all forms of determination having to do with human decisions. That is, God may determine that all human actions fall out according to one's own free choice, and not

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., XLIV, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 177. Italics added for emphasis.

¹⁸⁹ Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 143.

¹⁹⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV.37.1-2

¹⁹¹ Ibid., IV.37.1, in Roberts and Donaldson, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, volume 1, 518.

coercively. Sanders' insistence that many of the early fathers prior to Augustine believed God was in some respects conditioned by the creatures' free choices is simply incorrect.¹⁹² No major orthodox father that I am aware of ever believed that God could in some sense be causally affected by his creatures in an ontological manner as the open theologians argue. Unfortunately, Sanders interprets all divine-temporal relations as an implication that these same relations must be conducted temporally and causally, without regard to the distinct ontological categories of those involved in such relationships.¹⁹³ Further, it is puzzling to understand why Sanders views these fathers as beneficial to his argument (that God is in some sense conditioned) since these patristic passages present a classical God that is relationally dynamic, involved, intimate, uncoercive and ontologically other than his creation. This demonstrates that the fathers saw no tension, as open theism affirms, between the classical attributes and God's relations with the world.

Joining Sanders, Pinnock describes the detriment that occurs to relationships under the burden of classical Theology Proper:

Pure actuality means there is no becoming in God. God cannot change because change would presuppose a transition from potency to act and require change either for the better or the worse. This affects God's relationship with the world. God cannot have real relationships with a changeable world because that would involve give and take. God can impact us but we cannot impact him in any mutual way otherwise he would change. But God never changes and cannot change in relation to the world – only the world can change in relation to God. There cannot be reciprocity of relations between God and the world because then the world would be able to affect God. God must also be apathetic, unaffected by our joys or sorrows. We are in the presence of an immobility package of attributes shaped by philosophy not Scripture, i.e. immutability requires timelessness requires impassibility requires omniscience....The Bible uses personal not absolutist language. It talks of God's being-here and his being-with and for us. The Greek definition is incapable of rendering the living God and his intensely personal nature. It makes God an abstraction without personality...¹⁹⁴

Critics of God's immutable relationships identify Aquinas as being responsible for synthesizing the pagan-classical doctrine on the subject. Sanders avers:

¹⁹² Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 146-147. This may be a result of Sanders reading his *radical* libertarian theology into Justin's words.

¹⁹³ See Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 24, where he quotes with approval Brian Hebblethwaite's reflections on divine-temporal relations: "If God creates a temporally structured universe, then, whatever his own eternal being may be, he must relate himself to his creation in a manner appropriate to its given nature, i.e. temporally" ("Some Reflections on Predestination, Providence and Divine Foreknowledge," *Religious Studies* 15, no. 4 (1979): 436). I maintain that if God must be temporal in order to relate to temporal creatures, logic demands he must also be material, finite, contingent, limited and subject to death. Granted, God must relate to the creature in temporal modes of expression that are understandable and accessible to the creature, but relations never require one to change one's own mode of *nature*. If changing one's nature was necessary to relate, how then can man relate to God who is in some sense, as open theologians maintain, unchanging in character?

¹⁹⁴ Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 117.

[In the classical view] God is completely independent, immutable and impassible. For Aquinas, the creatures' relationship with God is "real" while God's relationship to the creation is only "logical". God is like a stone column, he says, to which we stand in relation. The column may be on our right or our left, but the relation to the column is always in us and not in the column. As the zenith of medieval thought, Aquinas epitomizes the tensions of the biblical-classical synthesis in attempting to reconcile the God of historical action depicted in the Bible with the understanding of God as metaphysical principle, which was needed to explain the cosmos.¹⁹⁵

To be certain, Aquinas did contribute to the formulation of how the Creator relates to the creature in ways unknown previous to his time. Unfortunately, the confusion revolving around Aquinas' treatment of the subject is not unique to open theism. Those who seek to predicate change in God often cite Aquinas as a classical example of how *not* to proceed, employing him as a case study that highlights the negative results that stem from the traditional concept of God's relation with the created order. Aquinas summarizes this relationship when he says the "creatures are really related to God Himself; whereas, in God there is no real relation to creatures".¹⁹⁶ Openness criticisms are straightforward and two-fold: 1) God must be *really* related to the creature since they are *really* related to him and that 2) Scripture shows that God is *really* related to the world (Ex. 6:1-7; Heb. 4:13). If not, God would be aloof, detached and distant from creation. Though the challenges to Aquinas are valid, a careful reading of the passage would reveal that Thomas himself would not disagree with the challenges. Yet, as important as divine-human relations are to open theologians, they have not offered a detailed analysis of Aquinas' view, nor of those works most familiar with logical and mixed relations.¹⁹⁷ The ambiguity inherent in Aquinas' language has led many to clarify and develop Aquinas' perspective, which also indicates the necessity of closer study.¹⁹⁸ The substance of Aquinas' statement—that God is not "really" related to creatures—cannot be divorced from the context in which it was made.¹⁹⁹ In his seventh article, Thomas attempts to discover whether names of God, which imply relation to creatures such as "Lord" and "Creator" are

¹⁹⁵ Sanders, "Historical Considerations," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 87.

¹⁹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.7. In responding to this without thorough investigation, Pinnock makes a sweeping statement that appears to make classical theology dependent on misleading terminology: "Is it not astonishing that this is what so many have the temerity to call the 'orthodox' view?" (*Most Moved Mover*, 69, footnote 16). Though this view may be "orthodox", it certainly cannot be considered "the" orthodox view, especially among protestants.

¹⁹⁷ Ironically, most major publications coming from open theologians addressing the subject of divine relations disapprovingly cite Aquinas' view without so much as a footnote, with the exception of *Most Moved Mover*, 69, indicating where the doctrine is found. See Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 87; Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 70-71; Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 152-153; Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 116.

¹⁹⁸ See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 84-87; Davies, *The Thought of St. Thomas*, 75-79; Weinandy, *Does God Change?* 92-95; Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 136-137, footnote 69.

¹⁹⁹ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.7.

predicated of God temporally or eternally.²⁰⁰ To understand the rationale behind the question of why he is addressing the subject, one must understand that Thomas sought to render intelligible the classic attributes of God in light of these *new* relational designations forged with the creature. That is to say, before creating, God was not the Creator. Likewise, before salvation, God was not the Savior. Each of these titles were predicated of God only after the events occurred. This not only applies temporal designations to God, but it also implies a new relationship between Creator and creature. Some argued, as did Ambrose, that such terms refer to God's substance and, therefore, could not be applied temporally, but only eternally. But how could God possibly be an eternal *actual* Creator before he creates? One could only say God was a *potential* creator. If God is a potential Creator before the creative event, and then an actual Creator after the event, it would seem that God had undergone a substantial or accidental change by virtue of the new relationship to creation he did not have before. However, this would run contrary to what Aquinas has been arguing in regards to immutability. He argued that God does not change and that all transition from potency to act would be for the worse. Others argued that these sorts of names could not possibly be applied to God since whatever is temporal has been made and would be part of the created order, which stands in opposition to Aquinas' notion of the timeless eternity of God.²⁰¹ Thomas anticipates objections from scripture, which could argue that contradictions would arise if "Creator" was predicated of God temporally when in relation to creatures since there are passages such as Jeremiah 31:3 that describe God's love for his creatures as an "everlasting love", even before the creatures existed.²⁰² In the fourth objection he enumerates, Aquinas addresses what the new relation means for God and creatures. Is the change something in God, or is it in the creature only? Aquinas reasons that the change cannot be in the creature only since then "God would be called *Lord* from the opposite relation which is in creatures; and nothing is named from its opposite. Therefore, the relation must be something in God also".²⁰³ But nothing in God can be temporal since he is immune to the succession of moments as a timelessly eternal being. Perhaps the divine-temporal relation is real in the creature (since they are really under God's Lordship) but only ideal in God. However, if God's new relationship to creatures as Lord is merely ideal and not real, "it follows that God is not

²⁰⁰ Ibid., Obj 1.

²⁰¹ Ibid., Obj 2.

²⁰² Ibid., Obj 3.

²⁰³ Ibid., Obj 4.

really Lord, which is plainly false”.²⁰⁴ To solve this impasse, Aquinas reasons that the terms “Lord” and “Creator” may be predicated of God temporally to account for, and be consistent with, God’s new actual relationship with creatures without changing his nature. As mentioned previously, for Thomas, acquiring something new would place God’s immutable nature at risk of becoming temporal, contingent and finite.²⁰⁵ Therefore, without denying these new relational appellations to God, he posits three kinds of relations, one of which will justify God as the creatures’ Lord and Creator.

First, Aquinas argues that there is a relation where both terms are *ideas* only “as when we say a thing *the same as itself*”, and some know this as an “unreal” relationship. That is, when someone has an idea of one thing in the mind, but thinks of it as two. Hence, there exists a relation between the idea and itself by the process of the mind thinking of it twice. This applies to any relation formed by reason in which both ideas undergo no change.

Second, relations exist where both terms are real (i.e., not merely a product of reasoning) “according to some reality that belongs to both” such as quantity that is described as great and small, double and half, action and passion, motive, power, color, ability to move, father and son, and the like.²⁰⁶ The terms, or extremes, in this kind of relation have the potential to change, much like when two individuals related to each other gain or lose weight, thus requiring change in the person. It is in his third way that Aquinas distinguishes himself by offering an innovative explanation of God’s dynamic relationship to contingent beings that both defends Creator-creature relationships and maintains God’s immutable otherness.

Third, Aquinas asserts that “sometimes a relation in one extreme may be a *reality*, while in the other extreme it is an *idea* only”.²⁰⁷ That is to say, Thomas distinguishes “real” relations (*relatio realis*) from those that are set up as part of our thinking (*relatio rationis*).²⁰⁸

Burrell explains:

Aquinas distinguishes ‘real’ relations from those ‘that are set up as part of our thinking’ (*relation realis/rationis*) by the *respects* involved. Father and son are related by generation, larger and smaller by quantity. Wherever we can specify the respect to be either an inherent property or a natural process, the items are said to be really related to one another; this signifies that the relationship is grounded in the concrete nature

²⁰⁴ Ibid., I.13.7 Obj 5.

²⁰⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles Book II: Creation*, Translated by James F. Anderson, (London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), II.12.5.

²⁰⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.7

²⁰⁷ Ibid. Italics added for emphasis.

²⁰⁸ Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 85.

of the things themselves. On the other hand, where the respect cannot be so specified the relation is said to be merely one of reason....The difference between a relation *realis* and relation *rationis* reduces to the reasons which can be offered for adducing a relationship: do they refer to natural processes or inherent properties, or are they intellectual fabrications....To neutralize the misleading effects of Aquinas' choice of terms, we might say that a real relation designates one where a reason can be discovered; on the other hand, a relation 'set up as part of our thinking' must be such precisely because no reason can be found.²⁰⁹

Burrell's point is crucial to understanding what Aquinas is saying in regards to Creator/creature relations. Thomas grounds the relationship in accord with the ontology of the things related. We must not assume that Aquinas is saying the relation between the Creator and the creature is a "mere idea". Aquinas highlights God's ontological distinction from his creation as the crucial concept in understanding how God relates to the world. He says:

Since therefore God is outside the whole order of creation, and all creatures are ordered to Him, and not conversely, it is manifest that creatures are really related to God Himself; whereas in God there is no real relation to creatures, but a relation only in idea, inasmuch as creatures are referred to Him. Thus there is nothing to prevent these names [i.e., *Creator* and *Lord*] which import relation to the creature from being predicated of God temporally, not by reason of any change in Him, but by reason of the change of the creature;²¹⁰

His words *relationem non esse rem naturae sed rationis tantum* (STh I.13.7) are frequently translated as "that relation is not a reality, but only an idea". However, *rationis tantum* rather means "a relation according to the manner/respect/consideration",²¹¹ or order.²¹² This makes a significant difference since we are dealing here with different modes and manners of being.²¹³ Being well aware of the importance of the ontological distinction between Creator and creature, Aquinas realizes it is what distinguishes God from all else. Unlike the pagan deities and Gnostic emanations, which in most part advocated a continuum or hierarchy of beings, the God of Christianity occupies an ontological standing by himself as *actus purus*.²¹⁴ Because God and creatures are not simply of a

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.7

²¹¹ I owe the following insights to Dr. Johannes Hoff (University of Wales) through written correspondence dated July 5, 2011.

²¹² The fact that Thomas is referring to orders of "being" and not a mere logical negation is made clear in his statement in STh I.13.7, when he says, "sometimes a relation in one extreme may be a reality, while in the other extreme it is an idea only: and this happens whenever two extremes are not of one *order*;" Italics added.

²¹³ Aquinas' synonymous use of the expression *secundum modum intelligendi* at STh I.13.7 ad 3 confirms this translation.

²¹⁴ Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 137, footnote 70. Open theism's attempt to dissolve immutability and other classical attributes that are implied from God's *actus purus* undermines the radical distinction between God and his creation. At best, the open view of God can be said to present the most perfect being among many of the same *genus*. In this case, open theology has essentially adopted Aquinas' second way of relating (i.e., where both terms are real, which can be distinguished by quantity, passion and power) to creatures, which unfortunately leaves

different order (*genus*), which can be compared as two distinct realities as described in Aquinas' second form of relationship, and because creatures are not independent as described in the first relationship, there must be a relationship where God remains ontologically other and unchanged. While at the same time, the creature really relates to God by way of our *esse commune* and *fundamentum in re* in our existing in the created world by dependence, and not merely by a logical negation. By this third kind of relation, he is saying that God is not someone who is dependent on his creatures or on anything else as a ground or basis, but is really ontologically and independently other. That is to say, "real relations" must have a causal or dependent ontological relationship between the extremes, and the *relata* must be different or distinct (identity is not a real relation, it's an asymmetric relation). For example, a relationship that characterizes the husband and wife relationship (at its beginning, middle and termination) is not one which possesses a causal or dependent component between the two persons since one may leave the relationship and the other is not ontologically/metaphysically affected. However, the same is not true in relations between parents and their children since there is a causal and dependent relation between the two. That is, the child is causally dependent upon the parent for their coming to be, though the parent is not dependent upon the child in any causal way.

However, more significant and fundamental to this discussion on real relations is Burrell's crucial point that a proper and essential distinction is always based on what he calls a "comparative criterion" (like quantity). This criterion demands an account of what distinguished extremes (e.g., such as Creator and creature) have essentially in common. As distinct from this kind of relation, the relation between Creator and creature is without *fundamentum in re* (i.e., grounds or basis in a real thing) from the side of God.²¹⁵ In other words, an ontological *difference* between Creator and creature cannot be reduced to a proper distinction. More specifically, on the one hand, we know creatures are essentially related to something incomparable, and, therefore, the ontological difference has a *fundamentum in re*. On the other hand, we know that the incomparable being of God is not a possible object of comparison (i.e., indefinable, ineffable). This lack of comparative criterion is what the Creator and creature have in common with a distinction known as *rationis tantum* (i.e., reason only), which is an improper distinction as real is related to idea. In Aquinas, this distinction

God in the same *genus* as man. Thus, the charges that open theism has collapsed into finite-godism and/or pantheism appear to have merit.

²¹⁵ See the Latin text of Thomas Aquinas, *Scriptum super sententiis magistri petri Lombardi*, edited by Mandonnet. Paris: Lethielleux, 1929, Bk I, D. 26, Q. 2, A. 1, response, where Thomas uses *fundamentum in re* to describe some things that really exist, but have no basis or foundation in some other real thing.

is not merely reduced to an ideal distinction or logical negation, but it has a *fundamentum in re* in our “being in the world”. This would suggest that Thomas rejects any *comparative* analysis of the relation between Creator and creature, implying a rigorous aphophaticism. The argument of STh I.13.6 makes it clear that the relation between the Creator and the creature is “without reason and fundament”, implying this relationship is a mere matter of grace. Therefore, this relation illustrates what I believe Aquinas to be articulating by his assertion that creatures are “really” related to God, but that God does not have a real relation to creatures (as an expression of the fundamental lack of essential comparison). How, then, is the creature really related to the Creator? I would argue it is due to the unidirectional causal dependence the creature has upon God as its originating and conserving cause of the creature being in the world. This same dependence God does not have upon the creature. Therefore, it is acceptable to predicate the term “Creator” to God even though it implies temporal succession and change.²¹⁶ Essentially, Thomas is showing that God can create and come into a new relationship (*habitudo*) to the world without undergoing ontological change since creation refers not to his *being* but his intentional and willful.²¹⁷ Aquinas reasons:

As the creature proceeds from God in diversity of nature, God is outside the order of the whole creation, nor does any relation to the creature arise from His nature; for He does not produce the creature by necessity of His nature, but by His intellect and will....Therefore there is no relation in God to the creature; whereas in creatures there is a real relation to God; because creatures are contained under the divine order, and their very nature entails dependence on God. On the other hand, the divine processions are in one and the same nature. Hence no parallel exists.²¹⁸

Weinandy correctly assesses God’s new relationship to his creation when he comments, “God, then, as the logical term is truly understood in a new way, not because he has changed, but because the creature is related to him in a new way as the Creator”.²¹⁹ Clearly, Aquinas is denying that God has any *dependent* relationships with his creation that would require change in God. However, he is not denying that God has *actual* relationships with his creatures.²²⁰ In other words, Aquinas does not

²¹⁶ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.11.1.

²¹⁷ See Burrell, *Aquinas: God and Action*, 86, where he says, “Since this relation follows upon what God does rather than what he is, it is not a *real* one. Rather, the creator bears to creatures an *intentional* relation” (*Summa Theologica*, I.14.8; I.19.4; I.44-45; Walter Stokes, “Is God Really Related to this World?” in *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 39 (1965), 145-151).

²¹⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.28.1 ad 3.

²¹⁹ Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 136, footnote 69.

²²⁰ Weinandy suggests that the description of God’s relationship to creatures should be known as an “actual relation” since it is founded on God’s pure actuality and is a relation in reality (Ibid.). I would agree that this is a step in the right direction in order to avoid the ambiguity of Thomas’ language, which appears to place God’s relation to the world as in idea only. In my estimation, the title does not fully distinguish itself from any kind of actual relation since all relations are in some sense “actual”. In a similar way, I would suggest the relation of this

mean there are no relationships in reality between Creator and creature; rather, it is his way of describing and protecting the ontological, causal and (in)dependent distinction between God and man. Thus God, in a new way not applicable to him before creation, can be called “Creator”, not because there was change or dependence in God, but because the creature is related to God in a new way (namely, unidirectional, causal dependence).²²¹ Aquinas illustrates this creaturely dependence by importing an example from Aristotle that describes the creature “on the right side” of a column.²²² Aquinas sees the column as an unchanging object to which creatures must relate. Therefore, just as when the creature is “on the right side of the column” or moving to the “left side”, the creature must change in relation to the column. As Norman Geisler says, “While the relationship between God and creatures is real, God is in no sense dependent on that relationship”.²²³ Open theism views Aquinas’ statements in a sense that does not allow God to have dynamic relations with his creatures because they are only ideological or likened to a stone column that is inert. This interpretation, however, completely misses the point Thomas is seeking to make. This fundamental misunderstanding of divine-human relations can be seen when William Hasker describes the open view of relations when he writes, “God is really related to his creatures, where ‘really related’ means that it makes a difference to God how things are with the creatures”.²²⁴ But immediately after these comments, Hasker misunderstands what Thomas is saying when he asserts he “had puzzled over the medieval doctrine that, while creatures are really related to God, God has only a ‘relation of reason’ to the creatures”.²²⁵ In his contrast, evidently he incorrectly assumes Aquinas’ explanation precludes God’s *actual* relationships and concern for his creatures. Though Aquinas uses language and examples that are in some cases problematic to one’s understanding, this should not distract the reader from deducing the thought behind the vocabulary. Davies correctly describes this thought inherent in Aquinas’ teaching when he writes:

sort should be known as “actual *relatio actus purus-genus*” in order to more clearly describe the two extremes involved while still founding the relation in God’s unique being which is a totally distinct kind of being inherent within creatures. That Thomas here is referring to *dependent* relations see his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.11.2.

²²¹ Ibid. See Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.13-14.4, where he says temporal appellations can be applied since “it follows that they are attributed to Him solely in accordance with our manner of understanding, from the fact that other things are referred to Him”.

²²² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13.7.

²²³ Geisler, *Systematic Theology: God and Creation Volume II*, 89. Geisler’s rationale for interpreting Aquinas as speaking of *dependent* relationships is found in the *Summa Theologica* I.28.1 ad 3, where Thomas says, “because creatures are contained under the divine order, and their very nature entails dependence on God”. Also see Geisler, *Thomas Aquinas: An Evangelical Appraisal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 107.

²²⁴ William Hasker, “An Adequate God,” in Cobb and Pinnock, eds., *Searching for an Adequate God*, 216.

²²⁵ Ibid., 217.

What, in fact, Aquinas is saying in his (curious sounding) teaching on God's relation to the world is that God is not something alongside his creatures. For Aquinas, God is the source of his creatures and, for this reason, is distinct from and different from them. Given the difference between God and creatures, Aquinas reasons, it can be said that being a creature is something in the creature but not something in God. Or, to put it another way, the fact that there are creatures is a fact about creatures, not God.²²⁶

For Thomas, there are *actual* divine-human relations. However, due to the ontological distinction between Creator and creation, as Davies enumerated, there is no "real" *ontological change* that occurred in God as Creator, nor can God stand alongside the creation as simply another of the same kind. Unaware of the implications of his criticism, Pinnock says, "The fact that there are creatures makes no difference to God". If this is the understanding of what Aquinas meant, namely, that God has no "real" relations to creatures and is indifferent to them, then Thomas would be also saying that God has no love for his creation and could not be called "Creator", which is something Aquinas would wholly reject.²²⁷ To his critics, Aquinas gives the rationale for his unique wording when he says, "Creatures are contained under the divine order, and their very nature entails dependence on God"²²⁸ and because "God's substance would depend on something else extrinsic to it, so that He would not be, of Himself, the necessary being...".²²⁹ That God's relation to the world is a reality can be discovered in Aquinas' reply to an earlier objection,²³⁰ which addresses this very point. It reads:

Since God is related to the creature for the reason that the creature is related to Him: and since the relation of subjection is real in the creature, it follows that God is Lord not in idea only, but in reality; for He is called Lord according to the manner in which the creature is subject to Him.²³¹

What is more, Aquinas does not want his readers to be left with the impression that God's relationship with his creatures is somehow detached and inert, but rather he sees them as dynamic when he says, "It cannot be said, however, that these relations exist as realities outside God".²³² Reminiscent of Paul's quote of Epimenides to the Athenians in Acts 17:28 that "in Him we live move and have our being", Aquinas makes the relationship as eminent and dynamic as it possibly can be. Unfortunately, open theism understands immutability and relations in a too

²²⁶ Davies, *The Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 76.

²²⁷ Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 130-131.

²²⁸ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.28.1 ad 3. To support this contention, Aquinas makes it clear that no real relation exists due to the fact that God did not create creatures from his nature or by necessity; instead, they are *effects* resulting from his intellect and will (I.28.1 ad 3).

²²⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.12.2

²³⁰ See Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I.13. Obj 5.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, I.28.1 ad 5. Also see Aquinas, *De Veritate*, III.2. Obj 8.

²³² Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II.13-14.1.

creaturely manner,²³³ failing to understand that God is immutably relational precisely because he cannot be any more supremely dynamic than pure being (*actus purus*) can be. Weinandy sums up the relationship between God's immutability and dynamism when he claims that:

While the attribute of immutability is a negative attribute, it is founded on something that is entirely positive – God being pure act or being itself. God is immutable not because he is static, inert, or inactive, but precisely because he, as pure act, is supremely active and dynamic and cannot ontologically become more in act.²³⁴

Simply asserting that the classical God is cold, detached and unrelational because he is immutable and impassible without exploring further the complexities involved, is to fall short of wrestling with the great metaphysical and ontological aspects associated with such a claim. In their zeal to demonstrate the lack in God's relationship to the world entailed by the classical notion of God, open theism has overemphasized Aquinas' flaws of ambiguous language (e.g., idea) and illustration (e.g., column/pillar) at the expense of substance. This overly literal way of interpreting literature without the aid of analogy or a thorough treatment of Aquinas' work has come to haunt the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the openness movement. In the end, open theism is left with a notion of God who is dependent upon the world for his knowledge, will and emotions in order to provide the substance and content of the Creator-creature relationship.²³⁵

Ultimately, open theism has not rendered God's changing attributes and passions philosophically or biblically coherent, leaving one without a mechanism to explain why changing love, knowledge and will, are superior to unchanging love, knowledge and will in a perfect being. If God's passions and love are changing as they are in creatures, then God cannot be perfectly loving since he would always have to actualize further loving potential.²³⁶

²³³ See Dodds, *The Unchanging God of Love*, 211-215, 221.

²³⁴ Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 123.

²³⁵ Rice, "Biblical Support for a New Perspective," in Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God*, 15-16, 25, 48; Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 88-89.

²³⁶ Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* 126.