1

Delimitation of the Problem

Introduction

By delimiting the problem for investigation, this chapter provides the first orientation that an encounter with the Christian symbol of divine suffering requires. I will delimit the problem for inquiry in a series of steps. (1) In the first step, I will circumscribe *the question* with which to approach this symbol. (2) Second, I will specify the meaning of this symbol as a *Christian* symbol. (3) My third step will describe the *concept of symbol* that I have employed to formulate the problem that this larger study addresses. (4) In a fourth step, I will clarify the nature and extent of this problem's *theocentric posture*. (5) The fifth step will display the symbol's *various structural levels*, and their interrelationships, as examined through these studies. (6) Sixth, I will *contextualize this particular interaction with the symbol*, as conceived in the particular problem that this larger study investigates. (7) Finally, my last delimitation will formulate *the aim* for this particular encounter with the Christian symbol of divine suffering.

Circumscription of Inquiry

In order to initiate delimitation of the problem for consideration, I must answer a first question. With what sort of inquiry does one begin through which to commence an encounter with the Christian symbol of divine suffering, in order to understand this symbol most completely on its own terms and with respect to the questions that it attempts to answer? One might assume that the first and most fundamental question to articulate, by which to circumscribe this problem, logically should

take the following form: Can God suffer?[1] Following an affirmative answer to that first question, one might need to ask another series of questions prior to considering actual characteristics of divine suffering, such as the following questions. *Does* God suffer, if God *can* suffer? If God can suffer, does God have a choice of whether or not to suffer? An inquirer might extend this line of questioning almost indefinitely, thus postponing the even more pressing discussion about the characteristics of this symbol. Only after securing affirmative answers to the previous questions, at least according to that particular line of thought, can the inquirer begin to describe the characteristics of that divine suffering. Unfortunately, however, beginning with the question of divine suffering's possibility often elicits a negative and dogmatic answer, thereby at least inhibiting, if not entirely preventing, any thought about characteristics of divine suffering: in other words, one may already have identified such a concept as an impossibility.

More importantly, however, the previous questions fail to reach the foundation of this problem. Those questions already imply a presupposition of their very inquiries—the attestation of piety itself: "God suffers!" This attestation elicits the previous questions, rather than following them as an affirmative conclusion to the question that initiated the previous series of inquiries. Attestations to God's suffering certainly remain confessional, devotional, even liturgical, religious language of a first order. Precisely for that reason, however, language that testifies to divine suffering precedes all reflection or speculation about whether or not God can or does actually suffer.[2]

1. Many Christian theologians frequently approach the problem from this perspective, often answering the question from opposite perspectives on the spectrum: see Attfield, "Can God be Crucified." 47–57; Galot, *Dieu souffre-t-il*; Harrison, "Can the Divine Nature Suffer," 119–21; Kobusch, "Kann Gott Leiden," 328–33; Küng, *Incarnation of God*, 518–25; Owen, "Does God Suffer," 176–84; Stockdale, "Does God Suffer," 87–92; Torrance, "Does God Suffer? Incarnation and Impassibility," 345–68; Weinandy, *Does God Suffer*; idem, "Does God Suffer," 35–41.

2. Other scholars, such as Francis Fiorenza, perceive the only adequate approach to "the possibility of a theology of the pain of God" to be through the transcendental consideration of "the problem of the possibility of language about God and the meaning of such language," an approach which means "that we are first of all dealing not with God directly but with a question of our language about God" (Fiorenza, "Joy and Pain as Paradigmatic for Language about God," 75). Abraham H. Khan engages similarly with the question of the possibility for a theology of divine suffering, as a linguistic and epistemological problem, though from a Wittgensteinian and Kierkegaardian

Notwithstanding any validity in the previous claim, in a very important historical respect, such a claim requires qualification. In the intellectual world that received Christian communities at their births, an entire universe of philosophical reflection upon the nature of God had flourished for centuries, philosophical efforts that argued for *stasis* in the divine being: for example, that nothing external to God can change (divine immutability) or affect (divine impassibility) the ultimate reality. For example, one finds this line of thought in the biblical interpretation of the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria. This world of thought had developed from philosophical attempts by Greek thinkers to interpret the myths of Greek religion in such a way as to dispense with the cruder aspects of their anthropomorphic language about the gods. Christian thinkers quite readily, though also somewhat uncritically, adopted this approach to interpreting their own God-language, so that even they began to describe God as immutable and impassible.[3]

perspective (e.g., Khan, "God Suffers: Sense or Nonsense," 91–99). While the concerns that these approaches express remain very important for theologies of divine suffering, they remain equally important for all theologies. Most, perhaps all, theologians of divine suffering would not deny the importance of such approaches to this problem. Nonetheless, should theology remain preoccupied to such an extent with *talk about talking about God* that theology finally fails to talk about *God*? In these studies, for a variety of reasons, I have not approached the Christian symbol of divine suffering in a way that resembles Fiorenza's line of treatment. Thus, these studies do not focus upon Fiorenza's concern: the question about the possibility, meaning, or even viability of applying the language of suffering to God.

3. See the following works, as an introduction into the complexities and history of this rich tradition of discussion and debate: Abramowski, "Die Schrift Gregors des Lehrers 'Ad Theopompum' und Philoxenus von Mabbug," 273–90; Brasnett, *Suffering of the Impassible God*; Brown, "Schelling and Dorner on Divine Immutability," 237–49; Burnley, "Impassibility of God," 90–91; Creel, *Divine Impassibility*; Crouzel, "La Passion de l'impassible," 269–79; D'Arcy, "Immutability of God," 19–26; Dodds, *Unchanging God of Love*; idem, "Thomas Aquinas, Human Suffering, and the Unchanging God of Love," 330–44; Dorner, "Dogmatic Discussion of the Doctrine of the Immutability of God," 115–80; idem, *Divine Immutability*; Edwards, "Pagan Dogma of the Absolute Unchangeableness of God," 305–13; Grant, *Early Christian Doctrine of God*, 14–33, 111–14; idem, *Gods and the One God*; House, "Barrier of Impassibility," 409–15; Jones, "Immutability of God Considered with Reference to Prayer," 565–70; Kondoleon, "Immutability of God: Some Recent Challenges," 293–315; Maas, *Unveränderlichkeit Gottes*; Meesen, *Unveränderlichkeit und Menschwerdung Gottes*; Mozley, *Impassibility of God*; Mühlen, *Die Veränderlichkeit Gottes als Horizont einer zukünftigen Christologie*; Muller, "Incarnation, Immutability, and the Case for Classical Theism," 22–40; Norris, *God and World in Early Christian Theology*; O'Hanlon, *Immutability of God in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar*; Pohlenz, *Vom Zorne Gottes*, 66–105;

Nevertheless, the previous claim remains valid. Even the language about the passions of the Greek gods certainly preceded the hermeneutical qualifications of that language by the early Greek and later Hellenistic philosophers. Although Christian communities originated within the Hellenistic world, even the Christian and Jewish language that attested to divine suffering definitely preceded the hermeneutical qualifications of that language by early Jewish and Christian theologians and philosophers.

In spite of the previous historical comments, however, I do not propose with these studies either to search for the origins or to trace the development of the Christian symbol of divine suffering. Naturally, much of that history will appear throughout these studies in notes and references. Nonetheless, I do not propose explicitly in this project to inquire into the origin of this symbol or idea, although that inquiry remains essential even if often implicit for the results of my studies.[4]

Pollard, "Impassibility of God," 353–64; Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*; Prichard, "Immutability of God," 338–44; Randles, *Blessed God: Impassibility*; Robertson, "Does God Change," 61–64; Ryssel, *Gregorius Thaumaturgus: Sein Leben und Seine Schriften*, 71–158; Schoonenberg, "Chalcedon and Divine Immutability," 103–7; Slusser, "Scope of Patripassionism," 169–75; Taliaferro, "Passibility of God," 217–24; Thaumaturgus, *Ad Theopompum: De Passibili et Impassibili in Deo*, 363–76; Trethowan, "A Changing God," 247–61; Watson, "Problem of the Unchanging in Greek Philosophy," 57–69; Weinandy, *Does God Change*; Woodbridge, "God Without Passions," 42–61; Zoffoli, *"Mistero della sofferenza di Dio"? Il pensiero di S. Tommaso*

4. Thorough and accurate historical studies about this Christian symbol's origin and development remain lacking in both histories of Christian thought and systematic Christian theological efforts. Such studies would need to identify and assess numerous appearances and versions of this symbol in its vastly different geographical, cultural, social, political, and intellectual contexts: such as East Asia, Southeast Asia, Scandinavia, Western and Central Europe, Great Britain, Africa, the Americas, and so forth. One contemporary theologian of divine suffering suggests that this symbol originated in the Israelite exodus from Egypt (Exod 2:23–25; 3:7-8); nonetheless, he proposes neither to prove or defend this thesis nor to attempt such a comprehensive historical study (Frey, "Holocaust and the Suffering of God," 613). Other theologians claim, somewhat inaccurately, both (1) that the doubts about the doctrine of impassibility "have their earliest roots in British theology, where we can trace the passibilist tendency back to the last ten years of the nineteenth century" (Sarot, "Patripassianism, Theopaschitism and the Suffering of God," 363; idem, "Het lijden van God," 35; Sarot finds support for this conclusion in van Egmond, *De lijdende God in de Britse Theologie van de negentiende Eeuw*, 23–25), and (2) that English theology has "pioneered" the development of theologies of divine suffering "from about 1890 onwards" (Bauckham, "'Only the Suffering God Can Help,'" 6; cf. Schoonenberg, "De lijdende God in de Britse Theologie," 154–70). Even Moltmann makes a similar oversight, when he makes the following claim. "In

Two convictions support the rationale for the necessity of this study, therefore, both of which historical research validates. First, before the symbol of divine suffering could develop fully enough to stand on equal terms before and debate with the historically-dominant Christian ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies, the intellectually-dominant representatives of the Hellenistic world had both asked and then answered negatively the question (and its related questions) as to whether or not God can suffer. This effectively (both intellectually and finally politically) stifled any fully adequate and convincing expressions of this symbol. An interested person needs only to survey the history of Christian thought on divine impassibility and immutability to perceive the extent of this situation. Second, although since the nineteenth century many theologians (and not only Christian theologians) have accepted, contemplated, and studied the Christian symbol of divine suffering, most of these religious and theological efforts remain sketchy or incomplete. Most of the earlier receptions and retrievals of this symbol have usually held positions in larger projects with broader theological agendas. Few of these theological studies have closely examined the fuller structure in the Christian symbol of divine suffering in any clearly systematic way. Thus, these facts, *both* the intellectual refusal and silencing of the symbol as a credible proposal prior to its adequate de-

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries it was English theology which carried on the theological discussion about God's passibility. Continental theology passed it by unheedingly" (Moltmann, *Trinity and the Kingdom*, 30). Not only does Moltmann fail to identify and acknowledge the historical North-American emphasis upon this theological theme, but he fails to perceive even its broader presence in European thought as well. As examples in European thought, see the works of Schoeberlein, Troeltsch (*Christian Faith*, 174–94), Erling Eidem (*Den Lidande Guden*; *Suffering God*), or even the philosopher, Hermann Lotze, who influenced the personalist tradition in the United States through Borden Parker Bowne. Admittedly, Bauckham does credit the North-American theologian, Horace Bushnell (ca. 1866), with "a good deal of influence on the English tradition" (Bauckham, "'Only the Suffering God Can Help,'" 6 n.2). Nonetheless, the North-American shift in the direction of divine passibility was much broader than even Bushnell's influence indicates. See, as examples from the early through the later 1800s in the United States, the works of Edward Beecher, Charles Beecher, Henry Ward Beecher, Harriet Beecher Stowe (Caskey, *Chariot of Fire*), and George Griffin (*Sufferings of Christ*), all of whom developed concepts of divine suffering. As other scholars study this symbol in other historical and geographical contexts as well, discoveries of such omissions will increase.

velopment *and* the less than fully adequate recent acceptance and study of this symbol, invite the present study.[5]

Given the historical factors that have contributed to the need for this study, and given the secondary character of the questions about the possibility of divine suffering, I orient this present encounter with the Christian symbol of divine suffering through the following question: *What is the structure, and what are the structural dynamics, of the Christian symbol of divine suffering*? By construing this question in another way, I amplify my intent: *What are the various modes of divine suffering, and how are they both distinct from, and related to, one another within the broader Christian symbol of divine suffering?*

With this line of questioning, I aim to provide the conditions for a more complete elucidation of this symbol's characteristics. I intend to initiate an encounter with this symbol that permits the symbol's full development, prior to any extended conversations or debates about this symbol with the classical Christian theistic tradition. Here, as Walter Bauer suggested for the historian, I attempt to comply with the following principle: "*audiatur et altera pars* (let the other side also be heard)."[6] Thus, I have bracketed the question about the possibility of divine suffering, a question usually addressed to traditions that already affirm divine suffering, as a topic for later conversation with classical Christian theism. Certainly, this question and the network of questions that relate to it remain important areas of inquiry. Nevertheless, the conversations (and finally arguments) in which those questions play significant roles do not determine the focus in my studies of this symbol. That conversation becomes equitably possible only following the completion of two tasks: (1) a more complete elucidation of this Christian symbol; and

5. See some of the more systematic interpretations of this Christian symbol: E. Beecher, *Concord of Ages*; Brasnett, *Suffering of the Impassible God*; Eidem, *Suffering God*; idem, *Den Lidande Guden*; Fiddes, *Creative Suffering of God*; Fretheim, *Suffering of God*; Galot, *Dieu souffre-t-il*; Griffin, *Sufferings of Christ*; Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*; Krause, *Leiden Gottes-Leiden des Menschen: Eine Untersuchung zur kirchlichen Dogmatik Karl Barths*; Kuhn, *Gottes Trauer und Klage in der rabbinischen Uberlieferung (Talmud und Midrash)*; J. Lee, *God Suffers For Us*; Moltmann, *Crucified God*; idem, *Trinity and the Kingdom*; Ohlrich, *Suffering God*; Robinson, *Suffering, Human and Divine*; Thaumaturgus, *Passibili et Impassibili in Deo*; Scharbert, *Der Schmerz im Alten Testament*, 216–25; Varillon, *Humility and Suffering of God*; idem, *La souffrance de Dieu*; White, *Forgiveness and Suffering*.

6. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, xxi.

(2) an elaboration of the contemporary *significance* of this symbol at several levels (ontological, epistemological, axiological, and praxiological). In this book, I take the first step in an elucidation of this Christian symbol (which I will complete in the next two volumes of this larger study) but do not attempt to fulfill the latter task. Nevertheless, only on those two bases, minimally, can one expect an intelligible and a genuine dialogue between the alternative Christian traditions of divine suffering and those of classical Christian theism. Hence, I have placed brackets around the conversation with classical Christian theism, thereby separating it from my present studies of this Christian symbol, at least as I herein conceive that encounter.

In these studies, then, I hope adequately to identify and elucidate the fundamental character of the structure and dynamism within the Christian symbol of divine suffering. Such labors necessarily precede inquiries into the validity, truth, value, or correspondence of that symbol to any and all levels of reality. One must listen carefully to the complete statement of one's partner in conversation before one can respond both fairly and intelligibly to the other perspective.

Christian Symbol

The question by which I have defined my approach to the problem of divine suffering more specifically delimits the problem by inquiring only about the *Christian* symbol of divine suffering. Such a qualification at least implies attestations, or the possibility of attestations, to some form or forms of divine suffering in other religious traditions.[7] I will inves-

7. One may find examples in both contemporary and ancient religious texts. In more recent decades, the teachings of the Unification Church supply one example. While possessing many of the marks of traditional Christian communities, the teachings of this community deviate radically from traditional Christian thought, most specifically at the key point, christology. Still, this community espouses a strong concept of divine suffering (Moon, *Divine Principle*, 10; Y. Kim, *Unification Theology and Christian Thought*, 36–40; Sonneborn, "God, Suffering and Hope: A Unification View," 163–239). Another contemporary version of divine suffering appears in the teachings of The Children of God (now known as the Family of Love or the Family) (e.g., as analyzed in, Richardson and Davis, "Experiential Fundamentalism: Revisions of Orthodoxy in the Jesus Movement," 397–425). Some Hindu thought about the issue of divine passibility resembles many classical Christian theistic defenses of divine impassibility except under certain conditions (Bhattacharyya, "Does God Suffer," 34–47). Also see a North-American Christian example: England, "Weeping God of Mormonism." 63–80. As examples from ancient religious traditions, consider the suffering deities in the *Enuma*

tigate, however, only that symbol of divine suffering that its witnesses represent as a *Christian* symbol: by virtue of their confession of Jesus as Christ, their participation in the broader Christian communities, their adherence to one or another of the very similar canonical scriptures of these Christian communities, and their explicitly-stated relationships with the God to whom all of these witnesses attest.

By contrast, at this point, many persons might reasonably object that orthodox Christian teaching has never supported any claim that anything external to God in any sense affects God or causes the divine nature to suffer.[8] Furthermore, the doctrine of divine impassibility (as

Elish, the Akkadian epic of creation (Enuma Elish, "The Creation Epic," 60–72). There, the gods, formed within Tiamat and Apsu (the two primal gods), by all of their activity disturbed and troubled their begetters (Tablet I, lines 22–23), so that Apsu decided to destroy those whom he had begotten (I.35–40). This plot grieved Tiamat, filled her with woe, so that she desired to deal kindly with her children (I.41–47). Apsu proceeded with his plan, but word of it reached the intended divine victims, who wept from fear and sorrow, whereupon Ea developed a counter-plot and killed Apsu (I.60–70). Other gods then persuaded Tiamat to avenge Apsu, since they themselves grieved over his murder (I.109–23). Tiamat agreed to their call for vengeance and elevated Kingu into the position of her consort and leader of the gods (I.147–54). When the usurper Ea learned of this, he became troubled and sought aid from his forefather Anshar; Anshar, having heard the gloomy report, became troubled (II.49–51). Finally, when the remaining gods heard of Tiamat's vengeance, they all sorrowed and extended their divine power and authority to Marduk, son of Ea and Damkina, to battle against Tiamat (III.125–28). Thus, Marduk and Tiamat battled, whereupon Marduk killed Tiamat (IV.98–106). The gods who had supported Tiamat wailed in fear (IV.113). Marduk created the world from the carcass of Tiamat (IV.128–40). Marduk then killed Kingu who was accused of contriving the rebellion of the gods: from Kingu's blood, Marduk created humanity (IV.23–33). Later, the praise of Marduk's heroics attributed great sympathy to Marduk (VII.155).

8. Bertrand de Margerie, in response to an official, and a somewhat sympathetic, Roman Catholic reassessment of Christian attestations to divine suffering (Commissio Theologica Internationalis, "Theologia-Christologia-Anthropologia: Quaestiones Selectae. Altera Series [Sessio Plenaria 1981, relatio conclusiva]," 20–24), argues that such attestations contradict revelation, Catholic tradition, and human reason (De Margerie, "De la Souffrance de Dieu," 110–12). De Margerie cites evidence from those sources to support his argument in that order. Nonetheless, although he begins with scripture, insofar as his ontological assumptions (e.g., ultimate reality's impassibility and immutability; and determined far more by tradition than by reason) require a particular hermeneutical approach to scripture, he finds in the scriptures only that which he already presupposes. On the one hand, he cites in this essay only one biblical text (Jas 1:17), although he might easily have cited more, to support his argument. On the other hand, he completely ignores those biblical texts that explicitly attest to various forms of divine suffering: such as Gen 6:5–6; Isa 63:9–11; and Eph 4:30. Nonetheless, given

well as its attendant doctrine, divine immutability) received dogmatic status in the earliest stages of the development of Christian thought,[9] has been consistently propagated and defended by all of the major Christian confessional traditions, and still marshals strong defenders of its claim to truth. As far as this objection goes, according to its understanding of that which constitutes *Christian* doctrine and dogma, it remains correct.

Nevertheless, although the Christian doctrine of divine impassibility has possessed, and still possesses, dogmatic status in many of the major Christian confessions, one may properly describe testimony to divine suffering in Christian thought as a *Christian* teaching. Certainly, Christian ecclesiastical authorities have officially judged Christian testimonies to divine suffering as heretical or heterodox. One inescapable reality, however, has always challenged such judgments: the presence in a variety of Christian canonical scriptures of testimonies to various forms of divine suffering. Ecclesiastical judgments, to which I have previously referred, upon the idea of divine suffering have relied upon hermeneutical methods by which interpreters have realigned such scriptural affirmations with the philosophical presuppositions that justified the condemnation of this idea or symbol in the first place.

Not only can one discover testimonies to divine suffering within the scriptural traditions that arose from the Jewish and early Christian communities. Throughout Christian history, piety has articulated such testimonies in a variety of ways, through hymns, liturgies, confessions, sermons, and theologies.[10] Since the early years of the nineteenth cen-

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the theo-logic of de Margerie's symbolic framework, attestations to divine suffering do contradict revelation, Catholic tradition, and reason.

9. See examples from this history in the notes to the Prologue of this book. Studies of the definitions, creeds, confessions, and anathemas that appear in the earliest conciliar decisions of the Christian communities clarify this: see Mozley, *Impassibility of God*; Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*; Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches*; Schaff and Wace, eds., *Seven Ecumenical Councils*; Denzinger and Schönmetzer, eds., *Enchiridion Symbolorum*.

10. Besides Christian ecclesiastical doctrinal studies that various Christian communities have commissioned to study this symbol (as I noted in the Prologue), Christians have explicitly organized entire consultations and conferences around this theme: see Cameron, ed., *Power and Weakness of God: Impassibility and Orthodoxy*; Smith, ed., "Seoul Theological Consultation 1979: Reporting the Event," 3–4. Furthermore, these consultations have occurred in Asia as well as in Europe. In Korea, the Seoul Theological Consultation adopted a theme with the following title: "The Hope: God's Suffering in

tury, this tendency has increased significantly. Presently, both theological and philosophical support for the idea of divine suffering has grown so strong that one writer has described the increase in this notion's popularity as "the rise of a new orthodoxy."[11] Hence, whether or not, and to what extent if so, one agrees with such an assessment, and while one may not speak (from an official ecclesiastical standpoint) about the idea of divine suffering as an *orthodox* teaching of all or most Christian communities, one yet truly can and should describe this teaching as a *Christian* teaching. Furthermore, this teaching continues to acquire, not only a religious and devotional following, but also a stronger theological and philosophical reception among Christian scholars.

Therefore, in this book, I will examine the symbol of divine suffering as attested by numerous voices within various Christian communities. Even on the basis of such a delimitation, however, numerous Christian interpretations of divine suffering demand attention, many of them claiming to be the most adequate understandings of the phenomenon to which they attest. Neither do all of these different Christian testimonies to divine suffering agree with one another nor can an interpreter harmonize all of them. All Christian witnesses to divine suffering, nevertheless, primarily ground their testimonies, as a rule, in the Christian scriptures.

Another facet of the problem attends this situation, a facet that further complicates any examination of this religious symbol: *Even the Christian scriptures contain competing traditions*. Referring to Christian scriptures, James Barr states this much more forcefully: "The Bible is more like a battlefield, in which different traditions strive against one another."[12] Thus, not only do Christian testimonies to divine suffering compete with one another, testimonies that principally originate from

Man's Struggle." The consultation in Korea also indicates the global proportions of this concept among Christians: case studies from Latin America, North America, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Africa, and Asia followed its theological presentations.

11. Goetz, "Suffering God," 385–89. This claim, however, really expresses nothing more than that which perceptive theologians have expected for at least the last one hundred years. For example, in his essay entitled "Patripassianism," first published in 1917 and later included as a chapter in his book, H. Maurice Relton anticipated something similar to Goetz's claim: "There are many indications that the doctrine of the Suffering God is going to play a very prominent part in the theology of the age in which we live" (Relton, *Studies in Christian Doctrine*, 79).

12. Barr, *Scope and Authority of the Bible*, 115.

the Christian scriptures. One may also discover that even the Christian scriptures themselves contain testimonies to divine suffering which, at best, do not harmonize or, at worst, even conflict with one another.

Nonetheless, both the variety of testimonies to divine suffering in the Christian traditions and the sometimes-conflicting viewpoints within this variety contribute to the richness of the Christian symbol of divine suffering. To express any experience of the divine (especially experiences of the suffering God) requires repeatedly-renewed thought-experiments. As William James expressed this point, "without too much you cannot have enough of anything." At the basis of this insight, rests the practical conviction that "precious specimens" of thought only appear scattered throughout and lodged within mountains of sometimes partial, inadequate, inferior, misguided, or even banal alternatives and experiments. More positively, this means that, with James, I acknowledge the benefits of multiple thought-experiments about God, in this case about the suffering God of Christian piety. Multiple Christian viewpoints yield a many-faceted portrait of the God who suffers.[13]

In spite of the complexities involved when examining the different kinds of Christian testimonies to divine suffering, I here rely upon a wide variety of texts from the history of the Christian traditions. These texts, as Christian texts, comprise the primary source-material for my analyses of this symbol. These selected texts include texts from the two canons of Christian scriptures,[14] works by classical and contemporary Christian thinkers, and Christian liturgical, confessional, and credal writings. In addition, at certain points, I will examine texts from Jewish (and other) traditions for amplification of, or comparisons to, particular elements of this symbol's rationality. All of the post-biblical materials or sources for my interpretation of this symbol, therefore, principally interpret and re-interpret the primary testimonies to divine suffering that one may find in the Christian scriptures. I will examine these sources in order to contribute either to elaboration and development of this inter-

13. James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism and a Pluralistic Universe*, 316; E. Beecher, *Concord of Ages*, 40.

14. As examples, see Gen 6:6; Isa 63:9; Eph 4:30. One may refer to these two testaments as "the one" and "the other" testaments (following Beauchamp, *L'Un et l'Autre Testament*), as the first and second canons, or as the older and newer Christian canons or scriptures. I will sometimes use each of these categories as well as occasionally the more familiar distinction between "old" and "new," even though problems appear in connection with the usages of any of these distinctions.

pretation of the structure and dynamism of this symbol, to clarification of the methodological principles that I have used to study this symbol, or to both of these ends.

By further delimiting the problem for this work, as well as through a discussion of the procedural principles or method in chapter 2, I will clarify the procedure that I have used both to adjudicate between competing testimonies and to establish the core Christian symbol of divine suffering. The following chapter on method will also clarify more about the sources to which I have turned for these studies.

Operative Concept of Religious Symbol

I have cited enough evidence already by which to support my claim that various Christian witnesses attest in one way or another to divine suffering. If Christian testimonies to the suffering of God, however, compete with one another for the position as the most adequate witness to that phenomenon, and if most of the major Christian communities have consistently identified such testimonies as unorthodox (erecting in their places, instead, the ecclesiastical dogma of divine impassibility), then in two senses a question about the existence of an actual Christian understanding of divine suffering arises. (1) First, since official Christian ecclesiastical authorities have labeled Christian testimonies to divine suffering as heretical, are those testimonies not then, by definition, non-Christian? (2) Second, even should Christian ecclesiastical authorities award some kind of *Christian* status to testimonies to divine suffering, then, due to the often great differences between these various testimonies to divine suffering, may one convincingly designate one single construal of divine suffering as its definitive Christian expression? I have tried to open a way beyond the dilemma that this dual perplexity poses with two initiatives: first, by developing a distinction between symbol and doctrine, by which I limit this study to the notion of religious symbol; and, second, by elaborating this particular concept of religious symbol.