

## Misery of Human *Cupiditas*: Formal Characteristics

### Introduction

THE FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HUMAN MISERY CERTAINLY INCLUDE those initial consequences of human infidelity to God that I briefly described in chapter 1: guilt (*culpa*), self-enslavement to self-deification or life against God (*servum arbitrium*), and sinful social fatedness or subjugation to a world of sin (*peccatum originale*). For the purposes of this chapter, however, first, I will more fully develop from chapter 1 only my interpretation of the second consequence, since it forms the taproot from which the other formal characteristics of human misery grow. Nonetheless, the second formal characteristic of human misery, human self-destruction, also stems from the central consequence of human *cupiditas* as the elongation of that taproot. From the central formal characteristic of human misery, third, several lateral roots grow, symptoms of human infidelity's misery. The features of this twisted network of consequences constitute the formal characteristics of human misery.

### Non Posse Non Peccare

My description of the first formal characteristic of human misery extends my previous exposition of human bondage to sin (*servum arbitrium*). The Christian symbol of divine suffering construes the human inability not to sin, not necessarily as a programmed tendency to perform perversely or criminally in every human activity; rather, the *non-posses-non-peccare* of human misery principally denotes an *inescap-*

able condition, a necessary participation in life as *cupiditas*, a condition and a participation both of which influence the character of any and all human actions, whether one perceives those actions as good or evil. Indeed, the human act of turning from God (*aversio a Deo*) and around toward the creature (*conversio ad creaturam*) designates the essence of sin: *sin-as-act*. Nevertheless, through this act, an inescapable condition immediately installs itself.<sup>1</sup> The human can choose to actualize itself as false love, as *cupiditas*; even if the human should or could again decide to actualize itself authentically, however, the human cannot extricate itself from the distorted relationships to God, neighbor, and self that it has instituted for itself. No matter what kind of, or how many, good deeds the human might do, the human can undo for itself *neither* the act *nor* this resulting state of disruption. For the Christian symbol of divine suffering, the human inability not to sin operates as this condition.

### *Lost Freedom*

With the *non posse non peccare*, as a symbol of the human inability to love authentically or to actualize itself as *caritas*, the Christian symbol of divine suffering announces the loss of original or fundamental human freedom. This symbol, however, does not imply that God predetermined or predestined this loss. On the contrary, the symbol of the human inability not to sin receives its meaning from its place within the context of the beloved human's active and intentional betrayal of the divine lover. Thus, the human has lost the freedom to live faithfully, and with reciprocity, in relation to the ever-faithful divine lover, through the human

1. Various Christian testimonies to divine suffering borrow features from the apostle Paul's understanding of slavery to sin (Romans 6:6–23; Galatians 4:1–9). “In the language of St. Paul, the *act* is the ‘yielding’ of the body to servitude (as you have yielded your members as servants), the state is the reign (let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies). A ‘yielding’ of myself that is at the same time a ‘reign’ over myself—there is the enigma of the servile will, of the will that makes itself a slave” (Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, 154). Still, the apostle Paul described sin as an almost personified reality, whereas, in the Christian symbol of divine suffering, bondage to sin describes the inescapability (at least, with human resources alone) of the betrayed relationship with God. Bondage to sin, then, does not describe an independent reality alongside God and the creation; rather, it describes the condition that humans have produced for themselves in their lives as *cupiditas*. Tillich expressed this insight in the following way. “It is the inability of man to break through his estrangement. In spite of the power of his finite freedom, he is unable to achieve the reunion with God” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:79).

refusal and distortion of that relationship. The *initial* prerogative for the possible restoration of that authentic relationship, for re-engagement of human life as *caritas*, belongs to the betrayed divine lover, not to the human betrayer.<sup>2</sup> Humans have not forfeited all freedom; even the human as sinner, or the *imago Dei* actualized as *cupiditas*, still possesses some degree of *liberum arbitrium* or free will. Humans remain images of God; and, therefore, they remain capable of making choices or decisions and acting; in short, they retain the capacity for responsiveness and responsibility. Nonetheless, the human operates as *cupiditas* within this range of freedom, with all love for others really only as various degrees and modes of self-love. As such, the human deprives itself of the capacity for *genuine* self-transcendence, the capacity for authentic openness to others, including openness to the divine lover.<sup>3</sup>

### *Incommensurable Demand*

The human, in its refusal of life as *caritas*, has refused the proper possibility that God has prepared and envisioned for human life. Now the beloved human has actualized an inability to realize its proper destiny with the divine lover. Consequently, in its former authentic relationship with God, in which the human once possessed the ability to participate reciprocally, now the human *cannot*, but rather *should*, participate. What had occurred as divine *gift* to the human now falls upon the human as a *demand* of the human's created nature, but a demand that the human can neither escape, nor understand, nor fulfill.<sup>4</sup> The life of genuine

2. Christian theologians of divine suffering, such as O. C. Quick, have described the prerogative of the one who has been betrayed with reference to God in a variety of ways. "The sinful child cannot sweep away the barrier or bridge the gulf alone. It lies with the father who has been sinned against to forgive, before the restoration can take place" (Quick, *Essays in Orthodoxy*, 92).

3. Emil Brunner similarly understood this aspect of human bondage (Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 2:118, 122; idem, *Man in Revolt*, 269–72). Similarly, see the following theologies of divine suffering: Mackintosh, *Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, 170; Robinson, *Two Hebrew Prophets*, 41. Geddes MacGregor said that "... my freedom cannot be realized except to the extent that I cease erecting self-assertive impediments to the entry of the self-limiting God into my life" (MacGregor, *He Who Lets Us Be*, 162).

4. On the basis of this insight into the beloved human's relation to the divine lover, the apostle Paul developed a theology of the divine law and the inevitability of sin (Romans 7:1–25; Galatians 2:1–5:14). For the Christian symbol of divine suffering, however, before this divine gift becomes "the law" in all of its specificity and detail, humans experience the demand of their own lives or humanity as the image of God:

mutual love between beloved human and divine lover should become a reality; but now the human, in its own strength, cannot actualize that possibility for authentic human destiny. The power of the claim from that authentic destiny (to live along the *caritas*-trajectory) makes itself experienced as the human inability not to sin or as the necessity to sin. The gift re-appears within human *cupiditas* in a multitude of traces, through the demands that claim various human responsibilities. A rift opens, and constantly expands, narrows, and re-expands in human life between that which humans have become and that which they should have become: once open, however, this rift never closes completely, and the human cannot bridge it with human efforts. The constant re-appearance of this chasm announces both the inescapability of the sinful human condition and the ever-present (though never fulfilled) claim of authentic human destiny upon the sinner.

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that they *should* realize themselves as *caritas* toward God, their neighbors or other creatures, and themselves, even though they have not done so and, now, *cannot authentically* do so. From this demand, a demand that discloses the inadequation in human experience defined as sin or fault, originate all values, norms, customs, interdictions, taboos, restrictions, imperatives, prescriptions, laws, and even the so-called "laws of God." One theologian of divine suffering expressed this awareness in the following way. "God's love is now experienced by them as a law of demand. . . . Adam has by his act 'fallen' from the level of loving *responsiveness* to the level of *responsibility* where he can know God's continuing love only as law" (Wolf, *No Cross, No Crown*, 188, 189). According to the Christian symbol of divine suffering, only Christ, the most complete human life as *caritas*, has genuinely fulfilled the law (according to both the first and second Christian canons, the law of the covenant of God with Israel). The Matthean Christ declares specifically his intention not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17–48). Moreover, the Matthean Christ sums up the whole of the Hebrew scriptures, or the entire revelation of God ("the law and the prophets"), under two great headings: (1) the love of God with one's entire life or self, taken from Deuteronomy 6:5 in the *Shema*; and (2) the love of one's neighbor as oneself, taken from Leviticus 19:18 of the Holiness Code (Matthew 22:34–40; cf. 19:16–25; cf. Mark 12:28–31; Luke 10:25–37). As Richard Hays has properly noted, "[t]he pronouncement story about the greatest of the commandments (22:34–40) again highlights Matthew's hermeneutical transformation of the Law" (Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 101). The apostle Paul claims that "Christ is the end (**telos**) of the law" (Romans 10:4). Paul interprets this end as *fulfillment* or *completion*, in a way that resembles Jesus' condensation of the Jewish scriptures into the two great commandments, rather than as *abolishment* or *elimination* of the law, as in the view of H. J. Schoeps (see Schoeps, *Paul*, 171–75). See also the apostle's own summation of the law in the one great commandment: to love one's neighbor as oneself (Romans 13:8–10; Galatians 5:13–14). Also see Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 270; idem, *Dogmatics*, 2:119–20.

### *Sinful Social Fatedness*

In chapter 1, I briefly described sin's third consequence, developed from the traditional doctrine of original sin (*peccatum originale*), as sinful social fatedness.<sup>5</sup> I indicated that, according to the Christian symbol of divine suffering, this reality that resulted from sin-as-act paradoxically became the external basis of temptation. Precisely sinful social fatedness, this empire of evil, reinforces, as the external environment in which every person and all communities find themselves already situated, the human inability not to sin. This external reinforcement occurs in at least two major ways.

First, sinful or evil social fatedness deepens both the lost freedom and the incommensurable demand. Initially, sin's externalized power deceptively identifies and proclaims the reality of *cupiditas* that already dominates human experience as true human freedom; moreover, sinful social fatedness then submits various evidences to support its claim. Sinful social fatedness denies the validity of human loyalty to any other reality that might transcend the immediacy of sin's environment. As a result, sinful social fatedness convinces the human that the freedom which the human experiences along the *cupiditas*-trajectory constitutes the only freedom. The human, then, fails to discern its own inability to restore its relationship to God (often, even its need for that relationship) as a reality at all, much less as evidence of a lost freedom.<sup>6</sup> As a

5. Theologians describe this facet of human misery with a variety of concepts and symbols. I borrow the category of sinful social fatedness principally from the work of Langdon Gilkey, who understood this category as "fate" (Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, 49–56; idem, *Message and Existence*, 142–47; idem, *Through the Tempest*, 119–20, 209–10). Also see the superb analysis of social evil as "subjugation" in the work of Edward Farley, whose descriptions I have also employed in my own interpretation of this occasion for divine suffering (Farley, *Good and Evil*, 251–65). One might designate this category more symbolically as the empire of evil (Ronald Reagan so described the former Soviet Union: a case, perhaps, of the proverbial pot calling the kettle black?), following Rauschenbusch's description of sinful social fatedness as the "Kingdom of Evil" (Rauschenbusch, *Theology for the Social Gospel*, 77–94) or Ritschl's description of this category as the "kingdom of sin," although Ritschl does not identify the category with original sin, but sees the two categories as "mutually exclusive" (Ritschl, *Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation*, 3:337–41).

6. See Isaiah 6:10 and Hosea 2:6. One theologian of divine suffering identified a related aspect of this lost human freedom: "The more sinful the sins and the sinner, the less capable does the sinner become of appreciating either the sinfulness of himself or of his acts" (Simon, *Reconciliation by Incarnation*, 266).

result, sinful social fatedness reinforces this lost freedom by hiding and denying its loss. These external forces, thus, tempt humans to consent affectively, cognitively, and volitionally to this sinful social fatedness, whatever the various forms of its cultural specificity, as the norm for human and worldly life. Hence, sinful social fatedness also places its own demands upon human life. These demands conflict with *the gift of caritas*, but also tend to coincide with (even as they sharpen, proliferate into almost infinite specificity, and therefore demonize) *the demand* into which human sin has transformed the divine gift of *caritas*. Sinful social fatedness, with all of its values, institutions, laws, and structures, *attempts* (and finally pretends) to meet the infinite demand of betrayed human destiny as *caritas*; thus, sinful social fatedness *tempts* humans into believing that they can fulfill this demand of their own lives upon themselves.

Second, sinful social fatedness, as a reality external to and preceding all individuals and communities, produces enormous emotional, volitional, and intellectual forces with which to fuel victimization, oppression, and subjugation of other creaturely and human individuals, groups, and communities. Sinful social fatedness uses its energies to generate its own value-systems, to legitimize and promote those systems, and to realize them practically. Through these forces, the realities of sinful social fatedness victimize, oppress, and subjugate the world's various creaturely participants. Thus, the forces and realities of sinful social fatedness tempt humans actively to consent to and approvingly to participate in them, indeed to victimize, oppress, and subjugate other creatures as well.<sup>7</sup>

7. H. Wheeler Robinson identified this aspect of human misery, when he described one aspect of sin as "socially nurtured" (Robinson, *Two Hebrew Prophets*, 28). Furthermore, the realities and powers of this sinful social fatedness, in victimization, oppression, and subjugation, afflict those whom they also tempt. Despite all contemporary struggles against social injustice, this cause still receives no more forceful acknowledgement and expression than in the works of Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr. According to Rauschenbusch, for example, "... if our community is organized in a way that permits, encourages, or defends predatory practices, then the larger part of its members are through solidarity caged to be eaten by the rest, and to suffer what is both unjust and useless" (Rauschenbusch, *Theology for the Social Gospel*, 182). In Niebuhr's interpretation of pride as the religious dimension of sin, he said that "... an inevitable concomitant of pride is injustice" (Niebuhr, *Nature and Destiny of Man*, 1:223). Henry Maldwyn Hughes, however, concluded that "one of the greatest truths for which Christianity stands is that *suffering can be moralised*." Although a qualifiedly

## Human Self-Destruction

Although major Christian attestations to divine suffering do not claim that creaturely suffering and death *necessarily* result from sin as its deserved punishment, these attestations unequivocally announce that human life as *cupiditas* most certainly culminates in destruction, and especially in human self-destruction.<sup>8</sup> By self-destruction, neither does this symbol designate simply the isolated human self nor does it designate only physical destruction in suffering and death. The human self, according to the Christian symbol of divine suffering, exists only in relation to other humans and other creatures, only in community, only with some form of self-awareness, and only in some form of relation and communion with God. Human self-destruction refers to the distortion and, ultimately, to the dissolution of this relational network or web of divine, human, and cosmic realities.

### Death

In human aversion to God and conversion toward the creatures, the human denies the originating and sustaining source of its very own reality. Unaware of the negative consequence of its choice, aware only of its resulting and seemingly absolute autonomy, indeed, the human unwittingly turns again toward that from which God had originally summoned it: *toward nothing*. The human presumes to be its own god, whether the human displays that presumption by denying the reality of all deities or by creating its deity or deities in its own image. With this presumption, the human attempts on its own, both individually and collectively, to overcome the nothing that it faces. In the extremities of life as *cupiditas*, the human pretends even to conquer the threatening nothingness that induces dread and ultimately despair. Hence, although death remains an aspect of finitude in all of its goodness apart from any sin or evil, the presence of death constantly notifies the human of the deception in life-as-*cupiditas*. As such a notice, death, although neither a punishment for sin nor an evil in itself, *symbolizes* the human self-

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valid judgment, Hughes carried it too far, perhaps, thereby enabling legitimizations of injustices that operate already in prevailing social structures: “the suffering that comes upon us on account of the sins of others can be given a moral value when it is voluntarily accepted and endured for social ends” (Hughes, *What is the Atonement*, 74, 75).

8. Robinson, *Two Hebrew Prophets*, 28.



destruction that sin initiates.<sup>9</sup> Normally, for human life as *caritas*, physical death reminds the human of its creaturely status and its ultimate interdependence with God, while, for the human as *cupiditas*, physical death threatens the human with that which the human cannot finally overcome in its own strength: *nothingness*. As the human shuns the source of its own existence and life, in its creaturely attempt at self-promotion or even self-deification, simultaneously the human embraces the very source of its non-being. Along the trajectory of *cupiditas*, the human speeds toward destruction, toward *ultimate* death, a death that deepens and intensifies the death that finitude itself already holds. Through the guarantee of physical death, *non posse non mori* (the inability not to die), the horror of life as *cupiditas* emerges,<sup>10</sup> even though,

9. Insofar as symbols participate in the realities to which they also refer (see my discussions of religious symbols in Pool, *God's Wounds*, vol. 1, *Divine Vulnerability and Creation*, chapter 1), physical death (inasmuch as it serves as a symbol) for the sinner also concretely participates in the nothing that threatens the sinner with ultimate destruction. In this sense, one may understand death as a negative sacrament, in its conjoining of actual threat (rather than promise) and life as *cupiditas* or infidelity to the divine lover (rather than faith).

10. Augustine's view on the relation between sin and death represents the dominant thanatology in the history of Christianity. According to Augustine, not only was the human able not to sin (*posse non peccare*) prior to the human's fall into sin, but the human was, on that basis, also able not to die (*posse non mori*). For Augustine, humans became unable not to sin and to die (*non posse non peccare et mori*) through the first human's sin; moreover, in Christ, humans await an eschatological freedom in which they will possess both the inability to sin (*non posse peccare*) and the inability to die (*non posse mori*) (see, for example, Augustine, *De Correptione et Gratia*, 12.33; translated as "On Rebuke and Grace," 103–4). In the apostle Paul's hamartiology, "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Humans earn death with their sin. The apostle, however, does not sharply distinguish between physical or bodily and spiritual death. For him, physical death and death as a condition that sin has produced—in my terminology, as the human flight from life's source to its antithesis—closely resemble one another; the apostle, nonetheless, seemed to hold that physical death results from the sin of the primal human (Romans 5:12–14). Still, the apostle Paul did write that "the sting of death is sin" (1 Corinthians 15:56); the real negating power of physical death oppresses humans through their participation in sin (e.g., Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 112–13). Jüngel's view resembles my interpretation of this symbol's construal of the relation between sin and death. For Jüngel, "sin is the *intensified empowerment of nothingness*, that nothingness into which God goes out and out of which he calls his creation into being, an empowerment to the level of a power summoning back to destruction. Sin makes nothingness into something; it builds up nothingness into an anti-deity. . . . Man, then, insists on nothingness as his origin and source, which he has now vanquished. In this, he gives nothingness the opportunity to convict him of the very opposite. He *falls prey* to nothingness. In death, the apparent vanquisher of nothingness is vanquished



finally, only the Christ discloses the human as a sinner to itself.<sup>11</sup> With its attestation to the human's inability not to die, *non posse non mori*, the Christian symbol of divine suffering, in its constructive mode, *regards* death as a necessary or created (and, therefore, good though negative or dark) dimension of finitude itself. Yet, in its critical or de-constructive mode, this symbol *rejects* the orthodox Christian conclusion about death: that the reality of death has appeared either as a consequence of or as a punishment for human sin. Only in this very restricted sense can and do many Christian testimonies to divine suffering consistently discuss physical suffering and death in connection with the consequences of human sin.

### *Ira Dei*

Following major strands in the Christian traditions, the Christian symbol of divine suffering describes the divine refusal of and resistance to human sin as *ira Dei*, the wrath of God.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, many testimonies to divine suffering refrain from construing this symbol as God's retribution or vengeance for some sort of offended divine holiness or honor. For the Christian symbol of divine suffering, the symbol of *ira Dei* essentially expresses the fullness of God's love. From the divine standpoint, the misery of the beloved human results from human refusal of

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by it. When man avers that nothingness is the origin which he has overcome, he surrenders himself to nothingness as the unvanquishable purpose of his being; for God is kept back from the struggle with nothingness to the extent that man claims that he *comes* out of nothingness, rather than to be called forth from it" (Jüngel, *God as the Mystery of the World*, 225n.73). Brunner described this reality as "existence unto death," which "is not the knowledge beforehand of physical death, of the end of earthly existence," but is rather the combination of "the bad conscience" with "the thought of the unknown 'afterwards,'" the point where sinful humanity "meets the wrath of God, in a dim pre-awareness of the possibility of eternal punishment" (Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 165). Hughes stated a similar view. "It is sin which gives death its significance in relation to conscience. Apart from sin, Death might have been what Wordsworth says our birth is, 'a sleep and a forgetting'" (Hughes, *What Is the Atonement*, 34).

11. In his study of the relation between sin and death in Pauline theology, Günther Bornkamm argued similarly. "Of course, the misery of the unredeemed man is described from the standpoint of the redeemed man. Only from this perspective is his existence in its radical lostness under law, sin and death properly recognized" (Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience*, 89).

12. See Max Pohlenz's excellent, though dated, study on the wrath of God (Pohlenz, *Vom Zorne Gottes*).

life's source, not from condemnation that originates in an offended divine consciousness. By creating humans who must actualize themselves as love (either as *caritas* or *cupiditas*), God made it possible for humans to choose against the divine lover. Indeed, God rejects human betrayal and its resultant destruction; but God cannot prevent this possibility from becoming an actuality, since God has allowed the human to remain truly an-other-than-God-who-resembles-God. Thus, paradoxically, the human destruction that results from human sin, while one can describe it as divine wrath because God rejects and opposes both it and its source, occurs as a negative reality—even as judgment—that *God has not willed*. In this sinful human self-destruction, the Christian symbol of divine suffering construes divine love as most fully active; even in sinful human *self*-destruction, God refuses to coerce the beloved human into life as *caritas*. In divine wrath, then, the divine lover surrenders the beloved human to that which the unfaithful human desires, to that which opposes God.<sup>13</sup>

13. The apostle Paul developed a similar understanding of divine wrath (“**oogh**l qeou”), in his threefold declaration that God has surrendered unfaithful humans (“**paredwken au0ouj o9qeoj**”) to the desires of their hearts (“**e0 tai=piqumiaij twx kardiwn au0wn**”), to unworthy passions (“**ei0 paqh a0imiaj**”), and to disqualified or worthless minds (“**ei0 a0okimon nouw**”) (Romans 1: 24, 26, 28). Brunner expressed this attestation as follows: “the wrath of God consists in the fact that when man asserts his independence God takes him at his word” (Brunner, *Dogmatics*, 2:120). William Temple shared this perspective as well: God “lets our selfishness bring upon us its own fruit of disaster” (Temple, *Christus Veritas*, 184). See the similar viewpoint of Tillich: “the divine love stands against all that which is against love, leaving it to its self-destruction, in order to save those who are destroyed; for, since that which is against love occurs in persons, it is the person which falls into self-destruction” (Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:77). In keeping with the sense in which a dialectic establishes itself between sinful social fatedness and human misery, Ernst Käsemann said: “the threefold **paredwken au0ouj o9qeoj**, introduced by **dio** in v. 24, **dia touto** in 26, and **kaqwj** in 28, marks the changing from guilt to fate” (Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 44). Clearly, through divine wrath, according to the Christian scriptures, God intends not vengeance as much as correction of the covenant people: “Do I have any pleasure in the death of the wicked; declares the Lord God, rather than that he should turn from his ways and live?” (Ezekiel 18:23 NAS). “To impute vindictive fury to God is pagan; to believe that His love corrects our faults by pain is part of Christianity” (Mackintosh, *Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, 168; also see, Robinson, *Two Hebrew Prophets*, 54, 55). Klaus Koch argued convincingly that the first Christian canon develops no theory of divine retribution for sin, a claim most clearly supported by biblical Hebrew itself, a language having no single word for punishment. Instead, according to Koch, the Hebrew scriptures generally develop an “Action-Consequences-Construct” to communicate sin’s destructive bondage (Koch, “Is There a Doctrine of Retribution in the Old Testament,” 57–87).

Thus, the symbol of divine wrath, while not depicting vengeful divine rage, does attest to God's personal (not impersonal) and natural response to sin,<sup>14</sup> but only a divine response in the sense that the divine lover refuses to punish the beloved human's flight from, or to coerce the beloved human's return to, the genuine source of its creaturely life. Furthermore, for the Christian symbol of divine suffering, divine wrath does not signal the absence of God's love,<sup>15</sup> but rather that very love as

14. Christian testimonies to divine suffering do not consistently agree with one another about the character of God's wrath. On the one hand, some theologians hold viewpoints that resemble the position of C. H. Dodd. As Dodd understood it, the apostle Paul used the symbol of divine wrath "... not to describe the attitude of God to man, but to describe an inevitable process of cause and effect in a moral universe." For Dodd, sin's consequences, as divine wrath, grow naturally from sin and are, therefore, "impersonal" (Dodd, *Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, 22–23, 24). A. T. Hanson also accepted this view (Hanson, *Wrath of the Lamb*, 178). On the other hand, many biblical scholars and theologians regard divine wrath as God's *personal* action, not a power or process that operates independently of divine control (see, as examples, Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 108; Hughes, *What Is the Atonement*, 55, 56; Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, 91, 108; Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 14–16). Divine wrath is not an "immanent causality" as Dodd understood it. "For Paul every thing depends on the fact that in this apparently immanent event God himself is secretly at work to exact retribution. . . . He exercises judgment by delivering up the guilty to the separation from God which they want. Their wish becomes their fate and therefore the power which rules them" (Käsemann, *Romans*, 43–44). A third position among some theologians of divine suffering resembles the one that I have described. "God does not smite the sinner from without; the process works from within. . . . But God's object is not to inflict pain on the unrepentant sinner. Such revenge contains the elements of hatred and cruelty, which have no place in the nature of God." Nonetheless, those theologians who hold this position still perceive divine wrath as God's personal response (e.g., White, *Forgiveness and Suffering*, 48, 49, 56). H. R. Mackintosh discerned no conflict in a construal of divine wrath as the union between God's personal reaction and a natural consequence: "it means that His opposition to evil is so intense that He has actually formed the world on such lines that it infallibly reacts against the wrong-doer" (Mackintosh, *Christian Experience of Forgiveness*, 169).

15. One theologian of divine suffering claimed that sin "forces a kind or degree of kenosis even on the *divine love*," thereby reducing God's love "in part to a potential state" (Simon, *Reconciliation by Incarnation*, 301). Jung Young Lee understood divine wrath as "a biblical symbol which describes the restrained mode of *agape*, or the empathy of God unrealized" (Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 16). Egil Grislis said that Anders Nygren's concept of divine wrath also implies divine love's absence (Grislis, "Luther's Understanding of the Wrath of God," 279). To the contrary, however, other theologians of divine suffering have understood divine wrath as an aspect of divine love. God's wrath does not need to be "changed into love and mercy," but is rather "identical with the consuming fire of inexorable divine love in relation to our sins" (Baillie, *God Was in Christ*, 189). "It is granted to no being to compel Deity to lose the splendid happiness of

rejected, yet never completely avoided, by the beloved human. Neither does the symbol of *ira Dei* indicate a conflict within God between holiness or justice and love or mercy.<sup>16</sup> This symbol, rather, refers to the human self-destruction that results from the unfaithful human's rejection of creative, sustaining, and healing divine love.

According to the most consistent logic of the Christian symbol of divine suffering, then, the symbol of *ira Dei* refers to a reality that the human has produced from its own desire for absolute autonomy, for complete independence from the divine lover and partner. As a product of human sin, this frightening symbol depicts a distorted God: the holy divine warrior, full of rage, vengeance, and jealousy, who punishes the least offence retributively, vindictively, often arbitrarily, and usually more harshly than warranted. Such depictions of God, therefore, misrepresent the genuine character of the divine lover.<sup>17</sup> This terrible symbol

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loving even those who disobey and hate Him. . . . Quantitatively there is no more of the love of God in heaven than in hell, but qualitatively the loves differ as much as hell and heaven" (Fairbairn, *Place of Christ in Modern Theology*, 424).

16. "The wrath of God is the reaction of his holy love against sin. It is not the opposite of love; it is a part or aspect of love. The opposite of love is hate, and God is not described as hating men" (Stevens, *Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, 275). Some Christian theologians of divine suffering, however, do perceive a conflict or tension in the divine life between love or mercy and holiness or justice: as examples, see Kitamori, *Theology of the Pain of God*, 108; and Ohlrich, *Suffering God*, 44–48. Jung Young Lee construed this conflict between justice and love as the conflict between divine transcendence, as God's "eternal will to assert His own glory and power," and divine immanence, as God's "compassionate heart to renounce and sacrifice Himself in the world" (Lee, *God Suffers for Us*, 14).

17. Paul Tillich discerned this point as well. "For distrust of God is demonization of God in human consciousness. Man does not dare surrender to the unconditioned, because he sees the unconditioned as that which judges him, destroys, breaks him. All religious history is filled with this demonization of the divine. It appears most terribly where, with the elimination of all sacramental mediation, man is placed directly before God and experiences his absolute claim and his rejecting wrath; or where, with the disintegration of all life contents, the unconditioned appears as the abyss of nothingness" (Tillich, "The Demonic: A Contribution to the Interpretation of History," 95). Brunner developed a similar insight (Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 169, 179–80). For Brunner and Tillich, false views of God arise from human sin. Edward Beecher articulated a slightly different, perhaps even reversed, position: "the existence of suffering in God is a necessary and essential result of true love" and "to deny it, is to deny the great law of sympathetic love in him, and to enthrone a God of heartless and loveless force as the Lord of the universe." Furthermore, for Beecher, "the deepest root of spurious religion, in all ages, has been false views of the character of God, and of the real nature and extent of legitimate communion with him" (Beecher, *Concord of Ages*, vi, 15).

certainly illustrates divine refusal of and resistance to human infidelity; but the divine refusal and resistance, paradoxically, imply that, in God's love, God allows the beloved human to choose and to possess exactly that which the human wants. God even remains faithful to the divine gift of human freedom. Choosing against the source of its own life and sustenance necessarily implies the human's own self-destruction.

## Hell

According to the Christian symbol of divine suffering, unchecked by reconciliation with the divine lover, the self-destruction of human misery yields everlasting torment. Christian communities have traditionally communicated this with the symbol of hell.<sup>18</sup> I introduce a brief discussion of this symbol here, however, because, despite its eschatological character, for the Christian symbol of divine suffering, hell begins when humans begin to actualize themselves as *cupiditas*; hell does not simply await humans beyond death.<sup>19</sup>

Hell does not even await humans as that which God has created for the punishment of sinners. God does not create hell. God does not inflict torment or damnation.<sup>20</sup> Rather, the human's own choice against

18. Christian traditions also closely link other symbols to the symbol of hell: the last judgment, eternal death, eternal punishment, resurrection of the dead, and so forth. Here, however, I focus only upon the symbol of hell, and only upon this negative symbol because divine creation of alterity implies the possibility, at least, of an everlasting creaturely refusal of both love from and love for God. Nonetheless, such everlasting human refusals begin in present human experience—whatever the nuances expressed by this symbol's remaining eschatological elements. Christians often base their teachings about hell on a variety of often very different texts in the second Christian canon: Matthew 5:25–26; 7:21–23; 18:8; 25:30, 46; Mark 9:43; John 3:36; 2 Thessalonians 1:4–12; Hebrews 2:1–3; James 3:6; 2 Peter 2:4, 17; Revelation 2:11; 9:1–11; 11:7; 20:10. Christians have also drawn support for this symbol from a variety of other texts (such as, Deuteronomy 32:22; Daniel 7:10; Assumption of Moses 10:10; 2 Esdras 7:36; Judith 16:17; Psalms of Solomon 3:13), particularly with their references to the valley of Hinnon, transliterated into Greek as “Gehenna,” the place where ancient peoples sacrificed children (Joshua 15:8; 18:16; 2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6; Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35).

19. “The will that is altogether turned away from God whether in this life or in some other life to come has found hell, though pain may seldom seem to come its way” (Brasnett, *Suffering of the Impassible God*, 70).

20. Nicolas Berdyaev developed this position. For him, hell, as an “ontological postulate” or as a conception of the place that God constructs for the wicked, really represents a concept that “good” people have created as a place of retributive justice to send “evil” people. Berdyaev considered such an ontological postulate unjust—sending people to

the divine lover propels human reality away from God, the source of its life, and toward the nothing. Unwittingly, in the beloved human's desire for absolute autonomy, and in its arrogant attempt to accomplish that goal, the human wills its own everlasting self-destruction. Just as God rejects and resists human betrayal, even though God cannot prevent this from happening to the divine self in the face of the true other-than-God whom God has created, God also resists and rejects the reality of hell. God does not will or create hell. Human life as *cupiditas* produces hell.<sup>21</sup>

Hell, as a human creation, represents the ultimate state of self-estrangement from God, a situation that God does not desire, even for those who have betrayed the divine lover. Nonetheless, because the human is not God and therefore not its own source, the unfaithful human cannot fully disengage itself from God's presence; the beloved human cannot ultimately annihilate itself, although it can install for itself an everlasting estrangement from God.<sup>22</sup> Thus, for the human who wishes to

hell for eternity as punishment for a few years of temporal wickedness. Nevertheless, Berdyaev regarded hell as a necessary "moral postulate" of human freedom; humans must have freedom to choose eternal separation from God. "Hell belongs entirely to the subjective and not to the objective sphere; it exists in the subject and not in the object, in man and not in God" (Berdyaev, *Destiny of Man*, 268). Nonetheless, Berdyaev rightly declared that Christians must *hope* for both universal salvation and the liberation of all humans from hell.

21. See Matthew 18:14. Leonardo Boff described human freedom as "the enormous freedom to reject God and create hell" (Boff, *Passion of Christ, Passion of the World*, 115–16). C. E. Rolt also held a similar view, stating about humans that "to be by their own act cut off from Him Who is the only Fount of joy must be for them a source of misery worse than banishment or vengeance imposed by a despot's will" (Rolt, *World's Redemption*, 36).

22. "Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there" (Psalm 139:7–8 NAS). Although the previous text refers to Sheol, the realm of the dead (and not necessarily to the later and more developed Christian concepts of hell), it essentially supports the conviction in the Christian symbol of divine suffering about the inescapable divine presence even in hell. Brunner elaborated this conviction. "Man never escapes from God, not even in hell. Indeed, this is the very essence of hell—that one would like to be free from God at last, and it is impossible" (Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 163). Tillich, however, while developing a similar perspective, discerned more insightfully the paradoxical character of hell. He chose to speak of "eternal condemnation" or hell as "removal from the eternal." "The experience of separation from one's eternity is the state of despair. It points beyond the limits of temporality and to the situation of being bound to the divine life without being united with it in the central act of personal love" (Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 2:78). Stephen Davis construed hell as a place devoid

escape the divine presence along the *cupiditas*-trajectory, the inescapable loving divine presence denies the human's desire to constitute its own deified source and goal. Paradoxically, even though God remains inescapably present to the creation, God cannot coerce one who is truly other-than-God to love God genuinely. Hence, God, as creator of *imago Dei*, in risking its false actualization, also risks the everlasting possibility of hell, even though God does not desire or create this reality.

I hesitate further to elaborate this symbol's construal of God's relation to hell, since this chapter analyzes the anthropological component in the second divine wound. Nevertheless, this topic requires some discussion of the relationship between hell and God, even though a slightly misplaced excursus methodologically.

With modernity's advent, at least two major aspects of traditional Christian understandings of hell became extremely distasteful and embarrassing to many Christians: (1) the belief that God created a place of eternal torment, in which to incarcerate unredeemed and rebellious humans after death, as retribution or punishment for the evil of their earthly lives; and (2) the belief in the divine double-decree of predestination, that from eternity God both had elected some humans to eternal salvation and had reprobated the remainder of them to eternal damnation—the *decretum horrible*.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, that Christians often held these two beliefs simultaneously intensified the repulsiveness of the two convictions. As a result of many factors, theologians began to challenge both the belief in the double decree and the belief in a place that God produced, even if God had not predestined it, for the eternal punishment of earthly wrong-doers.<sup>24</sup>

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of divine presence, as a reality chosen by persons who cannot live in God's presence and who grow to regret that incapacity in themselves (Davis, "Free Will and Evil," 82).

23. See an early North American version of this *decretum horrible*: Edwards, "Sermon IX. The Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners," 226–53.

24. See D. P. Walker's excellent discussion of this growing reaction (Walker, *Decline of Hell*). Challenges to the *decretum horrible* of the double decree, of course, have persisted and gained considerable momentum—now on biblical grounds as well as on the basis of offended sensibilities. Some of these challenges have received forceful rebuttals. See, for example, the story of one Christian Reformed theologian's fruitless struggles against this doctrine in his own denomination (Boer, *Doctrine of Reprobation in the Christian Reformed Church*). Perhaps Boer's problems with this doctrine relate essentially to his own missionary work in Africa. See his still insightful work from that context on Christian missions: Boer, *Pentecost and Missions*. Also see the relation between the shift in concepts of hell and nineteenth-century Anglican missionaries: Hatcher,