

GOD, PASSIBILITY AND CORPOREALITY by Marcel Sarot. *Studies in Philosophical Theology* no.6, *Kok Pharos*, 1992. Pp. xii + 280. No price given.

On page one of this book we read that divine passibility is "a live issue," and if we needed any further convincing, the impressive seventeen-page bibliography at the end might suffice. However, this study is not only a rehearsal of differing opinions on the subject. Marcel Sarot, a pupil of Vincent Brummer and now research fellow at Utrecht, sets out to examine the arguments for and against divine passibility (formally defined as "mutability with regard to one's feelings, or the quality of one's inner life") and then to discuss a "widely neglected problem": the argument that, in order for God to be passible, he must have a body.

After an introduction, both sides of the impassibility debate are given a chapter's attention, with the author concluding that the "passibilists" (those who deny God's impassibility) have the stronger case. We are then presented with an analysis of Aquinas's argument that God cannot experience emotions because He is incorporeal. A brief excursus on the subject of religious language and metaphor is followed by an examination of the link between corporeality and passibility, which concludes that "if God is passible, He must be able to undergo located bodily sensations." Accordingly, given the author's preferences, the final chapter is entitled "Towards a theory of divine corporeality".

The first half of this book is both less remarkable and more valuable than the second. The tendency of "philosophical theology" to examine writers as different as Moltmann and Pike, for example, alongside one another, is to be welcomed, as is the concern for "intelligibility, coherence and consistency" which Sarot claims. Despite his own conclusions, certain of the unfounded assumptions which underlie modern rejections of classical theism are subject to criticism, most notably the oft-repeated claim that "A God who cannot suffer cannot love." Sarot lets slip a number of assumptions of his own, however. The idea that the relationship between God and the world, and hence God's manner of "being affected", is not causal but "personal" is never properly explained, and seems to beg the question. The assumption that God is a person predominates—at no point is it closely argued—and is used to justify divine corporeality. Further problems are presented by the breadth of the discussion: such a complex issue as "eternality" (sic) is given just three pages, and immutability fares only a little better with twelve. Although the thorough footnotes betray anything but ignorance, the text lacks much of the logical rigour which these problems require. There is also no real attempt to look into the historical issues which underlie a great deal of contemporary "passibilist" theology; one will look in vain, in both bibliography and index, for the names Luther, Hegel, even Barth.

The second half of the book pays a great deal of attention to physiological and philosophical studies of emotion in its quest for an answer to the argument of Aquinas which the author examines. The

discussion of metaphor in chapter five is, alas, again brief and loosely argued, adopting a controversial position (expressed in the amusingly Orwellian sentence "we may conclude that all language is metaphorical, but some language is more metaphorical than other") too quickly. The employment of Wittgenstein's theory of family resemblances to make this point is one example of superficial analysis. The comparison of models of divine corporeality in chapter seven is interesting and informed. There is a close exposition of Hartshorne, a discussion of Grace Jantzen's book *God's World, God's Body*, and a critique of Luco Van den Brom, who holds that God's body can be regarded as multi-dimensional, transcending our three-dimensional space.

The inadequacies so far mentioned are exacerbated by the turgid style. The quest for precision and coherence need not involve the rehearsal and judgement of one argument after another in quite so laborious and monotonous a manner as we come across here. There is no need for "philosophical theology" to be dull theology. There are one or two grammatical oddities which betray a non-English speaking author, though these are not intrusive (they usually concern conditional clauses). But it is the overall presentation which is chiefly at fault. The book is thus far from a pleasure to read.

The central thesis is unashamedly controversial. It is regrettable that only one chapter attends to a defence of divine corporeality. Whatever her book's final merits, one of Jantzen's strengths is her patient and cautious argument—Sarot hasn't the space. Little attention is paid to the consequences of Sarot's theory—why, for example, would it be wrong, on his account, for me to worship the trees in my garden, or even my friends; all make up God's body, it would seem. And what is there to stop me answering the question "What is God?" by pointing out of the window and saying "That's Him"? Without such obvious considerations, Sarot merely serves to remind us of Aquinas's celebrated reference to the *insania* of David of Dinant.

The author identifies many pertinent questions for those who wish to abandon the doctrine of divine impassibility. He also seems perfectly content to give the wrong answers. If persons need to be bodily, ought we not give up the idea that God is a person, rather than give Him a spatio-temporal location? If passibility requires corporeality, surely it is the former which must go. For this very reason, defenders of the impassibility of God will, I think, welcome this book (if they ever manage to get through it). Unfortunately for the author, their satisfaction is not his intention.

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