

# Preface

*'... solus Deus est omnino immutabilis'*

Today we know that even at the most basic level our awareness of our world depends in part on the presence of change. Change is not 'an extra'. *Living in an utterly changeless world is not only unimaginable; it would also be impossible.* But God, we say, does not change.

We have not produced this special issue with the needs of professional philosophers primarily in mind. The question whether or not there is change in God is quite as old as Christian philosophy, and, as you can see from Santiago Sia's bibliographic review in section IV of his article, the debate on the subject in the last two decades between classical theists and process theologians has already produced an enormous literature. Perhaps here and there in these pages something has been contributed to this debate, but that has not been our first objective.

We have had in mind first and foremost those serious-minded Christians of all sorts who want to understand better the tensions so many of them have at the centre of their faith-life. If the comments and requests we receive are any guide, quite a number of people today are asking themselves if there is any possibility of reconciling rather more satisfactorily the two notions of God most of them are living with.

The first of these notions is of the utterly transcendent God they identify as the purposeful intelligence that holds all things together and is (maybe) irrevocably bringing all things to some sort of final end, that is utterly dependable and stable, 'the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change'. The second is of the God whom they usually pray to, the God who is involved with the history of humankind and with their own lives—whom they can wrestle with, whom they can treat (they believe) as a friend, a lover, a sorter-out.

Possibly the apparent discrepancies between these two notions of God trouble these Christians quite as much as does all that currently questions whether there is a God at all. Quite as much as whether there is a God at all, it matters to people whether they can meaningfully turn to God and whether God will turn to them. This is a question at the core of religion. The question of change in God is in fact basic, not esoteric. As Christopher Rowland points out in his article, people's ways of seeing God, their ways of seeing the world, and their political behaviour, are closely linked (something for us to worry about particularly today). But that is not all. 'How can one be in a loving relationship with an

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immutable being?' is a modern question, but the issue is an ancient one; the tension between God's attributes of justice and mercy appears early in the Old Testament.

No doubt there is an indispensable ambiguity at the centre of all theistic religion. However, it would appear that, because of the kind of world we are in, it is more difficult than ever for the philosophically untrained person (nearly all of us, in other words) to believe in a God who is immutable and yet who is also engaged with his creation. This certainly does not mean that a convincing case cannot any longer be made for the classical view—see Michael J. Dodds' article here. But can we assimilate these arguments, however cogent, without moving into the thought-world of another culture?

Our venture here into the discussion of whether or not there is change in God is inevitably limited. Christopher Rowland's treatment of the scriptural background to the debate is followed by Santiago Sia's introductory survey of the question's treatment in two thousand years of theism and, now, in process theology. Next come fuller reviews of the writings on the subject of the two thinkers who most outstandingly represent the classical and process positions, Aquinas and Hartshorne, by Michael J. Dodds and David A. Pailin. Simon Tugwell closes the number with an article which questions whether there is in fact 'a stark and hopeless conflict between devotional expectations and the postulates of classical theology.'

There has not been space to place the debate in its world—in other words, to explore the intellectual, cultural and social reasons why it has an urgency about it that it did not have in the past. And there is no mention here of the contributions to the debate that are being made by disciplines outside the theology and philosophy faculties. In fact, the discussion here is confined to a consideration of the Judaeo-Christian God only. Even then, it has not been possible to discuss the writing on the subject of modern theologians who have been critical of the classical position on change in God but who are not process theologians ... for example, Karl Rahner's writing on the Trinity and the Incarnation in vol. IV of the *Theological Investigations*.

However, like all our special issues, *God and Change* seeks primarily to stimulate thinking, not to supply final answers.

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