

Many Christians have a pre-Christian theology in which God is held to be a God of power rather than a God of love and this placing of the majesty of power before the vulnerability of love has caused the Father of Jesus Christ to be idolised:- "The God of Jesus Christ, like Yahweh before him, has been turned back again and again into a God of war or the God of the nation or the patron of a culture" (p 34). Professor Macquarrie's latest book is directed against this essentially pagan tendency within Christianity.

The form which the book takes is that of a series of meditations on the theme of God's involvement with his creatures—in creation; in the person and teaching of Christ; in the Passion and in the post-Calvary events of the resurrection, the ascension and the gift of the Spirit.

Although these meditations are neither particularly profound nor original they are refreshing in that the author is not content to hide behind pious but meditative jargon. When he uses phrases like 'the God of history' or makes statements to the effect that the fundamental truth of Christianity is the truth of a person the question is asked as to the meaning of such language along with the further (and often neglected) question 'Is it true?'

The emphasis throughout the book is on God not as a *deus ex machina* but as the one who has 'shared and suffered and overcome in and with his creation' (p 84). The suffering of God is central to the theme of the meditations and, despite Macquarrie's disclaimers, this means that he can make no more than Pickwickian sense of the traditional belief in the impassibility of God.

Macquarrie maintains that since the creation itself is an act of love in which God shares existence with his creatures, then, by that very act God made himself vulnerable and opened himself to suffering: "... there cannot be this love and sharing and conferring of freedom without the possibility of suffering on the part of him who loves and shares and confers" (p 4).

The God who creates, who in love shares existence is also the God of infinite care and possibly also of infinite suffering.

It is on this point of the possibility of God's suffering that Professor Macquarrie could have raised the question of meaning with more rigour than he has done.

What does it mean to say that God suffers? Could this mean that he suffers change? The traditional Christian insistence on the impassibility of God is for the sake of affirming that God does not exist in that way that creatures do. Our existence is contingent, we suffer change, threat and pain but God upon whom our kind of existence depends does not exist in the way that we do. The Chalcedonian formulations which Macquarrie defends (p 26) locate the suffering of God in the human nature of the Incarnate Son but no such qualification is made when the suffering of God is mentioned in these meditations. This omission raises a serious philosophical question about the nature of God which is not resolved by the insertion of the word 'infinite'.

Because the concept of suffering is located in the creative act of God the historical event of the Cross and Passion becomes an eternal event in God: "The cross and passion of Jesus of Nazareth" (p 66). What does this mean? The Cross and Passion are historical events which concerned Jesus of Nazareth; if they are 'already there in God before the actual historical passion' does this mean that there was a pre-existent human nature of Jesus? Karl Barth would be happy with that view but it is not the view of the orthodox Christian tradition of which Professor Macquarrie is usually (and helpfully) at pains to make sense.

There are some good remarks on exorcism and the demonic (pp 34-35) and on reconciliation (pp 50-52) but his critique of false and sentimental notions of reconciliation is emasculated by wishy-washy remarks on the complexity of conflicts preventing Christians from having to make a decision either way (Lord Hailsham would probably approve).

Those Christians who believe that God is on the side of the big battalions will be dissuaded from reading this book by its title but this series of meditations could be of great help to those who believe God to be remote and fearsome.

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