

# Reviews

**DIVINE POWER: THE MEDIAEVAL POWER DISTINCTION UP TO ITS ADOPTION BY ALBERT, BONAVENTURE AND AQUINAS.** By Lawrence Moonan. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. Pp.xi + 396. £40.

Mediaeval philosophy and theology were much interested in a complex of problems to do with power, and especially with omnipotence. There was a central dilemma. God can do everything. But he is wholly good. So it seems he cannot do evil. So God cannot do everything. There were other surrounding problems. For example, God knows everything. So he knows what I am going to do. But I have free will. So can I choose to do something different? Or does his foreknowledge constrain me? In that case it seems that I do not have free will. Lawrence Moonan presents these issues in a lively and accessible study in connection with the 'distinction' round which this book is built: between what God has in him to do, and what he actually does. He takes the period from about 1215 to 1280, when the distinction was mainly framed and began to be systematically used, with some reference to what he identifies as a second stage, up to the 1340s and John Buridan, and a third, running to Luther's period, and thence into modern times. He sees it as important throughout that the study should be a tool for philosophers now, as well as an exercise in intellectual historiography.

A preliminary presentation of 'working notions' attempts to strip down the distinction to a core concept from which cluttering associations have been pared away. These include the associations with the concept of 'God' which lead Christian thinkers to have certain expectations of his behaviour; and the complexities of conditional futurity, freedom of choice, the operation of grace with which Anselm had earlier wrestled in this connection, in the face of a perhaps simpler concept-network involving an undifferentiated *potestas* in its relation to 'will' and 'necessity'. The heart of the matter for Moonan is the naked issue of 'power' in its two manifestations in God (*de potentia ordinata sua* and *de potentia absoluta sua*).

The 'history' begins with a rapid traverse of the early story. Here Moonan is cursory (to the point of insensitivity to their world?) in his sketch of the first *magistri*. But he is anxious to get on to the 'early users' of the distinction, beginning with Geoffrey of Poitiers, a pupil of Stephen Langton, and looking at William of Auxerre, Philip the Chancellor and William of Auvergne. It would be helpful here to have

brought out more sharply for the reader the 'question-breeding' character of early scholasticism, and the frequency with which questions such as 'could God have redeemed the world in any other way?' were being raised. Moonan is able to show from convincing analysis of the texts that by 1230 the distinction was in regular use, and to go on to trace something of the process by which it was adopted as a more or less standard device. Here he takes in particular Roland of Cremona, Hugh of St. Cher and Alexander of Hales. Albertus Magnus and Bonaventure have a chapter each, Aquinas two, in which work by work and theme by theme the application of the distinction is traced. A penultimate pair of chapters explores the use of the distinction by lawyers (Hostiensis), and the way in which it travelled outside Paris to Oxford (Kilwardby . Bacon, Richard Rufus) and beyond (the Dominican Hugh of Strasbourg). The study ends with an essay which seeks to take stock of the distinction now that its detailed history in this key period has been set out, and to point to ways in which it is a worthwhile addition to the equipment of modern philosophy.

There is much that is valuable here, not least the undertaking itself. The close examination of sub-departments of the problem in particular works and specific authors makes this an extremely useful resource-book, as its author hopes it will prove. Engaging though the writing is, for the most part, there are, however, passages where one glimpses a submerged agenda. (the masters who brought philosophy back from the groves and cloisters to the [publicly-regulated] market-place' are not people this reviewer easily recognises among the familiar faces.) There are also moments when the conclusions being drawn seem a little forced, or awkward. But this is an experiment in genre and it is forgivable that it should sometimes seem a little unsure of its identity in that respect.

There is an *index nominum* and an *index rerum*, but the reader has to construct his own bibliography from the references.

G.R. EVANS

**IN THE LIKENESS OF SINFUL FLESH**, by Thomas G. Weinandy, O.F.M.Cap. T & T Clark, 1993. Pp xv + 168. £14.95.

Stephen Sykes once wrote that "the question about the humanity of Jesus is a doctrinal one, with far-reaching doctrinal implications, and not in the least to be presented as conclusively decided by the mere statement that Jesus was a man." Sharing this conviction, and taking as a principle the notion that "What is not assumed is not saved", Thomas Weinandy argues forcefully that "in the incarnation, the Son took upon himself, not some generic humanity, but our own sinful humanity." Weinandy insists that, though Jesus never sinned, and though he was free from the taint and effects of original sin, nevertheless his was the fallen humanity we all share. The basic emphasis of the essay is soteriological. "Ultimately our salvation is