

*Divine Passibility* by Peter H. Vande Brake, under the supervision of R. J. Feenstra, R. A. Muller, and N. P. Wolterstorff. Pp. x + 261.

### **ABSTRACT**

The majority position in modern theology is that God is passible. Most modern theologians assert that the God portrayed by traditional theology is utterly impassible. They contend that the classical conception of God has been unduly influenced by Greek philosophical thought rather than biblical thinking. This, however, is a hasty generalization that has little historical support. The word “impassibility” when it is used as a reference to God in modern theological discussions is taken to mean exclusively that God is “without the ability to have emotions and unable to experience suffering.” The historical material that deals with the issue of the impassibility of God makes the distinction that impassibility refers to the passions of God—those feelings or inclinations to participate in or commit sin. There are also few theologians in any era who are willing to say that God cannot experience emotions.

Thus, we may more accurately say that God is impassible with regard to passions that lead to sin, but he is passible in that he can experience emotion or even suffer if he chooses to. This assertion is made under the assumption that divine emotions are very different from human emotions just as divine suffering is also very different from human suffering. We may presume that God suffers in some capacity because of the analogical material that we are given in the Bible that portrays a suffering God and because of the suffering that is manifested in the life of Jesus Christ.

Jurgen Moltmann’s theology of the passibility of God is examined as an example of a modern attempt to construct a theology with the suffering of God at its center. His theology is found wanting in that it portrays God as one who is not free to be himself without suffering. Ultimately, Moltmann’s theological construct leaves us with a depiction of a God who suffers with us, but who is not powerful enough to do anything about the problem of suffering.