

❖ Other Voices ❖

For where God is, there too is his foster-child, namely Patience. Whence God's Spirit descends, then Patience accompanies him indivisibly.

TERTULLIAN, *OF PATIENCE*, XV (THIRD CENTURY)

[Tertullian's *Of Patience*] is the first treatise in the history of the church on a specific virtue, and the choice is significant. Not only is patience explicitly mentioned in the Scriptures,...but it was not considered a virtue by the ancients. Cicero and Seneca had written admiringly of the virtue of endurance, by which they meant perseverance in adversity, but said nothing about patience as Tertullian understood it.

Tertullian had in mind what the King James translation of the Bible called "long suffering," an attribute of God, as in the phrase, "slow to anger": "The Lord is slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression" (Numbers 14:18). The first epistle of Peter says that "God's patience [that is, long suffering] waited in the day of Noah" (1 Peter 3:20), and out of mercy God refrained from punishing those who had done wrong. Tertullian's claim is that patience is not confined to God. In the wisdom books, for example, this divine quality becomes a virtue attributed to human beings: "He who is slow to anger has great understanding" (Providence 14:29).

...For Tertullian, the singular mark of patience is not endurance or fortitude but hope. To be impatient, says Tertullian, is to live without hope. Patience is grounded in the Resurrection. It is life oriented toward a future that is God's doing, and its sign is longing, not so much to be released from the ills of the present, but in anticipation of the good to come. Hence patience becomes the key to the other virtues, including love, which can never be learned, he says, "without the exercise of patience."

ROBERT LOUIS WILKEN, *THE SPIRIT OF EARLY CHRISTIAN THOUGHT: SEEKING THE FACE OF GOD* (2003)

The Word of God is led silently to the slaughter. ...He speaks not, nor is moved, nor declares his majesty even in his very passion itself. Even to the end, all things are borne perseveringly and constantly, in order that in Christ a full and perfect patience may be consummated.

CYPRIAN, *THE GOOD OF PATIENCE*, VII (THIRD CENTURY)

How often we wish that God...would strike decisively, defeating evil and creating a better world. All ideologies of power justify themselves in exactly this way, they justify the destruction of whatever would stand in the way of progress and the liberation of humanity. We suffer on account of God's patience. And yet, we need his patience. God, who became a lamb, tells us that the world is saved by the Crucified One, not by those who crucified him. The world is redeemed by the patience of God. It is destroyed by the impatience of man.

POPE BENEDICT XVI, HOMILY AT THE MASS FOR THE INAUGURATION OF HIS PONTIFICATE (2005)

Like human friends, God's friends not only do things *for* him; they also do things *with* him. In fact, among the spiritually mature, the distinction between doing with and doing for breaks down in the case of friendship with God. For everything that we do for God is done with his aid and in his fellowship.... And this fact is perhaps especially evident when the work that we do for God requires patience. For we can be patient in him – that is, in the knowledge of his presence, in the encouragement of working hand-in-hand with the eternal one, the one with whom “one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Because our work is his work, we can rejoice in the present moment, though it is but an early stage in a difficult process that we may not live to see completed.... Each day is a fulfillment in itself, independent of visible results, to those who in Christian patience see their work as the work that God is doing.

ROBERT C. ROBERTS, TAKING THE WORD TO HEART: SELF & OTHER IN AN AGE OF THERAPIES (1993)

One model...of fruitful patience is the witness of L'Arche communities, where people of varied abilities and disabilities live together in committed, interdependent relations. L'Arche moves at a pace suitable to community, where people accept each other (and themselves), with strengths and weaknesses, admirable and not-so-admirable qualities, and learn how to live together. Core community members, the permanent residents, bear with the assistants, who often arrive unaccustomed to such a pace of life, and in their shared household, they practice hospitality, not for the sake of “fixing” disabilities, but as part of a much deeper change, a shift toward patience.

KELLY JOHNSON, “GOD DOES NOT HURRY,” IN D. BRENT LAYTHAM, ED., GOD DOES NOT... (2009)

Patience is in contrast with teeth-gritting endurance. In real patience I am at ease with myself, dwelling gladly in the present moment despite having some desire, or what would normally be a reason to desire, to depart from it.

ROBERT C. ROBERTS, THE STRENGTHS OF A CHRISTIAN (1993)

Perhaps the essential quality for anyone who lives in community is patience: a recognition that we, others, and the whole community, take time to grow. Nothing is achieved in a day. If we are to live in community, we have to be friends of time.

And a friend of time doesn't spend all day saying: "I haven't got time." He doesn't fight with time. He accepts it and cherishes it.

JEAN VANIER, *COMMUNITY AND GROWTH: OUR PILGRIMAGE TOGETHER* (1979)

I know of three (mutually and profoundly interconnected) forms of patience for confronting the absence of God. They are called *faith*, *hope*, and *love*.

Yes, patience is what I consider to be the main difference between faith and atheism. What atheism, religious fundamentalism, and the enthusiasm of a too-facile faith have in common is how quickly they can ride roughshod over the mystery we call God—and that is why I find all three approaches equally unacceptable....

Faith, hope, and love are three aspects of our experience with God; they are three ways of coming to terms with the experience of God's hiddenness. They therefore offer a distinctly different path from either atheism or "facile belief." In contrast with those two frequently proposed shortcuts, however, their path is a long one indeed. It is a path, like the Exodus of the Israelites, that traverses wastelands and darkness. And yes, occasionally the path is also lost; it is a pilgrimage that involves constant searching and losing one's way from time to time. Sometimes we must descend into the deepest abyss and the vale of shadows in order to find the path once more. But if it did not lead there it would not be the path to God; God does not dwell on the surface.

TOMÁŠ HALÍK, *PATIENCE WITH GOD: THE STORY OF ZACCHAEUS CONTINUING IN US* (2009)

Humility and patience are inseparable, just as are pride and impatience. They are rooted in contrasting loves, the love of self to the contempt of God and the love of God to the contempt of self. The first glories in the strength of its patience; the second knows that all strength which is admirable is a gift from God. "The true patience of the just," Augustine writes, "is from the same source as the charity of God which is in them, and the false patience of the unjust is from the same source as their lust of the world."

DAVID BAILY HARNED, *PATIENCE: HOW WE WAIT UPON THE WORLD* (1997)

True patience is the opposite of a passive waiting in which we let things happen and allow others to make the decisions. Patience means to enter actively into the thick of life and to fully bear the suffering within and around us.

HENRI J. M. NOUWEN, DONALD P. MCNEILL, AND DOUGLAS A. MORRISON, *COMPASSION: A REFLECTION ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE* (1983)