

➤ Other Voices ➤

[T]he cry of 'Abba' in Gethsemane is surely part of a wider sense of the way in which Jesus' own sonship is inseparable from conflict, decision and suffering, from the cross. The paradox is that it is precisely Jesus' intimacy with the will of his Father that presses him towards the dereliction, the 'Godlessness', of the cross. To be 'Son of God' in the world of violence is to be the crucified victim; the sonship of Jesus is in no sense a 'cushion' between him and the felt absence of God in the world.

ROWAN WILLIAMS, *On Christian Theology*

Thus the church is called to be for the world what Jesus was for Israel: not just a moral lecturer, nor even a moral example, but the people who, in obedience to God's strange vocation, learn to suffer and pray at the place where the world is in pain, *so that the world may be healed*.

N. T. WRIGHT, in *The Meaning of Jesus* (with Marcus Borg)

Assent to suffering is a knife-edge. On one side are the wrong sorts of passivity which give in to evil, fail to value life and health, and glorify suffering as something good in itself. On the other side are the wrong sorts of activity which make elimination of suffering an absolute, strive above all for comfort and control, and fail to see the superficiality and boredom of a world without risk of things going wrong. In between is the apprenticeship which can only be served with those who know the trade of suffering and have learnt when, and how, to accept it and assent to it.

DAVID FORD, *The Shape of Living*

[A] belief in the unique presence of God in the crucified Christ means that God has chosen to identify himself as God in a dead man; he has chosen to define his deity in weakness. This strikes a blow against all human self-aggrandizement and self-deification, where power is defined as the ability to inflict suffering upon others or to avoid suffering for oneself, and where the weak and suffering are despised as of no real account and as failures of the system. Whatever we think in our better moments, we often act on the basis that refugees have no votes and starving children have no armies. But the belief that God is uniquely at one with the crucified Jesus turns all human values upside down; God is revealed not as the one who causes suffering, or has escaped great suffering, but who suffers.

PAUL FIDDES, *The Creative Suffering of God*

The extreme greatness of Christianity lies in the fact that it does not seek a supernatural remedy for suffering but a supernatural use for it.

SIMONE WEIL, *Gravity and Grace*

Most of us have been insulated for so long that we are numb to the suffering of others—and even to our own. Our media-driven culture is partly responsible, as our power to sympathize switches off in self-defense against a barrage of murders, massive earthquakes, famines, and atrocities. What's more, our numbness anesthetizes us to our own pain as well: we push away reflections on our problems with self-esteem, relationships, and disappointment. Many of us flee from an unblinking view of human reality into entertainment or consumption....

But materialism is not the only false escape from suffering; selfish and sentimental religion is a culprit that's just as guilty. When religion becomes a fantasy buffering us from life's harshness by telling us to ignore the present and worry only about the afterlife, it has become an opiate.

JOHANN CHRISTOPH ARNOLD, *Escape Routes*

Unfortunately, brothers and sisters, we are the product of a spiritualized, individualistic education. We were taught: Try to save your soul and don't worry about the rest. We told the suffering: Be patient, heaven will follow, hang on.

No, that's not right, that's not salvation! The salvation that Christ brings is salvation from every bondage that oppresses human beings.

ARCHBISHOP OSCAR ROMERO (1917-1980), *The Violence of Love*

[D]ramatic demographic changes and immense economic pressures are creating a situation in which...churches will soon be called on to offer various forms of health care to their members and to the community at large....

Although it would be wonderful if every church could hire a parish nurse,...many will not be able to do so. But this doesn't mean that every church can't have a health ministry.... Every church has members who are known for their caring hearts, and many have the organizational skills to take the lead in establishing and sustaining a ministry. They are willing and eager to help, but they must be identified and informed.

W. DANIEL HALE and HAROLD G. KOENIG, *Healing Bodies and Souls: A Practical Guide for Congregations*

If the soul is set in the direction of love, the more we contemplate necessity, the more closely we press its metallic cold and hardness directly to our very flesh, the nearer we approach to the beauty of the world. That is what Job experienced. It was because he was so honest in his suffering, because he would not entertain any thought that might impair its truth, that God came down to reveal the beauty of the world to him.

SIMONE WEIL, "Love of the Order of the World," in *Waiting for God*