

Where is God in all of this?

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Where is God in all this? This is a question that frequently arises in the minds and hearts of people when they are experiencing a crisis like the present pandemic.

Whether a pandemic or a personal issue, people ask questions that never receive satisfactory answers. *"I prayed that my sick husband would live, but he died. God ignored my prayer." "We were taught at school that God is loving and kind and all-powerful. Yet all I receive, when I pray, is silence. God is not interested."*

These sentiments are a problem for those who believe in God. We are by our nature oriented towards truth and we have the drive within us to ask these questions and to seek real answers to them. Therefore such comments are genuine and worth attention.

A starting point for the inquiring mind seeking to understand and come to terms with our human condition might be the words of Sophocles, the great tragedian of ancient Greece who wrote in his play, Oedipus Rex: *"Let every man in mankind's frailty consider his last day; and let none presume on his good fortune until he finds life, at his death, a memory without pain."*

The Hebrew Bible deals with the pain and suffering of the Jewish people in their long relationship with God. God is revealed as the one who initiates contact with people. He wants to save the Jewish people. He leads and guides them through the centuries. He wants to protect them like a shepherd. The Hebrew Bible, that is, the Old Testament, describes God in metaphors. God is like a shepherd. God is like a rock, a strong foundation, a mother hen protecting her young. People were familiar with these images and they were able to understand the qualities God had. Then Jesus appears on the scene.

As Christian people we came to have faith in him as being both God and a human being. This is a mind-boggling claim and a difficult one for people who live with a scientific mindset to accept. However, the implications are significant and important.

In the first place, by believing in Jesus Christ as both human and God, the idea of God as a metaphor, a shepherd, a

rock, is no longer necessary. As human he has lived a human life and if he was like us in all things but sin, then he is completely human. He knows the experience of being human and because he is human, as well as God, we can come close to him and he to us.

Cardinal Leo Suenens (1904-1996) from Belgium had a talent for summing up complex issues with a quotable quote. He said that Jesus did not come to explain suffering but to fill it with his presence.

What does that mean and imply? It could mean there is no rational and satisfactory reason to explain why people suffer. The world suffers natural calamities like earthquakes and cyclones, human calamities like wars and greed that destroys lives.

Jesus draws near to us in this constant turmoil because he is alive again through the power of his Father. When he said he was a shepherd, the metaphor is still workable but at a more profound level. He is like a shepherd, yes, but now he IS the shepherd. He invites us to share his life and he shares ours. It implies that God is not omnipotent in the ordinary understanding of omnipotence because of the human element in God. It means that wars and suffering will continue in the world.

One of the implications, which people struggle with, is the fact that according to the bible, God in Jesus Christ is vulnerable. How can God the creator of the world, so incredibly all-powerful, be vulnerable? The Christian answer is that Jesus is the risen one who makes it possible.

Cardinal Suenens believed that this was the way forward. Jesus does not take away suffering but fills it with his presence. People will continue to suffer one way or another but the risen Lord offers to be with them, to walk with them. He said, *"Come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest."*

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