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# When You Are Angry with God

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already involved in mission outside of the church in both their work and volunteer activities.

Planning unifies efforts and vision and enables mission. The planning process suggested in chapter 6 looks quite workable. It is important that a broad base of members affirms the principle of planning and engages in the process of planning. "The plan needs to be reasonable and the work doable but not so simple as to lack in challenge or so difficult as to be overwhelming" (75).

The study guide works through the book chapter by chapter with a plan for study and action. It looks to be a very workable plan. Other resources for further study are listed.

I see this book as a useful resource for people interested in strengthening their congregation for mission.

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## **When You Are Angry With God**

Pat McCloskey

New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1987.

One of the burning issues for the Christian church is the problem of suffering. How does the Christian community respond to experiences of human suffering? It is the author's thesis that one's view of God has a profound effect on how persons cope with or respond to difficult life experiences. He notes that in his ministry as a confessor there are a lot of people who are "heavily burdened by anger at God, or more precisely, by anger at what they interpreted as 'God's will' " (2). He observes that people are often reluctant to identify their anger and then to deal with it. They fear that being angry at God may lead to non-faith.

The purpose of the book is not to provide easy answers but it seeks to identify some basic questions about innocent human suffering and the feelings of anger at God. It invites the reader to go on a personal journey and to make a personal investment.

In his opening chapter, "Life Isn't Fair," McCloskey examines a variety of human problems which defy easy answers. What about the innocent victims of war, hatred, family violence or physical illness? Can we ascribe these events to God's will? Hardly! When people see suffering as being God's will then anger is an inevitable result. Anger must be recognized and voiced even when directed at God. His response to the question of human suffering is summed up in one sentence, "Much—I believe most—of human suffering can be traced to an abuse of human freedom" (18).

What are the sources for the various views on human suffering? The author identifies and traces four views in the Old Testament: Genesis—suffering is closely linked to sin; Exodus—hints of the innocent suffering as

God sends Moses to deliver his people from Pharaoh's rule; Deuteronomic theology—keep my laws and you will prosper, suffering on the individual level follows a sin/punishment sequence; Deutero-Isaiah—God suffers alongside the person (the Suffering Servant of Isaiah). The idea emerges of redemptive suffering not for one's own sins but for the sins of others. He traces these themes through the Old Testament, the inter-Testamental period and the New Testament concluding that, "the Hebrew scriptures and the New Testament do not promote a tidy but ultimately heartless theology which sees all suffering as punishment for the individual's sins... Though some suffering is unexplained... God's providence is steadfastly affirmed" (58).

How shall we respond to human suffering? The legalism of the Pharisees or the control of the emotions as in Stoicism are not helpful options. He suggests rather that prayer can become a helpful response. "If I pray for grace and strength, I am less likely to resent God for failing to protect me or someone else from all harm" (78). "Prayer does not change facts although it can tremendously affect my response to facts" (79).

McCloskey has provided a valuable service in helping us to explore cognitively and experientially how we can view human suffering and how we can respond to it. He both affirms and challenges the writings of Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He also encourages us to see God as one who can live with our anger but who also suffers with us in our pain. He says "What God is so fragile that he must be protected from honest expressions of human emotion" (86). The emphasis on the community of compassion as a fitting response to those experiencing suffering is both timely and consistent with his theology of suffering. I quote again, "But given the fact of innocent human suffering, compassion is a more sensible response than any other option. When the suffering is caused by someone's abuse of human freedom... the need for compassion is even more acute" (106).

The book is well organized and has helpful questions and suggested readings at the end of each chapter. Having experienced a tragic death recently the reviewer found the book to be both therapeutic and helpful in making sense out of the experience of an untimely death. If the reader is looking for easy answers this book will be a disappointment. The strength of the book is in its pointing to helpful directions both theoretically and experientially in dealing with the reality of human suffering.

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