



Foreword

The themes of suffering and salvation have, of course, been central to Christian theology from the beginning. A central question for theology has been whether we can hope for salvation from sin and its consequences, so often experienced with seemingly unbearable cruelty. How can (or rather, how *dare*) one speak of a loving God in the face of suffering, especially the suffering of the innocent victims? This is the question so many theodicies have attempted to answer. In one way or another, however, these have all failed, for theologies will always fail to make sense of what, at bottom, can never make sense. As the Jewish theologian Irving Greenberg has averred concerning the Holocaust: “To talk of love and of a God who cares in the presence of the burning children is obscene and incredible.”¹ In the presence of the burning children, theology is reduced to silence. Greenberg suggests, however, that we still are not paralyzed: “to leap in and pull a child out of a pit, to clean its face and heal its body, is to make the most powerful statement—the only statement that counts.” The only credible response is *practical*.

It is an irony of history that “modern atheism,” so often born of the inability to reconcile a loving God with the intractable reality of innocent suffering, has its origins not among the victims of that suffering but among those of us who look on from a distance, not among the burning

children (so many of whom continue to struggle and hope even in the midst of horror) but among those of us standing at the edge of the pit and wondering what to make of it all. If there is to be a credible “theodicy,” then it will be found in the very midst of those victims of history who continue to cry out, to struggle every day for survival in a world that obsessively seeks their elimination.

That is where Nancy Pineda-Madrid dares to locate her theology, in order to ask whether Christian claims of salvation can be credible in the face of the brutal extermination of the women and girls of Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Pineda-Madrid calls for a re-imagining of the themes of salvation and suffering as social, communal realities. For too long, she argues, Christians have interpreted both salvation and suffering in individualistic terms. This impedes the ability of Christians to respond adequately to evil, which so often presents itself not only in our hearts but also in our social structures. Evil becomes prematurely “spiritualized” and perceived as a fundamentally theoretical or theological issue—the challenge that meaninglessness represents for the believer—rather than the fundamentally practical issue that it is—the challenge that injustice represents for faith.

Pineda-Madrid’s masterful work in practical theology looks to the quite particular case of Ciudad Juárez to discern how that community’s practices of resistance are themselves religious “texts” that reveal the abiding presence and ongoing salvific work of a God who, despite all the available evidence, is indeed a God of love. As in the Gospels themselves, where the first evangelizers were the women at the tomb, so will the women of Ciudad Juárez be for us the unlikely witnesses to the Good News.

Roberto S. Goizueta
Margaret O’Brien Flatley Professor of Catholic Theology
Boston College