

Naming the Silences: God, Medicine and the Problem of Suffering, Stanley Hauerwas (T. & T. Clark 1994), 154 pp, £12.50 pbk

This is a reprint from the United States of a provocative and demanding exploration of suffering in a world where medicine shapes many of our experiences and expectations around pain. The theological dimensions of the search for meaning in evil and suffering are opened up through some actual cases of dying children. Modern medicine, Hauerwas claims, has too often become a noisy way to hide the silences created by the illness of children. The effect of this carefully written text is impressive and it ought to find its way on to reading lists. The quality of the reflection derives, in part, from the range of questions that Hauerwas asks: 'Most of us wander between belief and unbelief unsure what difference either makes' (p. 30); 'What kind of God do we believe in?' (p. 59); 'Do we live in a world that promises to "solve" suffering by eliminating its causes?' (p. 35).

Hauerwas is particularly insightful on medicine and there are parts of this text that need further testing with medical staff who are attempting to make connections between their work and faith. The dialogue between religion and medicine is in need of further development, especially in the light of advances in science and the growing body of literature critical both of the knowledge base of medicine and its exercise of professional power within the National Health Service. This is an area where radical changes will be made during the next decade. What will be the role of theology in these developments?

From the pastoral and personal perspective of those who actually suffer, the problem of suffering often remains a rational exercise to be engaged in by others, or at a distance from the experience. In my chaplaincy work I am amazed by the human courage and fortitude shown in adversity. Suffering is embraced without the intellectual difficulties grappled with here. Sometimes people ask why, but most affliction is lived through, often in silence and without meaning.

From this perspective much of the theological language of *Silences* demands more work: a language in which spiritual pain can become real and within which communities of care can offer support in embracing suffering. This could help to make it possible to absorb the destructive terror of life that constantly threatens to destroy human health and well-being. Hauerwas has given us a framework that needs further exploration and attention.

James Woodward
Middleton, Warwickshire