
PREFACE

AS A THEOLOGIAN AND ORDAINED MINISTER, I have a recurring experience. I am at a party or social gathering. Someone, often a person I just met, approaches me and wants to talk about God. That person tells me that he used to believe in God, but then his thirty-four-year-old brother, with a wife and two young children, was diagnosed with terminal cancer. How could God be that cruel, he asks me? What kind of God does that? Or a woman tells me that, after much internal confusion and a long struggle, she came to the realization that she is lesbian. Now the Christians she knows tell her she is not acceptable to God. I feel God does accept me, she says. In fact, I think God helped me to know myself. Am I right about God, or are those who tell me God condemns who I am right? Or the person at the party tells me that everyone in his family remains very active in the church in which he grew up, but now, when he attends, the worship seems hollow, the words meaningless. The God I hear about in church, he says, seems so distant and different from my life. Is there something wrong with me? Still others ask about what is happening in the world today and what God is doing about such things. Where was God on 9/11, they may ask. Or they may say, I don't understand why we have to worry about global warming. Isn't God going to bring everything to an end anyway? What do you think?

When I teach or lead workshops, students and participants also ask questions. Sometimes they feel confused about hearing something different from what they always thought was true. Or they are beginning to question and reflect on their own theological positions. Or they want to understand the meaning of faith statements they have recited for years.

I am thrilled when people ask questions and search for answers. That means they are beginning the task of theology. One of the oldest definitions of theology is “faith seeking understanding.” Asking questions, reflecting on faith, and thinking critically are all part of faith seeking understanding, of the search for truth and for faith that is meaningful and life-giving.

I wrote this book for those seeking such faith. I hope it provides food for their journeys of exploration. All the people who have questioned me about God and all those students who wanted to understand contributed to what is in these pages, and I thank them. They helped me to find ways to articulate and make sense of the logic of faith statements and theological affirmations.

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