

The book is indeed an exercise in theodicy – in the branch of theology that attempts, against the insuperable odds of a random world, to “justify God’s ways to man.” But as I said, it is an honest exercise. To my knowledge, it’s the only work of theodicy that flat-footedly admits that God is an accomplice in the world’s evil. To begin with, he made it possible. To continue, he did next to nothing about it when it happened. And to make an end, he claims to have solved all of its problems not by getting rid of it but by taking it into himself on the cross – and then inviting us to believe, against all evidence, that in Jesus his incarnate Word, everything is now hunky-dory. As I later came to put it, proclaiming the Good News of such a preposterous salvation is like trying to sell a pig in a poke – only worse. You might possibly trick some gullible soul into buying a three-legged pig if you talked fast and presented your merchandise in an attractive sack. But on any honest view of the Gospel, the poke that contains the pig of salvation is the ugly bag of all the world’s derelictions – of all its lastness, leastness, lostness, littleness, and death. And even if, by great guile, you can actually get the customers past the repulsiveness of the poke, you still have a hard sell on your hands – because when they look inside, they discover you’re asking them to buy an invisible pig.

Admittedly, that’s hardly a winning sales pitch. But it has one huge advantage: it doesn’t hold out a single false promise to anybody. Because evil, sickness, death – even sin – are here to stay. They are not options that religion or good behavior or clear thinking will enable us to decline. They are inevitabilities that even God in Christ gives himself no choice about. And that is the only Gospel we have to proclaim. If it is dreadful (and it is) – if the complicity of God in evil is an outrage to even the most elemental moral sense (and it is) – it nevertheless remains the only realism ever offered to the human race in the name of God. You may not like it. But by the very token of its awfulness, it does mean that you have a Lover who will never find anything about unacceptable. And if you have the stomach to accept such a Lover...well then, you have a lot more than religion ever gave anybody.

*– Robert Farrar Capon,
The Romance of the Word, pp. 32-33*