

The Bruised Reed

A Christian Reflection
on Suffering and Hope

Prepared by the Commission on Faith and Witness
of the Canadian Council of Churches

“A bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench.”
Isaiah 42:3a (cf Mt 12:9ff).

For additional materials and references, please see the website of the Canadian Council of Churches, www.ccc-ccc.ca.

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Why are there poems in this book?

When there are no longer any words to say the unspeakable, then there is poetry.
The stories in this book retell for us the human condition. The theological reflections in this book attempt to uncover the meaningfulness of that human condition.

But in our minds, these are two separate steps; only poetry can make them one and the same.
All poems ask human questions. These poems ask them through the cry of the human heart.

But only we, the responders to the poems, can find the answers.
For Christian responders, the answer we will find will be rooted in Christ.



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In Suffering Love

BELMONT. C.M.

Adapted from Gardiner's Sacred Melodies, 1812.

Moderate.

In suf - fer - ing love the thread of life is wo - ven through our care,

The first system of musical notation consists of a treble and bass staff. The treble staff contains the vocal melody, and the bass staff contains the accompaniment. The music is in 4/4 time and features a mix of chords and single notes.

for God is with us; not a - lone our pain and toil we bear.

The second system of musical notation continues the melody and accompaniment from the first system. It concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

In suffering love the thread of life
is woven through our care,
for God is with us; not alone
our pain and toil we bear.

There is a rock, a place secure,
within the storm's cold blast;
concealed within the suffering night
God's covenant stands fast.

In love's deep womb our fears are held;
there God's rich tears are sown
and bring to birth, in hope newborn,
the strength to journey on.

Lord, to our hearts your joy commit,
in to our hands your pain,
so send us out to touch the world
with blessings in your name.

In suffering love, our God comes now,
hope's vision born in gloom;
with tears and laughter shared and blessed
the desert yet will bloom.

Words: Rob Johns (1942-1986)

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*And about three o'clock Jesus cried
with a loud voice,*



*Prophet
Emil Nolde,
1912*

*‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’
that is,
‘My God, my God,
why have you forsaken me?’*

Matthew 27:46



The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

William Butler Yeats





Why This Story?

Our first purpose is to give Christians, in their varied backgrounds and circumstances, a focal point and some food from which to pursue their own discussions and reflection on suffering in our day and age.

As persons and communities belonging to Christ and Christ's church, we wish to address, in our own time and place, the paradox of finding hope in suffering, and suffering in hope. The Faith and Witness Commission was called on to give form and shape to the paradox; the outcome is the present resource.

As we reflected together on our churches' work with persons suffering from HIV/AIDS, from poverty, from other kinds of illness or prejudice or cruelty or violence, Faith and Witness noticed the word that kept recurring: *suffering*. We found ourselves turning to the question of how we, as Christians from various traditions, understand and respond to *suffering*—not in the abstract, but in the flesh-and-blood reality of this person bleeding in front of me, this pain in my own heart, this horrific conflict that gets worse instead of better. Where do we turn, when confronted with our own or others' suffering? Why do we go there? What does it mean for us? What is suffering, and what do we do with it? As we moved more deeply into the question, we discovered at its depths another recurring word, one that attached itself inseparably to *suffering*. That word is *hope*.

Overall, we found among our traditions many differences as we ruminated, differences of expression, differences of focus, and even differences of understanding. But we also found, at the core of our discussions, much we hold in common that is foundational. It may be that the foundation, so familiar to us as to be at times invisible, is also the place of greatest recognition among us. That foundation is *hope*.

Yet, three difficulties have haunted us from the beginning.

First, how could we address this intense subject without writing at least fifteen densely-packed volumes? Can those who suffer find solace, help, courage from just a few simple words such as in this booklet?

Second, how we could avoid becoming lost in the abstract, the cerebral, the theoretical, and remain thoroughly grounded in human experience while offering a valid, useful ecumenical theological reflection?

Third and most fundamental of all—fundamental because it is presupposed by the other two questions—how are both suffering and hope embraced together as faith? Not a vague, general,



Sorrow
Vincent van
Gogh,
1882

content-empty faith, but a concrete certainty that, in faith, the inseparable pairing of suffering and hope ceases to be a paradox. Thus, the questions helped each other.

We do not wish to repeat what has already been said, richly and beautifully, by the wise and the simple who have gone before us and upon whom we draw daily. We have a splendid treasury of writings and lived examples available to us; a selected bibliography is included in this resource, and we hope the reader will not peruse our words without turning to the words which helped form us.

We begin with stories of suffering and hope, stories of real Canadians we know who faced agony of different kinds, for different reasons, in different ways. They come from a wide spectrum of Christian tradition. Everything we say here, we say with these stories and these people in mind. If our theology, our praxis, says nothing to them, then it has gone astray from Christ who is our source and who came to the suffering. And we write, also, from our own experience and awareness

of suffering, not apart from but within the world of human pain and strife, which is precisely where the Gospel is best proclaimed.

Intertwined with these stories of suffering and hope, we recount, as simply as we can, the story, the narrative of hope, which for Christians is the ever-flowing source from which we drink. Our theological reflections speak from and to the personal narratives. We ask what it means to be human amidst suffering. We give an account of the hope that is in us, as we are asked to do (1 Peter 3:15c). We look at the reality of suffering in this world, types of suffering and ways to understand what people suffer. And we return to the Scriptures and the cross of Christ to ask how the great Christian story of Suffering and Hope speaks to the personal stories upon which we have reflected.

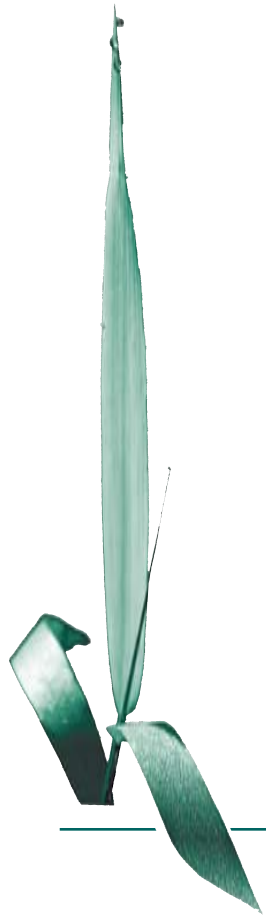
The appendix suggests hymns, prayers, references, and ways to use this book. The Canadian Council of Churches website (www.ccc-cce.ca/english/faith/suffering.htm) gives additional resources including reflections on our Scriptures, the iconographic tradition of the churches, and images of suffering, as well as giving pastoral and liturgical resources for those who wish to explore these questions in these ways as well as through discussion.

Our first purpose is to give Christians, in their varied backgrounds and circumstances, a focal point and some food from which to pursue their own discussions and reflection on suffering in our day and age. Our second aim is to let all people in the world know that, for Christians, suffering and hope are at the core of being human, and we will attempt to bring forth a Christian response to that inextricable core.

Holy Sonnet xiv

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend.
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town, to another due
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end!
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly, I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy;
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

John Donne



**Stories
and
Theological
Reflections**



Waking Up

I have asked many times the, "Why me, God?" questions, crying out in frustration and anger in the midst of physical, emotional, and spiritual pain.

It was June. I went to bed a perfectly healthy 13-year-old and woke up the next morning paralyzed from the waist down, the effects of Transverse Myelitis. After three months in the Hospital for Sick Children, I returned home with a lame left leg in a brace, two crutches, and the beginning of my life-long journey with muscular pain. Surgery a year later helped me regain more use of my left leg. The brace and crutches were soon gone. Much has changed for the good over the past 46 years. In fact, there was little I did not at least try to do physically as a teenager and young adult, some of it, in hindsight, quite ridiculous. However, my pain remained my constant companion.

I am a person of Christian faith. Throughout my life, as far back as I can remember, I have experienced God's presence. There were times when I pushed God as far away as I could, but God was always there. I have asked many times the, "Why me, God?" questions, crying out in frustration and anger in the midst of physical, emotional, and spiritual pain. I and others have prayed for healing many times. I still have my lame leg, my scoliosis, my pain, but I can say without hesitation that I have experienced healing.

In the Baptismal rite of my church, the Anglican Church of Canada, candidates renounce "the evil powers of this world which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God." We live in a fallen world where evil touches our lives in ways over which we have absolutely no control. Disease, disasters, accidents all happen. The reasons why remain a mystery. Yet, in the midst of my pain and suffering, my friend and redeemer Jesus Christ, stands at my side. God is there in the hope and peace and healing that touch my life. God is there in my family and friends who love and support me. God is there in the Church which has welcomed me, affirmed me, and called me to be a Bishop. God is there in the broken world into which God sends you and me, because God is in me and in you.

No doubt my life would have been different without the pain. Ultimately, every person suffers in some way. My suffering is just a little more visible. What has been important for me is how I have lived my life, with all the pain and suffering. I cannot imagine it being any richer.

Bishop George Elliott



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How do you respond to young George's question, "Why me, God?"
2. Where is the hope in this story coming from?
3. What place does the Christian memory have in Bishop George's experience of suffering and hope?



Theological Reflection 1

"An Accounting for the Hope that is in You" – 1 Peter 3: 15c

At the top of the hill on the road into our property, you can see far into the countryside: the rolling hills, the farm houses, the crops in the fields, and the open sky. It is a panoramic view, a beautiful vista. As you walk down the hill on that road, the scenery changes. Trees and bush and fence line close in; all you can see is the road and what is right next to it. That larger view is gone from sight, and the only way that you can see it again is to go to some higher ground where it will re-appear.

Suffering is like being at the "bottom of the road" where there is no "long view"; all you can see is what is right in front of you. All you know is your present experience of pain or trouble. Any sense of joy or love or peace, like that panoramic view, can fade or disappear at the bottom of the road. What hope is there? Like Bishop George, you wonder: "Why me, God?" What is the purpose or meaning of my suffering?

The New Testament takes a long view regarding suffering. It is the long view from the future, and it calls us forward. This view is the hope to which we are all called in Christ. Various texts literally cheer us on towards God's future which we can see only dimly now. Scripture



The "long view" at our place.

helps us get a new perspective on our suffering; and it does this by reframing suffering, enabling us to see all of life from a "higher ground" and a wider viewpoint. Two examples from the New Testament illustrate this hope in suffering.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance that race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of

Parting

My life closed twice
before its close;
It yet remains to see
If immortality unveil
A third event to me,

*So huge, so hopeless to conceive,
As these that twice befell.
Parting is all we know of heaven,
And all we need of hell.*

Emily Dickinson



The chapel of the children's home of the Missionaries of Charity (Mother Teresa's sisters), Port-au-Prince, Haiti.



our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. *Hebrews 12: 1-2*

Jesus sets the example of seeing the longer view. He “for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross.” The “cross,” whether it is that of Jesus or ours, is part of a bigger picture. This bigger picture included joy which enabled Jesus to “disregard” the shame of the cross. The race of Bishop George has involved pain and suffering, but also healing and peace and hope and a deep sense of the presence of God. In the bigger picture, God is present to him in Christ and in the communion of “witnesses” who support and love him: his friends, his family and his Church.

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,

because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

2 Cor. 4: 16-18

When we suffer, it is hard to see beyond our pain and lack of freedom. We are absorbed in the present situation, and our focus is often on what is self evident and not on what could be imagined or envisioned. In this passage from 2 Cor., suffering is reframed as a slight, momentary affliction in comparison with what the suffering is preparing us for, namely: “an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure.”

Bishop George has caught sight of this “long view.” He lives in the light of this view and sees God in this broken world and in each person, including himself. What is important for him is how he has lived his life with what he has been given. His suffering is a visible, tangible reality, but the invisible reality of his life is a richness beyond what he could have imagined. Here is an accounting for the hope that is in us through Jesus Christ!

The Rev. Elisabeth Wagschal



“I am thirsty.”

John 19:28



Aging, Suffering and Hope

*Refusal to love is the only lasting death.
Beloved, rise and I shall meet you*
Nancy Marrocco*

I'm going to die. Will whatever this force, this identity, that is me, really come to an end?

I am an old woman. At times, contemplating death can be positive. One gets tired from the simple effort of living. Comparing life to a train journey, there is relief with thoughts of that final step, of getting off the train. A friend's recollection of his father's death was simple. "Ahhh, I am so tired," the father murmured, and then he died.

Fear indeed is another factor: Fear of a painful death. One has only to read a daily newspaper to discover human physical pain, even torture, is unavoidable. Mental pain is an even worse prospect. Mental suffering, dwelling on how I caused or failed to prevent pain in others, is the worst of all. Fear of whatever is after death. Will there be pain? I cannot believe that, after creating people with their warped human nature, eternal punishment could be justified. Will there be nothing? Why then, did rational human life begin?

Hope?

A few days ago I received a picture. It features a thin old woman, eyes half closed, the skeletal structure of her tired face evident behind those sunken cheeks. Guesswork would have put her age near a hundred. She is Kathleen, not even midway through the 80s, my cousin; one of the joys of my childhood, and I love her dearly.

Since Kathleen's stroke ten or so years ago, her daughter, Carroll, cares for her. The other day, Carroll emailed me another picture of Kathleen. This time, the old woman is sitting comfortably in a soft chair, Carroll seated beside her, hugging her, her face resting trustfully on her mother's chest. Kathleen's hand reposes – protectively? – on her daughter's arm.

It is a powerful picture. Shining through is the love, now brilliant, ever deepening between the contented acceptor of the care, and the equally contented caregiver. ►



The Magdalen
Donatello (c.1386-1466)

* from *A Promise in the Storm: Grieving and Dying with Hope* by Nancy Marrocco



Rita's cousin Kathleen with daughter Carroll.

The picture tells me clearly that the sum total of life is love. Of being loved, of loving others. There belongs our happiness now; there is our hope born of love.

Love will sustain me. Love for family, loved by family. Loving by so many other people who share this world. Love of beautiful things, of oak trees, blue bellflowers and wild red poppies, the sound of peepers in the spring, the ever-dramatic skies and thundering storms, the marvel of one small seed.

I await death with fear, but with hope in the love of God, who is Love personified.

Rita Marrocco



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How does Rita's experience of love change her experience of aging?
2. What is the fear that comes with facing death?
3. How might 1 John 4, "perfect love casts out fear," speak to her experience?

from "Affliction"

Now I am here, what thou wilt
do with me
None of my books will show:
I reade, and sigh, and wish I were a tree;
For sure then I should grow
To fruit or shade: at least some bird
would trust
Her household to me, and I should
be just.
Yet, though thou troublest me, I must
be meek;

In weakness must be stout.
Well, I will change the service, and
go seek
Some other master out.
Ah my deare God! though I am
clean forgot,
Let me not love thee,
if I love thee not.

George Herbert





The Difficult Pilgrimage*

I could not forget even if I wanted to.

That dream was abruptly destroyed when the young soldier, fast as a wolf, yanked the child from my arms and carried him directly into the bush. Not knowing how many members of his unit might already have their gunsights on us, we reluctantly climbed back into the Land Cruiser. As I slowly drove away, I had much on my mind....

That moment when the boy, in the arms of a soldier young enough to be his brother, was swallowed whole by the forest, haunts me. It's a memory that never lets me forget how ineffective and irresponsible we were when we promised the Rwandans that we would establish an atmosphere of security that would allow them to achieve a lasting peace. It has been almost nine years since I left Rwanda, but as I write this, the sounds, smells and colours come flooding back in digital clarity. It's as if someone has sliced into my brain and grafted this horror called Rwanda frame by blood-soaked frame directly into my cortex. I could not forget even if I wanted to. For many of these years, I have yearned to return to Rwanda and disappear into the blue-green hills with my ghosts. A simple pilgrim seeking forgiveness and pardon. But as I slowly begin to piece my life back together, I know the time has come for me to make a more difficult pilgrimage: to travel back through all those terrible memories and retrieve my soul.



Into the blue-green hills of Rwanda

Roméo Dallaire



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What does Roméo Dallaire see as his path of healing?
2. How does his sense of responsibility contribute to his suffering? What is the connection between his suffering and the suffering of a people, and among peoples?
3. Why does he have to retrieve his soul?

* Extracted from *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda* by LGen Roméo Dallaire. Copyright © 2003 Roméo Dallaire, LGen (ret) Inc. Reprinted by permission of Random House Canada.



We are all affected

Ubuntu is the understanding that each person is made up of a delicate network of relationships: I am because you are.

In March 2004, I co-led an educational visit to Zambia of 15 women from across Canada. Our purpose was to learn more about HIV/AIDS in Zambia and the responses of partner churches and non-governmental organizations.

On the last morning of my group's partner visits, we accompanied home-based care workers Verina Yebo, Christine Kombe, Prisca Paulino and Agnes Chipambe, members of the Busokololo congregation of The United Church of Zambia, to four homes. They work for a non-governmental organization, Family Health Trust in Chawawma, an impoverished neighbourhood on the outskirts of Lusaka. We first met two young women, both close to death, one still nursing her infant girl. We met a young man whose name was Special, also suffering from AIDS. All were being cared for in their own homes by their families, supported by the home care workers.



AIDS patient Patricia (centre) with nurses and volunteers from home-based care. Patricia, who has eight children and whose husband has died, lives in a house without running water. Her health has improved.

After the first visit, shocked by the suffering of people my own age, the strength and difficulties of the families caring for them, I observed to Prisca, next to me, that this was hard work. She agreed. I asked, why then did she continue to do this work. I will never forget her answer: "It is God's will....If you don't die from one thing, you will die from something else." After a few minutes of silence, she added, "We are all affected."

The third house we visited was her own. We met Prisca's sister, Stella, diagnosed in December with HIV/AIDS.

The trip taught me that "We are all affected" is a reality of our Zambian brothers' and sisters' lives, not merely a concept. It is at the heart of Christian service there. I cannot say for sure, but my guess would be that all of the Zambians who accompanied us during the trip had lost a family member to HIV/AIDS. The visits to the hospices were not easy for them.

School children in a village community in Zambia respond to the question, "Which of you is going to be President one day?"

In 2004, Zambia's external debt stood at US\$6 million. Despite having qualified for the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, Zambia's scheduled payments between 2003 and 2005 increased by more than 50% over the 2000-2002 period.

In Ontario, the effect of SARS (Severe Acquired Respiratory Syndrome) in 2003 led to increased funding and reinvestment in public health. Yet SARS affected a relatively small part of the overall population. In Zambia, increased public reinvestment, needed to address the loss of a generation and raise one that is being orphaned, is restricted. In 2004, the Zambian government as part of its debt repayment terms was prohibited from raising public sector wages to above 8% of the Gross Domestic Product. Therefore over an 18-month period, despite a shortage of doctors and teachers, no new civil servants could be employed and the government had to cancel plans to increase its employees' living allowance.

At that time, only 3,000 Zambians had access to life prolonging anti-retroviral treatments (ARVs). Donors were reluctant to provide funding for extending ARVs, citing Zambia's lack of infrastructure. At the same time, those patients who received ARVs paid 40,000 *kwacha* a month for the treatments, part of a cost-sharing program that further limited access.

Though anti-retroviral treatment is today more accessible to the majority of the population, the World Bank and IMF's economic policies have not changed fundamentally. Why is this so? Has the reality of HIV/AIDS not been seen and understood by the international missions and experts of the two International Financial Institutions? Emily Sikazwe, Director of Women for Change, a Zambian non-governmental organization and partner, asks the question in a different way. "Who is making 'orphan' a popular word?"

Ubuntu is the understanding that each person is made up of a delicate network of relationships: I am because you are. We heard about and saw *ubuntu* during our time in Zambia. "We are all affected" necessarily leads to action when you understand that your well-being is intricately connected to others and vice-versa. When one member of the body suffers, the others suffer with it.

Christie Neufeldt



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. When human systems contribute to suffering, how do we respond?
2. What difference does it make that this experience is shared?
3. What is it that enables Prisca to keep hope in the face of such suffering?



Theological Reflection 2

"Under Our Skin": The Embodied Reality of Suffering

Suffering is so much a part of the human experience that we are somewhat inclined to take it for granted – until we are actually suffering ourselves. Then we find ourselves asking all the big questions: “Why is this happening? Why me, or them? What is this for, what is its purpose?” Suffering really does *get under our skin* in irritating ways, and that is what gives us trouble.

Hurricane Katrina survivor Jim Barnett of Mobile, Alabama, and dogs, sift through rubble for personal keepsakes with Mennonite Disaster Services volunteers days after the storm surge smashes his brick home.

There are varieties of suffering and they do not always bring the same symptoms. Suffering can be physical, mental or spiritual; sometimes only one of these, sometimes all three at the same time. Mental or spiritual suffering can cause physical symptoms which, on the surface, may appear to be the real suffering. At other times the effects of physical

suffering cause mental and/or spiritual anguish.

Sometimes suffering is the result of choices that we have made, sometimes choices made by others which affect us. Suffering can be caused by societal factors such as poverty, social stigma, unattainable expectations placed upon us by others or by ourselves. Often there are natural causes for suffering such as illnesses that strike us, although there are times when the illness is caused by choices made, or not made, in our life. Natural disasters such as the great tsunami of 2004, the frequent hurricanes or earthquakes, and famine cause much of the suffering in the world. Then there is also suffering which has no other root cause than what we might describe as moral evil such as the shootings at Dawson College in Montreal, and other schools, or the genocide in Rwanda and Darfur, and even the event known only by its date, 9/11. Other similar factors are the suffering caused by war or by torture.

No matter what the cause of suffering, it affects us to the core of our being, and gives rise to questions of deep meaning and searching. We sometimes speak, metaphorically, of the pain of suffering, for suffering does cause a deep ache in our souls and in our very beings. However, physical pain, although it may cause one to suffer, is not itself suffering. Pain, when related to suffering, is really only a symptom. It can be dealt with, and at times relieved, by various medications and therapies. It is also possible that we can have pain without really suffering, and suffer, but have no pain.



We sometimes use the term suffering to describe a variety of types of inconveniences. Suffering, in the sense that we are considering it in this discussion, rises from the depths of our beings. It is a deep aching, a profound pain that cannot be removed with an antidote. It must be experienced fully, lived through, reflected on and, in so far as it is possible, given meaning in the context of one's own life, or the life of a community of people.

Sometimes, suffering actually helps to build community, as happened in the aftermath of 9/11, or that of the tsunami or hurricanes in recent years. People who were in the vicinity began to do what they could to help those affected. Even people who lived at great distance from these events were touched deeply by them, and responded in a variety of ways to help alleviate the tragedy and the suffering it brought.

At other times it is finding the courage just to "keep on keeping on" in the midst of the suffering. In her book *Sixtyfive Roses*,* Heather Summerhayes Cariou tells the story of her sister Pam, and her family as they lived through Pam's experience of cystic fibrosis. In the epilogue, she writes:

"Where was God in the matter?" my mother sometimes asks.

I tell her God was there in her tender, caring hands, and in my father's brave heart. God was there in my anger and in Pam's faith and in the way we kept trying to come through for each other.

Still, I've had to ask myself: do we forgive God for the pain visited on us? For the sick child, the flood,



the famine, the war? Does God have the power to stop these things, or does He simply have grace?

Pam always said there was no one to blame. She accepted His grace....

The grace I seek comes through forgiveness. The forgiveness I seek is my own....

I have not lost entirely the sense of danger, damage, and possible death that was ever present in my early years, but I have learned how to comfort myself, and to consciously choose faith over fear.... Like Pam, my parents and my brothers, I refuse to give up.

Yet what does it mean not to give up? We could have just lain down in exhaustion and pain after she died and said okay, that's enough. We could have allowed our grieving spirits to shrivel.... Yet in giving up we would be choosing a

Sometimes, suffering actually helps to build community, as happened in the aftermath of 9/11, or that of a tsunami or hurricanes in recent years.

* Heather Summerhayes Cariou. *Sixtyfive Roses*. Toronto: McArthur & Company, 2006. Pp 427-429.

minimal existence, and that is no way to honor all that we have loved and lost.

It is that kind of response which begins to bring hope into the suffering, even if it is impossible to find a satisfying answer to the questions the suffering raises for us. Hope is found in how we handle suffering. If we allow the suffering we are experiencing to defeat us, to batter us down into submission, we will not find hope. However, if we seek to overcome it, to grow through it, and to find God in it, there is hope in the midst of the suffering. We may not escape the suffering, but we can rise up to go through it, in the hope that someday it will come to an end and we will discover that we have endured to the end and come out the victor. It is only as we look back on the experience that we begin to see that God is indeed with us.

And the prophet Isaiah reminds us that "but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." *Isaiah 40:31*

Hope is ultimately given flesh in the incarnation. The death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the supreme sign that God is in the midst of our suffering, with us through it to the end. At the end is redemption. As Jesus taught, the harvest will come. In the meantime we toil through joy and tears in life, confident that God is indeed with us, even if we are not always able to realize it. May we have the courage to go with God to the end, and there find the hope that is God in the midst of our suffering.

The Rev. Fred Demaray



***Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said,
'Father, into your hands
I commend my spirit.'***

Luke 23:46



[The Lord said:] ‘Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.’ Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.

1 Kings 19:11-13



When God Dies

The only reality was suffering

On March 1, 2006, Day 96 of being held hostage in Iraq, I wrote nine words in the notebook my captors had given me: “no report due to illness – a day from hell.”

All the sweat-soaked night before, lying on a mat handcuffed to Norman Kember and Harmmeet Singh Sooden, I floundered helplessly in fevered waves of anguish. Held in the grip of a relentless nightmare, I felt my body being carved over and over into chunks, with each discrete piece of flesh and bone lined up in perfect anatomical sequence and tortured by a man holding electrodes in rubber-glove hands.

I asked my captors for aspirin and anti-biotics but there was nothing they could do. Everyone was under curfew, they said.

I wandered in a twilight world careening between despair and rage. God did not exist. God had died. There was no possibility of meaning or consolation. The only reality was suffering. At first I cursed the miserable circumstances of captivity. Then I imagined myself sliding into an abyss. I began to crave oblivion like a warm drug. If I wanted, if I let myself, I could just float away....

When after three days the curfew lifted, some Paracetamol was brought and my fever abated, God came back. In the days that followed, I began to reflect upon that period of absolute desolation. I



The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb. Oil on wood.
Hans Holbein the Younger, 1521

was astonished, for always I had felt, even as a very young child, some sense of God's presence in my life. In my breath, my heartbeat, the light and breeze around me, even if only in a vestige of a whisper of a trace, always, always I felt, I *knew* God was there. But not during those three days. Not when I needed God most.

I was confused. I used to think adherence to a spiritual practice – daily prayer, mindful living, loving service of others, facing myself honestly – would help alleviate my suffering when it came time for the *magnum curriculum* (great test). But none of that made any difference. It struck me that even Jesus, who of anyone did his spiritual homework, felt utterly forsaken by God in his last excruciating hours on the cross. Perhaps the dark night of abandonment is simply an inevitable season of the soul, something everybody has to go through at one time or another.

With my life stolen from me, I saw clearly that as a free man I had lived as a wastrel, squandering freedom with the blind habit of taking it for granted. I began to think the real purpose of spiritual discipline was to help us live ordinary time well, not extraordinary time; to crack us open to the miraculous wonders of washing dishes, making a cup of tea, opening the curtains when you get up in the morning. But then Norman objected. That's fine if your ordinary time is reasonably comfortable, he said, but for lots of people ordinary time is extraordinary hardship. So much for theories.

Finding meaning in suffering is perhaps the most difficult of all human tasks. How do you make sense of being locked up in a never-ending day (or week, or year) of hell, and the painkillers run out and God has died right when you need help the most? I don't know. I don't think I *can* make sense of it. The only thing I can say, beyond "no report," is that a window opened in me during those three days that God died: a window through which to see how much I need and love God, and how ineffably painful it is to be without him.

James Loney



"... a window opened in me ..."



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What spiritual lessons did James Loney take from his experience?
2. Have you ever felt abandoned by God?
3. What do you make of the three days during which "God died"? (Cf. Mark 8:31 Matthew 16:21 Luke 9:22)

It's possible I am pushing through solid rock
in flintlike layers, as the ore lies, alone;
I am such a long way in I see no way through,
and no space: everything is close to my face,
and everything close to my face is stone.
I don't have much knowledge yet in grief
so this massive darkness makes me small.
You be the master: make yourself fierce, break
in: then your great transforming will happen to
me, and my great grief cry will happen to you.

Rainer Maria Rilke



Theological Reflection 3

Suffering, Hope, and the Silence of God

Experience of the seeming absence or silence of God at certain times of one's life, even for long periods of time, forms a part of the spiritual life of many, if not most, Christians. Indeed, it is typical for those seeking God to pass through alternating periods of sensing a closeness of God's presence and love, and feeling abandoned and alone. This sense of abandonment can be brought about by an estrangement on our part from the path of righteousness, a weakening of commitment and faithfulness in our religious and spiritual practice, distractions from any number of sources. Or the feeling of abandonment can be a part of the spiritual life itself, a period of verification or confirmation of our spiritual resolve which enables us to progress further.

Jesus warned us of the risk of difficulties along the way to the Kingdom of Heaven in the parable of the Sower, one of the few parables that Jesus Himself

explains (Mt 13:1-23). While we all wish to be as the seed in the parable that falls on good ground and produces much fruit, this is not accomplished once and for all. At certain times of our lives we may indeed be growing like the grain in good soil, while at other times we may be withering away from doubt, concerns or engrossment with the cares and pleasures of this world. At these times God does indeed seem to "withdraw" from us and, like the prodigal son, we may suddenly realise what we have done and resolve to return to the house of the Father.

At other times, however, trials come to us from the outside: illness, accident, stress at work or in the family, unemployment, loss of dear ones or, as in James Loney's exceptional case, being kidnapped and at peril of one's life. There are many examples of seeming abandonment in the history of Christianity: one has only to think of the Christian martyrs not only of

the first centuries under Roman persecution, but even closer to us, the numerous Christian martyrs of the Communist and Nazi persecutions of the twentieth century. Did God abandon them? They were people of faith, good and peaceful – yet they endured countless tortures, punishments, deprivations and ultimately death. No, God did not abandon them, but He was with them in the midst of their suffering, fortifying them and enabling them to endure pain and suffering and ultimately death as witnesses of the Truth, who is Jesus Christ (cf. Jn 14:6). The word “martyr” comes from the Greek word for “witness”; we are all called upon to be “martyrs” for the Truth, some in ways more spectacular than others.

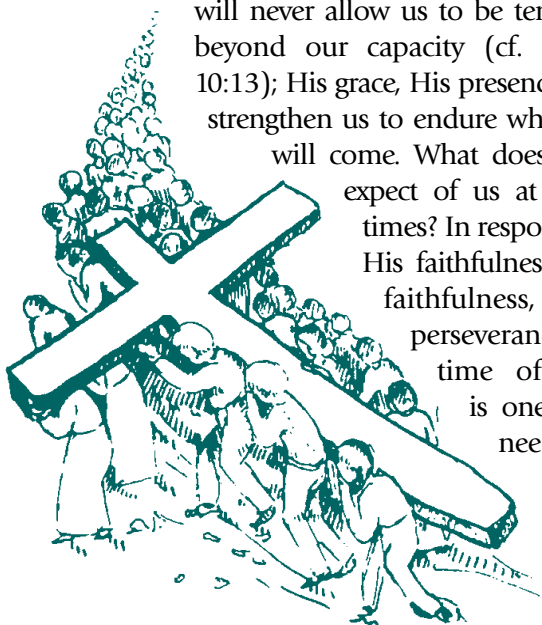
Keep your mind in hell and do not despair.¹

St. Silouan the Athonite

“But I am not a martyr, even if I am suffering”. It is the same situation: our trials along the way do not come from God, but God permits them to occur, like those of Job in the Old Testament, to enable us to strive more faithfully for His Kingdom. God

will never allow us to be tempted beyond our capacity (cf. 1 Co 10:13); His grace, His presence will strengthen us to endure whatever will come. What does God

expect of us at these times? In response to His faithfulness, our faithfulness, our perseverance: a time of trial is one of a need for



more intense prayer; the greater the tribulations, the more desperate the situation, the more fervent should be our prayer: “Thy will be done,” as we say so often in the Our Father and as Jesus prayed at the most desperate moment before His Passion (cf. Mt 26:39-44). This is a prayer not only of humble submission to God but also a prayer of confidence that God will answer our supplication and sustain us in time of trial: “The Lord has heard my supplication; the Lord will receive my prayer” (Ps 6:9); “Blessed be the Lord, because He has heard the voice of my supplications!” (Ps 28:6). Ultimately, such prayer in times of distress becomes a prayer of thanksgiving: “Rejoice in the Lord always,” says Saint Paul (Ph 4:4) – rejoice and be glad, for the Lord has chosen you to bear witness to Him in this time of difficulty.

Certainly it requires great faith and trust in the Lord to be thankful for all things, even in difficulties: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Ph 4:6-7). We cannot expect to reach such a level of spiritual maturity overnight, but must constantly strive towards this goal, inspired by the examples of the martyrs and saints: “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected, but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me... I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Ph 3:12-14).

God may seem to us to be silent for long periods in our lives, but He is always there, waiting for our constant commitment to Him. Silouan the Athonite, an important twentieth-century Orthodox saint, made

¹ Archimandrite Sophrony. *Saint Silouan the Athonite*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1999.



'I press toward the goal for the prize.'

rapid spiritual progress after his arrival at his monastery on Mount Athos, but a moment of pride caused him to lose the closeness of God's presence that he experienced. He felt that God had abandoned him and spent fourteen long years in repentance and prayer to recover what was lost. For long periods of her life, most of her life in fact, Mother Teresa of Calcutta felt abandoned by God, as the publication of her letters to her confessors has revealed. God's close presence that she had felt early in her ministry in India left her as she engaged more and more in the loving care of God's children, more abandoned than herself. Perhaps the sense of abandonment that she felt was a way to stimulate her to an ever-greater commitment to those abandoned by the world, but never by God, who is faithful: "God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Co 1:9).

"Lord, my God, who am I that you should forsake me? ... I call, I cling, I want – and there is no one to answer ... alone. Unwanted, forsaken. The loneliness of the heart that wants love is unbearable. Where is my faith? Even deep down, right in, there is nothing but emptiness and darkness. My God – how painful is this unknown pain."¹

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

James Loney's comments on his desperate situation contain a number of profound reflections. One of these pertains to "ordinary life". Most of our lives are "ordinary time" and the challenge that we have is precisely to realize that God is asking us to find Him and to serve Him in washing the dishes, making a cup of tea, and opening the curtains, just as we may find Him in taking part in church services and engaging in explicit prayer, reading Scripture or spiritual writings.

Indirectly, James Loney refers to Jesus' words on the Cross, citing the opening verse of Psalm 22: "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (Ps 22:1). We hear in these words despair and abandonment by

¹ Mother Teresa, *Come be my Light The Private Writings of the 'Saint of Calcutta,'* edited by Brian Kolodiecuk. New York: Doubleday, 2007, p. 187.



When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother.' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

John 19:26-27

God. But these words evoke their context, the whole of Psalm 22, whose theme is not despair in the face of suffering, but rather hope and confidence in the Lord. Indeed, the Psalmist proceeds through all the outward signs of suffering and abandonment, to maintain faithfulness in prayer and trust in God, and finally to express praise and thanksgiving: "I will declare your name to my

brethren; in the midst of the Assembly I will praise You" (Ps 22:22); "He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden his face from him; but when he cried to Him, He heard" (Ps 22:24); "My praise shall be of You in the great assembly" (Ps 22:25).

Dr. Paul Ladouceur
Scriptural Quotations: New King James Bible



'Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend'

Justus quidem tu es, Domine, si disputem tecum: verumtamen justa loquar ad te: Quare via impiorum prosperatur? &c. (Jer. 12:1)

Thou art indeed just, Lord, if I contend
With thee; but, sir, so what I plead is just.
Why do sinners' ways prosper? and why must
Disappointment all I endeavour end?
Wert thou my enemy, O thou my friend,
How wouldst thou worse, I wonder, than thou dost
Defeat, thwart me? Oh, the sots and thralls of lust
Do in spare hours more thrive than I that spend,
Sir, life upon thy cause. See, banks and brakes
Now leavèd how thick! lacèd they are again
With fretty chervil, look, and fresh wind shakes
Them; birds build—but not I build; no, but strain,
Time's eunuch, and not breed one work that wakes.
Mine, O thou lord of life, send my roots rain.



Gerard Manley Hopkins



O ke che manido

*The beating left a large lump on the back of my neck,
at the top of my spine which has never gone away.*

My number at Residential School was 56 and I was known by that number for many years. I was not considered to be a human being, just a number.

Incident one:

Forced to eat own vomit (humiliation and helplessness)

Shortly after I arrived at St. Anne's, I was in the dining room. We were having a meal, but I don't remember what we were eating. I got sick and threw up on the floor. The female supervisor slapped me many times before she made eat my vomit. So I did, I ate all of it. And then I threw up again, for the second time. The female supervisor slapped me and told me again to eat up my vomit. I ate it, half of it, and then I was told to go to the dorm. I felt humiliated, being slapped around in front of my friends and being treated worse than a dog, except you wouldn't even treat a dog like that. I was sick for a few days after that. I managed to eat a little here and there because I was afraid it might happen again, so I used to watch how I ate my food. (This incident today reminds me of Isaiah 50.)

Incident two:

Neck permanently injured when beaten with a shoe

When I was 12 years old, I was in the dining room. I was sitting across the table from my friend, and he was kicking me under the table to tease me. I caught his leg and I pulled off his shoe. Sister Mary



Immaculate caught me. She took the shoe, which was a heavy shoe (not like the running shoes of today that kids wear), and she hit me on my head with the heavy shoe. She hit me about 50 times. I passed out for a while. I was not allowed to report the incident, and I was not allowed to go to the clinic. The beating left a large lump on the back of my neck, at the top of my spine (which has never gone away). For many, many days I had a hard time walking or playing because it hurt. I had a regular, severe nose bleed that kept coming back for months. (Was this person working for the church and Jesus?)

The Tree of Life
Blake Debassige
1982

Hope

I revisited my Traditional Spiritual Teachings of my Elders especially the prayer on Wisdom my father used, which I like to share.

O ke che manido, give me wisdom....

Help me to understand that life on earth is part of your gift, inspiring to our patterns of life, with man the chief steward. Teach me to appreciate the delicate relationship of all things on earth. The majestic flight of Canada geese. The spring time promise of the wonderful smell of flowers in bloom. The crystal purity of a dew drop and all that it contains. *O ke che manido*, teach me the proper respect of my place. Guide me in doing my part to help solve the many problems that beset us. Let me be dedicated to this task, as a bee gathering pollen. *O ke che manido*, show me how to utilize the inspiration from the daily miracles that I witness on my walk in your created earth. Help me to remember that nature's songs and laughter are more in tune with life than any wail or frown. Make me realize that in nature there is both tranquility and power; knowing that makes harmony reside also in me. *O ke che manido*, make me humble; please give me humility to see how crude the most spectacular man-made things are compared with a baby rabbit, the wondrous perfection of a snowflake, or the grandeur of your sculptured tamarack trees in the muskeg. Give me wisdom and knowledge to know that if our environment fails because of our over exploitations, I too am doomed. *O ke che manido*, open our eyes.

Help us to understand that we are indeed all God's creatures. That we are all brothers and sisters after all. So be it.

Hoping this is helpful in the reflections of suffering and hope. The above prayer was translated from Omushkago Cree of James Bay.

Andrew Wesley



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How do the traditional spiritual teachings illuminate the essence of hope for Andrew, when he experienced great suffering through the actions of Christians? Does this spirituality touch the heart of Christian hope?
2. How does Isaiah 50:6-9 speak to this experience of suffering? Consider also Matthew 27:27-31.
3. How do we as Christians respond when our brothers and sisters – or we ourselves – in the name of Christ perpetrate suffering?



*“Father, forgive them, for
they do not know what they are doing.”*

Luke 23:34

from
“The Fish”

I caught a tremendous fish
and held him beside the boat
half out of water, with my hook
fast in a corner of his mouth.
He didn't fight.
He hadn't fought at all.
He hung a grunting weight,
battered and venerable
and homely. ...
I stared and stared
and victory filled up
the little rented boat,
from the pool of bilge
where oil had spread a rainbow
around the rusted engine
to the bailer rusted orange,
the sun-cracked thwarts,
the oarlocks on their strings,
the gunnels—until everything
was rainbow, rainbow, rainbow!
And I let the fish go.

Elizabeth Bishop





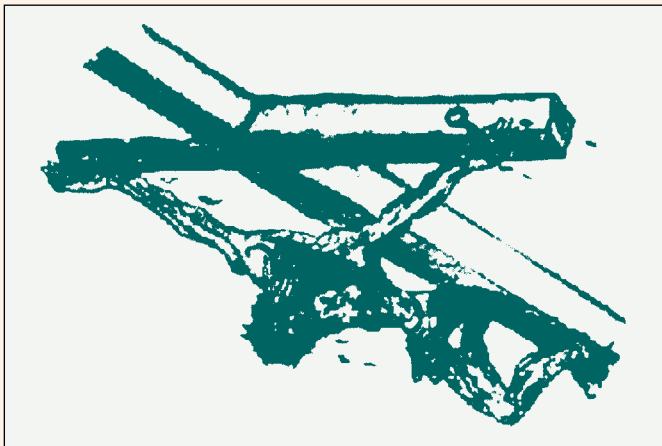
Hospital Chaplaincy: Facing Death, An Experience of Fear and Trembling

Death had many places to haunt.

Death is something I have never felt comfortable with. As a child I didn't like attending funerals, not even for someone as close as my great grandmother. I used to have bad dreams about death and I continued to avoid going to funeral parlours, even as an adult. So why did I accept a position as chaplain to the Regional Trauma Unit at the Hamilton General Hospital? – A place where death is almost daily!

The first few weeks at the hospital I didn't spend much time in the trauma suite (part of the larger Emergency Department – the "ER"), as there were other responsibilities that kept me busy. When I did have time, I would go down to the ER and lean against the wall in the trauma unit's reception area. I hoped no one would notice me or request anything from me since my anxiety was discomfort enough. During the third week there, the charge nurse quipped in passing: "Are you still holding up that wall?" This shocked me into action. I was embarrassed to be noticed doing nothing, so it was time for me to get to work. From then on, I made daily rounds in the ER, introducing myself and visiting each patient. Initially, no one died, but it did not take long for that to change. Several weeks thereafter, on average, there were two deaths every other day.

I also did on-call duty at the Henderson and McMaster sites, covering anything that might happen in the hospital for a twenty-four hour period. The McMaster location was especially difficult because it has an ER with a pediatric trauma unit, Labour and Delivery, Maternity, Neo-Natal ICU wards and an abortion clinic. Death had many places to haunt. While trauma units can be dramatic, nothing is more disturbing than dealing with death in the initial period of life. Mothers frequently requested "baptisms" for their dead infants, premature babies and aborted fetuses. Once I started to attend to dead babies and their families, my hair started to turn white.



The unrelieved hours of on-call responsibilities were challenging to say the least.

In the spring of 2002, I had a quiet day and evening shift, "peace of the pager" we called it. At 10:00 p.m., the peace was gone. The various requests kept me busy for the rest of the night and into the morning. In the course of my final twelve-hour shift, I attended to seven deaths. One patient succumbed to his traumatic injuries, a cancer patient surrendered to the disease, a mother wanted me to attend to her and her aborted fetus and a set of twins died unexpectedly.



Two ICU patients also died, one of whom I had a long-term relationship with.

A new patient had been admitted to ICU during the night. Surrounded by his family, I accompanied them in singing beloved hymns as his life support was withdrawn. Two young children were in attendance. An ICU nurse took me aside and expressed concern about the appropriateness of such young children being present. I was mindful of my own early experiences with death, but felt it was the parents' decision to determine whether they should be present or not and currently the parents felt it was important that the children be present at this important life event. It

was an unusually slow death and after being up all night attending to patients, family and staff, I was emotionally spent. I returned to the office for a break just as my colleagues started to arrive. When I was asked how the shift had gone, I broke down and cried - I was exhausted. My colleague seeing that I was drained volunteered to take over. I took her to the ICU, introduced her to the dying patient's family and then I withdrew. It was time to go home and sleep.

That shift was the worst I have ever experienced and one I will never forget.

Andrew Allan



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What signs of spiritual growth do you see in Andrew's experience?
2. In Andrew's daily experience of death, what does it mean to say Christ has overcome death (cf. 1 Cor 15:25-26)?
3. What difference does human relationship make in helping Andrew cope with his fears?

Out of the blackened shards pulls a hapless man
Withered and distended an icon from nobility torn
Pocked and pimped with night and day
where is your master,
a wordsmith for hire, a Sophist nears life's final hour
where will you take me
part the darkness, some die in life
appendages of machine,
pounding in, pounding out
a civilized cruelty, little is known
part the darkness, some die in life.
Little was known.

Tim Span





Theological Reflection 4

Suffering and Being Human

“Quit your whining!” Those were some of the words that passed through my mind as I listened to Alan tell his life story in a visiting room of the jail. How many times did I have to listen to his complaints without resorting to clearing my throat or glancing anxiously at my watch. At what point could I feel justified in resorting to direct closure? “Time’s up! I’ve got to go”.

I was beginning to wonder if any good could come out of these repeated visits. After all, they were becoming a dance of two complainers – his vocally expressed and mine inwardly repressed. Still, there was no doubt in my mind that his suffering was more urgent than my own. Yet there was a symbiotic relationship between what we were each experiencing, and this became evident one day when Alan broke through the impasse for us both.

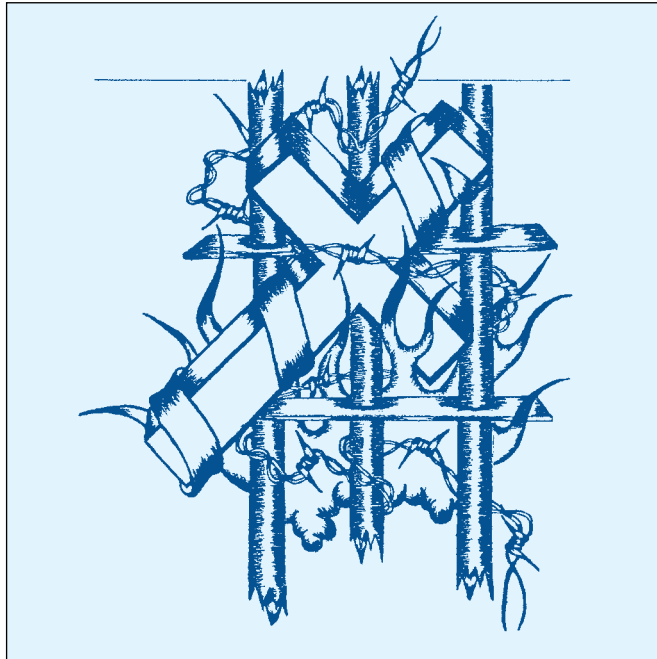
His story began with a memory of childhood. He was walking along the street around the time of his tenth birthday when he was suddenly overwhelmed by a feeling of depression beyond his comprehension. He hadn’t been punished for misbehaviour. He hadn’t eaten anything that disagreed with him. No one that he could remember had told him he was bad. And yet, there it was and nothing he could do would make it go away.

He knew that his experience as a child had something to do with his present condition of “clinical” depression, linked to drug addiction and repeated incarceration for petty crimes. But that

is all he could account for in his need to be heard, a need so intense that he came close to pulling visitors and caregivers alike into sharing his distress. But one day, pausing to check that I was still listening, he said with a sudden stab of insight, “I do have moments of grace, you know”.

Depression may be one of the most common ailments of our time, ranging from a mild condition that everyone seems to experience now and then to the more serious pathology that Alan was afflicted with. William Styron, in his book *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* (N.Y.: Vintage Books, 1992), writes, “Depression is a disorder of mood, so mysteriously painful and elusive in the way it becomes known to the self – to the mediating intellect – as to verge close to being beyond description. It is nearly incomprehensible to those who have not experienced it in the more severe forms, although the gloom, ‘the blues’ which people go through occasionally and associate with the general hassle of everyday existence, are of such prevalence that they do give many individuals a hint of the illness in its catastrophic form”.

Styron, whose account of his own struggle against clinical depression includes insights into the psychology of self-healing, relates that people in deep depression often experience a sense of being accompanied by a second self – one that, while not sharing in the dementia, watches with dispassionate curiosity as his companion struggles to overcome the darkness. The sense of accompaniment, in an unobtrusive and



*Drawing by
Stephen Metcalf, Toronto.*

sinfulness – with a sense of personal guilt blocking the road to redemption and healing. In the Judeo-Christian context, it is not possible to speak of “God” apart from suffering. Yet in the Christian story, while some might argue it is a stage of atonement, suffering is neither an end in itself nor a means to an end. I would suggest it is simply part of the paradox of being human. As we mature, we may learn to articulate our protests in terms of the wholeness, happiness, true justice and compassion that we lack. This instinctive protest against separation from God, the Divine Parent, or the Whole, may then develop into a sense of moral responsibility to speak out against injustice for others who suffer as we do.

certainly non-judgmental way, has the effect of enabling the sufferer to seek help, to leave behind the distractions and move into what he calls “an orderly and benign detention (*in his case, a hospital*) where one’s only duty is to try to get well.” For Styron, the real healers were seclusion and time.

Those who tell us to suffer passively, to “pull up our socks” and accept our lot in life, whether it be the result of ancestral sin or a bad attitude toward authority, deny our primal innocence and our right to a hearing. To complain – even if we resort to whining on occasion – is to assert our spiritual birthright in simply being human. Psalm 13, one example among many relevant biblical texts, does not deny the appropriateness of protest and complaint. It begins with the words:

Alan’s story, that of a child weighed down by forces that were completely outside of his experience and understanding, is all the more remarkable. “Moments of grace,” as he described his flashes of insight, were moments when he could step outside of himself and at least describe the experience he was having, if not overcome it. These moments hinted at the possibility that depression was not the whole story. As darkness can only be adequately described as the absence or deprivation of light, so the experience of overwhelming depression may also harbour an opening for light to shine through and reveal it for what it is.

How long, Lord, will you leave me
forgotten,
how long hide your face from me?
How long must I suffer anguish in
my soul,
Grief in my heart day after day?

When God is brought into the story in many traditional religious teachings, it is often with negative results. Depression is then interpreted as a sign of unredeemed

There is no doubt that the psalmist has reached the point of total despair. And yet, as a sleeper often awakens while dreaming of his or her own death, the voice of the inner self cries out:

Look now, Lord my God, and
answer me.

Give light to my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death.

The outcry of suffering is transformed from self-pity into an expression of faith – often beyond all our hopes and expectations. Where do such words as these come from?

As for me, I trust in your unfailing love;

My heart will rejoice when I am brought to safety.

The Christian story of an omnipotent Creator who actually chooses to suffer with humanity is itself a “moment of grace” in the eternity of Creation. From the perspective of being human, the separation of light from darkness is not only the work of millennia. It is the story of how we may, and often do, find relief from our daily struggles through awakening to the inward Light, discovering that we are not alone – God is with us through it all. The crucifixion story is intensely human, as in the unabashed cry of Jesus from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). As in the all-too-familiar stories of human experience, there is no immediate sign of intervention from God. Yet, reflecting back in the Gospel story to Jesus’ prayer of submission in the garden, we discover that the precondition for God’s intervention in suffering has already been disclosed: “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to pass me by without my drinking it, your will be done” (Matthew 26: 42).

Where do we go when we suffer? It has become almost commonplace for individuals in the healthier and wealthier Western world to turn to professional problem-solvers like therapists and litigation lawyers. We cling to the belief that

every problem has a solution. Yet the work of professionals tends to focus on relieving or suppressing the symptoms of suffering. None have yet come up with a definitive antidote to suffering *per se*, and their attempts to do so in the face of pandemics like HIV/AIDS, natural disasters like tsunamis, or the civilian casualties of modern warfare tend to be shallow and unconvincing.

Similarly, the prevalence of depression in relatively safe societies suggests that all the resources available to remove or alleviate the symptoms have failed to deliver what they promise. Few professional caregivers, unless they are especially gifted religious and spiritual people as well as competent clinicians, are equipped to guide those who suffer to the most effective resource for healing – acceptance of our own imperfect human condition. To be human is not only to suffer (a fact that is not denied), but to love and to be loved through our suffering.

The separation of light from darkness is not only the work of millennia. It is the story of how we may, and often do, find relief from our daily struggles through awakening to the inward Light, discovering that we are not alone – God is with us through it all.



Alan, misdiagnosed at an early age and punished for his abnormal and anti-social behaviour, was treated with anti-depressants. This led to drug addiction and repeated incarceration. He understood that much about the causes of his condition, and complained bitterly about the injustice of it all. Yet, when I shared the words of the early Quaker, George Fox, written from the depths of his depression in a sixteenth century jail, Alan responded with a knowing smile.

Stand still in that which is pure, after ye see yourselves; and then mercy comes in. After thou seest thy thoughts, and the temptations, do not think, but submit; and then power comes. Stand still in that which shows and discovers; and then doth strength immediately come.

These words affirmed something he already knew in his heart, and expressed more simply in the words, "I have moments of grace."

Keith R. Maddock

"I do have moments of grace, you know".



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. How do you feel in the face of another person's suffering?
2. How might our understanding of the nature of depression help spiritual and religious caregivers like Andrew in Story #6 realize their vocations?
3. Read Psalm 31 in light of the quotation from George Fox. Can you see a glimmer of hope appearing through submission to God's grace?



Life and Death of a Child

For me, this was, and is, a sign of hope rising out of suffering.

I first met Robert when he was only a few days old. I was a newly arrived pastor, and he was the second son born to a couple in the congregation. I met both his mother and Robert at the same time, in the hospital, on a pastoral visit. Robert was a very quiet child. His smile, which was almost always present, was beneficent. He seemed to accept everyone with equal signs of love and friendliness. Everyone who lived in his circle felt his warmth. His mother and father were proud of him and amazed at his calm nature in all situations.

As time progressed, however, concerns led to tests which eventually showed that Robert had an incurable brain tumour which possibly had begun before his birth. Although it was thought that he must be suffering from the pressure in his head, he rarely seemed to complain by fussing or crying. He continued to watch his world with beneficence and peace, and his warm smile. Finally, on Valentine's Day, about two and a half years after he was born, Robert slipped into death very quietly and peacefully in the loving arms of his mother, father and grandparents. I was privileged to be with them at that moment, and it was a moment of peace and sadness all wrapped together in this little one we had grown to love so much.

His family went through their grief, each in their own way. Robert's mother is a scientist, and could look at all of this with a clinical eye, which masked her sorrow in some ways. His father was full of questions and deep sadness.

On Easter Sunday of the year that Robert died, his mother presented me with a beautiful stole. A cross-stitched rainbow of colour opened into a rainbow coloured butterfly on one side panel, with a white on white butterfly and alpha and omega symbols on the other panel. As she gave it to me, she indicated that every stitch represented another tear as she worked out her grief.



For me, this was, and is, a sign of hope rising out of suffering. Every time I wear this stole in worship, I am reminded of the Easter hope that marks our faith, that life is not bounded totally by our experiences, but behind all of life is God, who sustains and upholds and suffers with us. Every time I wear this stole, I am also reminded of a loving boy, who in his brief life offered his world more love and acceptance than often is given in much longer lives, a boy who brought peace into the world of all who knew him. I thank God for the gift he gave to me of knowing Robert for two brief, but very rich, years.

The Rev. Fred Demaray

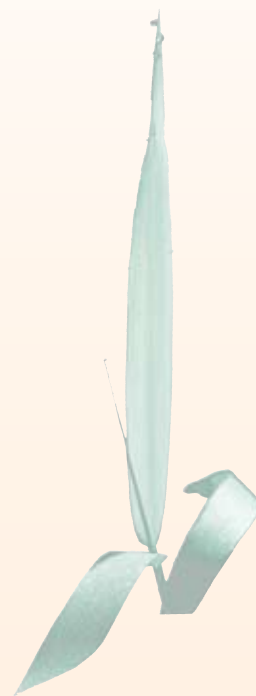


QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. What is it that the parents are suffering in this story?
2. Why is the death of a child different from the death of an adult?
3. How would you describe the meaning of Robert's brief life? How does the symbolism of the stole speak to this?

I cry to you and you do not answer me;
stand, and you merely look at me.
You have turned cruel to me;
with the might of your hand you persecute me.
You lift me up on the wind, you make me ride on it,
and you toss me about in the roar of the storm.
I know that you will bring me to death,
and to the house appointed for all living.
Surely one does not turn against the needy,
when in disaster they cry for help.
Did I not weep for those whose day was hard?
Was not my soul grieved for the poor?
But when I looked for good, evil came;
and when I waited for light, darkness came.
My inward parts are in turmoil, and are never still;
days of affliction come to meet me.

Job 30:20-27



what gives with this world?

Gift granted
then wrenched, torn away
ripping & shredding hearts all the while
wondering what it's for
to experience?
to feel?
to know one is alive?
only to have life snuffed out
with unspeakable suffering
resting uneasily
in the cradle of risky, raw, hesitant
expressions of human love & care
raging relentlessly against the safe,
easy, confident
religious platitudes that serve only
to distance the speaker
from the pain
from the dissonant reality
that challenges their secure existence
in their happy god-s un-world
stuff them
stuff their image of a god who
'plans' such an obscenity
as the slow & tortuous death
of one who so loved life
one so gifted & giving

one who extended, stretched,
pushed, pulled,
bursting through limits
imposed outside
unknown in spirit
Madeleine is gone
the world is forever changed
forever diminished
i am not the daddy i was
i am not the partner i was
i am not the parson i was
i am not the person i was
waiting to see what will come
of this
of us
of me
desperate days
dangerous nights
what gives with
this world?

*bob paterson-watt,
Baptist minister,
Toronto, Ontario
May 5, 2004*



*Madeleine Paterson-Watt,
daughter of MJ and bob,
April 14, 1989 – April 28, 2004;
pictured, "the blue rose".*



Theological Reflection 5

The Christian Narrative of Suffering and Hope

No matter how certain we are that death is transcended by life, death is tragic. "Jesus wept" at the death of his friend Lazarus (John 11), whom he was about to call back to life. Uniquely poignant is the death of a child. There is a "wrongness" in it. Parents should not bury their children. We barely began to know them, and they were taken from us. They had no chance to discover who they would become. Why uproot the gift of life so soon after it is planted? Why give, only to take away? Why allow us to bestow our hearts, and then tear them out?

*Drawing by
St. Maria
of Paris of her
young daughter,
Anastasia, dying
in hospital.*

At two years of age, a child has just learned to walk and talk. We've seen all his little teeth come in, and we know the expressions of his eyes and the curl of his hair. We have delighted in his little pet phrases and mispronunciations. His personality is shining forth. So much has happened by this

time, and so much is yet to happen. What happened for Robert and his parents? Far different than they would have chosen for themselves, perhaps. Robert's brief life was always shadowed by death, since his brain tumour began while he was yet in the womb. Yet, as we hear the story, his life is marked far more by beauty and love. It begins and ends, not with regret, but with thanksgiving. Though certainly about death, it is infused with life, and points not to a hopeless ending but to an astonishing opening-up, dare we say, a birth.

The story of humanity begins and ends in joy. As Christians, we know our beginning and we know our end, for God has told us both: created out of love, for love, to dwell forever with God and one another in happiness. This is no opiate, no wish-fulfillment, no illusion spun to keep people from progressing, but the real Truth of our own being. If we forget this truth, we forget how and why to live. If we allow ourselves, we can taste it daily; our Christian way of life helps us remember and savour the taste, so that it might grow and flourish in our lives.

Yet we also know the middle of the story, the part in which we dwell now, and this part is riddled, crisscrossed, dappled with pain, sorrow, tragedy, anguish and violence. It is not only pointless but harmful to forget or ignore this truth. Sometimes we make the mistake of focusing so much on the joy that we fail to understand those who suffer; sometimes we make the opposite



mistake, becoming so wrapped up in present pain that we forget to taste and nourish joy and happiness in people's lives. Let us not forget the "deep sadness" of Robert's father and the grief of his mother, which surely carved out a place in their hearts; rather, let us feel how they are stitched into the butterfly and rainbow of the Easter stole, which filled that new place in their hearts with colour and life.

For Christians, it is clear that joy, love and goodness are the fundamental realities. Suffering and pain, though dominant and even seemingly all-powerful on earth, are not eternal but passing realities. We come from God and are journeying towards union with God, and this is the true meaning of "hope" for us. In times of great pain and tribulation, it may be extremely difficult to recall or experience this hope; that is why one of the best ways we can help each other is to remind each other that our hope is real and fundamental, even when it seems far-away and imaginary.

Yet we must never forget or diminish the great tapestry of sorrow and pain ever swelling around and through us. For Christ, in his time among us on earth and afterwards in his risen glory, points us to *the sufferer* as our locus of service and redemption. Through his taking-on of humanity and all it entails – including pain, sorrow and suffering – Christ showed us that only by entering into suffering, not alone but for and with one another, can we enter into eternal life. Through his own trial, temptation, anguish and agony up to and on the cross – an agony which we, his disciples, can and must contemplate, especially as we find it mirrored in our own lives – he blazes a path for us to follow. That path



inevitably leads through suffering; but equally inevitably, it leads beyond suffering, or rather it transforms suffering so that all pain is taken up and woven into the new joy towards which Christ bears us. For Christians, incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection are inseparable elements of one reality; but resurrection is the last and ultimate word.

Anastasis. The Resurrection. Chora Church, Istanbul, Turkey.

It was upon an Easter garment that Robert's mother painted images of his life and death. There is no underestimating the crucifixion this family underwent. But the Easter stole tears back the veil of death and gives us a glimpse from the resurrection side.

Because our Saviour invites, requires, that his followers walk the path of suffering out of love, we have sometimes been tempted to think that perhaps Christ even wants us to suffer, or that God considers suffering a good thing. It is not! Suffering is born of evil, and evil is all that opposes God. We experience it as an evil, and we understand it as an evil, to be overcome, not to be tolerated and not to be worshipped. Who would tell this grieving mother, this stricken father, that Robert's death is "good," that the

pain he and they bore comes from God? When Christians allow suffering to flourish unchecked, uncomforted, unwept, unredeemed, then we are betraying our mission. When Christians, in our sinfulness, inflict suffering on one another or on others, then we are turning our backs on the very Christ we proclaim. When we fail in such ways, there is forgiveness and the ceaseless call to return to our mission of sowing hope and working for healing and transformation, rather than ignoring or encouraging suffering and pain. When we take up this task, we understand ourselves to have the privilege of working with Christ towards the already-accomplished redemption of the world, which God alone has wrought.

When we reach the fullness of joy and beauty, then we will see that suffering has been stitched into that tapestry and is part of its beauty. We see this already in the Easter moment when Mary Magdalene, with tears still in her eyes, turns from the emptiness and death of the tomb to the very face of Christ. Robert's mother represented her

tears with stitches on an Easter stole; she understood it is only through tears that we can witness the resurrection.

We see it in the joy of the disciples walking to Emmaus, born out of the despair in which they had been travelling through Jesus' death before they saw the risen Christ had come to walk with them. Fred, the pastor who accompanied Robert and his family through life into death, saw the risen Christ travelling with them.

And we experience it in our own living when we allow Christ to be present in our affliction, and discover that what seemed unbearable, unending pain can give birth to true love and joy. Robert's parents gave birth unto death, but far more, they accompanied Robert to death unto life.

Mary Marrocco



When Jesus had received the wine, he said:

“It is finished.”

Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:30



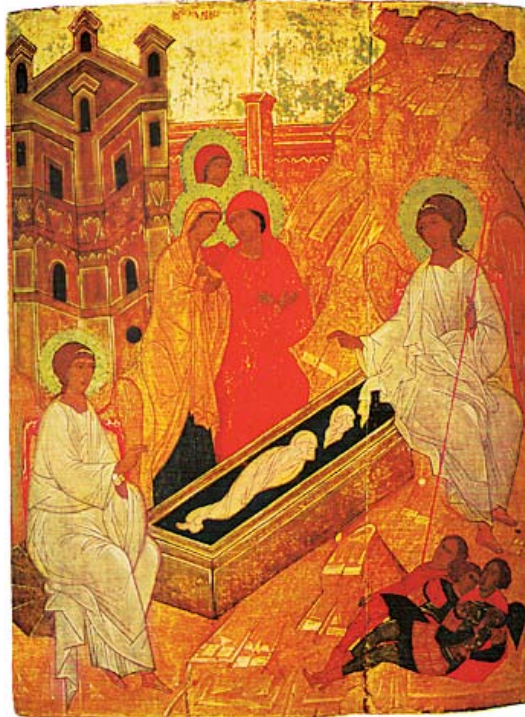
Concluding Theological Reflection

Hope as the Great Christian Virtue

“One of the most consoling figures in human history must surely be the good thief.” By opening his meditation on Christ with these words, Gerald Vann is deliberately pointing to an essential – an inescapable – paradox. The thief is fortunate because he has been promised the gift of Paradise, but, at the very moment of encountering this undeserved gift (Luke 23:41-43) his present reality is terrible, a protracted time of agonizing suffering with certain ignominious death as its only possible outcome. How, then, is he “fortunate”?

At the heart of this question is the very dilemma which opened this book. Suffering is all around us, an inescapable daily evidence of what medieval writers often called “the misery of the human condition.” We bear the burden of our own personal pains, and from them springs our capacity for empathy, for recognizing the suffering of others. Many of the story-tellers in this book asked – even in the darkness of grief and pain, still needing to pose the question to an “absent” God – “Why me?” but even more, many of the stories went on to ask “Why anyone?”

Yet the opening of our book revealed another, astonishing fact; in all the diversity of our numerous Christian traditions and understandings, one common denominator shone through: *hope* was the response to the cry of the heart for something to trust, something to validate the worth of the image of God in humankind (Genesis 1:26). All the Christians who contributed to this book



Icon of the Myrrh-Bearing Women at the Tomb of the Risen Christ (Novgorod, Russia, 15th century).

– especially the writers of the meditations – looked to *hope* to grant clarity to our minds clouded with a pain so distorting that it deceived us into accepting that the suffering itself might be the only answer to the question “What are human beings, that you are mindful of them?” (Psalm 8:4, but see how it is applied to Jesus in Hebrews 2:6).

But like the good thief himself, this proposition is a paradox. The suffering is present, immediate, experienced – it is “real”; hope is evanescent, a possibility, a “perhaps,” an intangible: “Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen?” (Romans 8:24, a passage recurrent throughout this book). And to be sure, the ordinary sense of the word “hope” – expecting some future occurrence, which is the

routine, “cross-your-fingers” meaning of the word almost always both in the Old Testament and in daily life – makes hope “chancy,” a possibility but not a certainty; how can this be an adequate, or even a useful response to a suffering that is self-evident, a “sure thing?” Even more, how then can Christians hold up hope as the greatest virtue, the true Christian response in the face of suffering? How dare Christians seek to palliate poor folk mired in concrete suffering with a vague and ill-defined concept like “hope” when what the “victim” wants is an immediate cure?

But as Yeats revealed so powerfully in the poem quoted at the opening of this book, a world of immediate cures is a world of “mere anarchy,” a world without a “centre”; and pat answers will not do in a world which has seen so much suffering that “the ceremony of innocence is drowned” and “the worst are full of passionate intensity.” Any one who has experienced suffering – and which of us has not? – knows that this is what the world is really like. Every one of the story-tellers in this book has been awakened from “stony sleep” by the “blood-dimmed tide” of suffering, and yet, almost paradoxically, every one has recognized the grain of hope – the “rocking cradle” of the birth in Bethlehem – that rests at the core of their awakening. Suffering has made us wise: the newborn of Bethlehem is now revealed to be, not a sweet innocent cherub, but a “rough beast” who bears in his very

person all of the wounds and scars and marks of the world of our suffering. Can we possibly recognize in this “slouching” monstrosity – a babe moving toward birth who will, we already know, be pierced by nails and spears and hung shamefully on a cross – the source, the birth, of constant hope for us?

The seeming unresolvability of the tension between suffering and hope is so strong that a common – though actually hopeless – solution is to emphasize the “futuraity” of hope as the solution to present suffering; as an analgesic “quick-fix” we are tempted to say: “you may be suffering now, but that is temporary, and you can console yourself with the hope of a *future* peace (when God brings this suffering to an end).” It is tempting to read even Scripture as holding this “futurist” view literally: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us The creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God... we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:18-23). If such a “not now; just wait” view were all that God has promised, then “hope” would function only as glimpsing, against all the facts of present pain and despair, of the future solace. With such an outlook, the only immediate, present Christian virtue in the face of suffering would be “love”: “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Indeed, many of the stories in this book reveal the tremendous power of

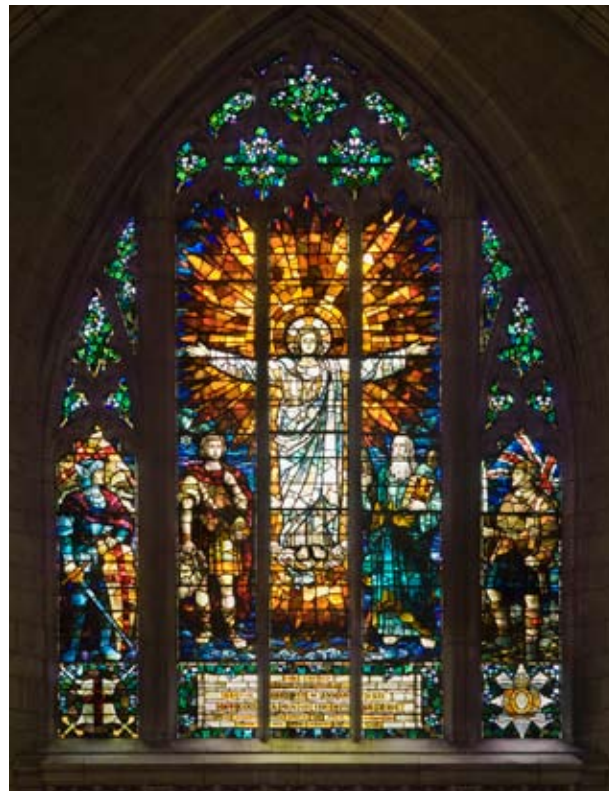
*No matter
what comes,
God is in it
with us.*



love – love in the face of insuperable odds – as a response to suffering; “the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted” (Isaiah 61:1). Several of the stories suggest that in the face of the death of a beloved child (Story 8), of death, expected or unexpected, from trauma or sickness (Story 7), of other temptations to a feeling of powerless helplessness, and hopelessness (Stories 2 and 3), nurturing love is all we can offer – and in fact, that is actually true. The care of consolation is rooted in our very being, our human nature, so deeply that only truly positive evil can oppose it. Love is certainly *the* universal *human* virtue. But this is exactly why love, while being a vital and necessary practical response to suffering, is not an *answer* to the question posed at the outset in this book, our asking for meaning in the suffering. For the Christian, that answer can only be found in hope – hope that God is with us, now. The “labour of love” is made possible by the “steadfastness of hope” (1 Thessalonians 1:3).

How can this be so? And what could possibly generate a lovable hope, one that could stand in the face of such insuperable suffering as that told about in story after story in this book?

Hope of this loving kind – not “chancy” hope that good things might come, but a trust in God so real that no matter what comes, God is in it with us – is a consequence of faith. Many discussions throughout this book have cited Romans 5:3-5: “We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been



poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.” Hope is the *present* – *not* the future – virtue of recognizing the experiential identity of ourselves with Christ; as this book has said frequently, God is *in* the suffering: (Mark 8:34-5) “He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, ‘If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.’” (// Matt 10:38, 16:24-5, Luke 9:23-24 with the addition of v. 25: “What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?”) If we trust our faith in Christ for our salvation – and as the stories and reflections show, also for our solutions – then living with the suffering is an intrinsic part of hope (see Story 1, by Bishop George) because it is an intrinsic dimension of Christ-as-human; “We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles...but to those who are called...



Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:23-25). Where this leads, hard as it seems to accept, is that at the same time, our suffering is an intrinsic part of His story: "Upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5).

From Christ's fundamental teaching that we are the ones who must carry His cross (cf. Matt 20:22-23) – the same Cross in our lives that He, the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14:6), carried – comes faith which recognizes salvation in the Crucified One, and from that faith comes acceptance of our call to put on Christ's resurrection by putting on his death. Although we did hear this even in our baptism – "Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6:3) – a "real-life" encounter with suffering unto death brings us face to face with the stark reality, which is much more than a simple metaphor or symbol. The Way and the Truth of Life are to suffer with Christ, to die and rise with Christ, in order to be in Christ.

A hopeful prospect? Perhaps, but it does appear at first to carry a tinge of gloom, a life-expectancy of unmitigated struggle with suffering. Faced with such a prospect, the simple-minded notion that, given enough science and social benefits, we can find fixes and cures that will end all the suffering almost looks more attractive than basic trust in God.

And yet we are told that the life in Christ for which a Christian hopes – the life of faith in which our suffering becomes meaningful and not pointless – has as its great fruit *joy* (1 Thessalonians 2:19, Galatians 5:22, and many other passages; see especially Hebrews 12:2, discussed in Reflection 1). Finding joy, the peace of acceptance of God's gifts, in the midst of suffering? How is it possible?

And yet, as we re-read every testimony in this book – all the stories, the reflections, the poems, the images – it is exactly this discovery which shines through in every case. In even the worst of circumstances, every one of these stories speaks of discovery, of "conversion" which tells us that our suffering is not the sole meaning which the world offers, but that in it we can recognize the mind of God (Romans 12:2) who "in all things...work[s] for good with those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28). Let us look one more time at how the tellers of the stories, and the theologians who reflected on them, recognized that, however mysterious and unfathomable the experiences, they discovered God's work in them, God's calling them to his purpose – "moments of grace" (Reflection 4). Rilke's poem sums it up perfectly: "You be the master: make yourself fierce, break in/ then your great transforming will happen to me;/ and my great grief cry will happen to you."

The juxtaposition of Story 1 and Reflection 1 set the theme perfectly, giving the key challenge which starts the wheel of this entire book in motion. The trajectory of Bishop Elliott's life lets him realize that when he stands in the midst of pain, Christ stands there too – "Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases" (Isaiah 53:4) – but faith

tells us to recognize Christ standing with us as God's gift, hope in our midst (Isaiah 53:10). Reflection 1 identifies the source of Bishop Elliott's conversion to faith: he has taken the "long view," seen his life with God's eyes, from God's perspective. The writer of Reflection 4 will never need to say to Bishop Elliott "Quit your whining." Through God's gift of grace, Bishop Elliott has discovered what Reflection 4 calls the precondition of God's intervention – the certitude that God is always with us. Physically, Bishop Elliott has a hard time getting up out of a chair, but his story says absolutely what Donne says in his poem: "Batter my heart...breath, shine, seek to mend/ that I may rise."

It was suggested above that love was our means of acting as Christ; but such a love, a meaningful love even when it looks like "hope against hope," must come from our "putting on Christ"; it is a love which never quits. This is a major theme in Reflection 3, which makes the very significant point that we must read Psalm 22 not only for its first line of seeming despair – "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" – but in its entirety; read from verse 22 to the end, and then read verses 19-21 with new eyes. It is the entire Psalm which Jesus intends when he quotes it on the Cross (Matthew 27:46). We see such love in Story 2, which like Story 1 – and all of the stories – is a tale of conversion. The story-teller begins by seeing the decrepitude of creeping old age and oncoming death, but then, with new eyes, she recognizes the great gift in the photograph of the daughter's gesture, the image of love with no conditions, no demands, no criteria but love itself. And yet all, everyone, in this drama is experiencing God's love and manifesting it to everyone else: the old lady is "comfortable"

thanks to the loving care, but as a consequence, the old lady is "protecting" her care-giver, and so the daughter finds "trust." And so, too, does the story-teller, whose conversion is to realize that the meaning of this story is in its wholeness, even in the face of inevitable loss. The last line of this story sums up perfectly the entire point of this present reflection; it points straight to George Herbert's recognition in "Affliction" that he will love God, even if he himself is "clean forgot."

Much the same point is made in Stories 3 and 4. General Dallaire found himself staring unblinkingly at evil, when operating under conditions which made it impossible for him to act (because all the rest of the world blinked). The pain of his frustration, and the horror of his vision were so great that for a time he himself broke down into total powerlessness as a person. Yet his story, too, has at its root that gleam of hope which is our universal gift, if we just have "eyes to see." The heart of the story is that he *pays attention* to the suffering, and by so doing he "retrieves his soul." And story 4 extends this theme, in the same direction as Story 2. In the face of overwhelming odds, the same sort of unconditioned love can recognize that suffering, any suffering, brings us face to face with the universal human



The care of consolation is rooted in our very being, our human nature.

Icon of the Crucifixion (Novgorod, Russia, 15th century).



condition: “we are all affected.” While Story 4 suggests many possible directions this shared notion – the oneness of the body of Christ – could go for discussion, the point brought out most strongly in Reflection 2 is the theme of the discovery of hope; the forgiveness of grace, the sureness that Christ is with us, is what leads to the ultimately hopeful point: “never give up.” General Dallaire and Prisca in the stories are both keenly aware of this. But are we capable of recognizing the Crucified and Risen One in all this horror, as advised by the writer of Reflection 2?

Does it become harder to hope, and hence to love, when the suffering is imposed on us from outside, by others bent on absolute evil, as is the case in Stories 5 and 6? Hopkins’ “Thou art indeed just, Lord” puts this issue forthrightly at the outset: “Why do sinners’ ways prosper?” Is there to be nothing for the just person but “disappointment”? In Story 5, God “dies” for James Loney when seemingly refusing Hopkins’s plea to send any “rain.” But in Story 6, with the aid of elder wisdom Andrew Wesley discovers that with hope, in response to his own seeking, God is providing

the wisdom to perceive the gifts after all; conversion is indeed possible. And in fact, James Loney makes the same discovery: he learns that God-given life, a great mystery, is greater than any evil (even when the Way of Life requires suffering). This is why Elizabeth Bishop can see a “rainbow” in what mundane eyes would call a mere oil slick; it is highly revealing that the mother of the dead child in Story 8 weaves her child’s death into the “rainbow” of the stole. Story 8 is the real pendant, the theological understanding, of Story 7 and of bob paterson-watt’s poem.

But the fullest summary, the fundamental point that holds together in all of these materials for grasping the mystery of suffering-and-hope (which we must now write as an inseparable one, not as a paradoxical opposition) is found in Reflection 5. There we learn that the “locus of redemption” is not to be found in the particular grief and pain of this or that suffering, any more than hope is to be found in this or that particular cure or fix. We do need to pay attention to those details – working on the cure and acknowledging the suffering are the essence of the caring love we have said so much about, and they shine through every story here. But Reflection 5 reminds us that the sufferer is the locus of redemption, as the image of allowing Christ, who took on humanity, to be present in every affliction. It is in Christ himself – and hence in every sufferer, who is his image – that we truly see accomplished what this booklet posed at its beginning as a near-impossible question: how can hope and suffering be inseparably attached, embraced together as faith?

How do we accomplish such a feat of



Icon of the Orthodox Monastery of the Protection of the Mother of God, Wentworth, Quebec.

Do not lament me

Do not lament me, O Mother, beholding in the sepulchre the Son whom you have conceived without seed in your womb. For I shall rise and be glorified. ... By my own will the earth covers me, O Mother, but the gatekeepers of hell tremble as they see me.

conversion in ourselves? Before all else, as this reflection states at the outset, we must admit that God is the “Lover of humankind” and so God (and we, cooperating in faith) can allow Christ to come into life and its inevitable suffering, not in a triumphant blaze of imperial glory but carrying His own Cross (John 3:16). The Cross carries all these stories from start to finish; that is why this booklet is structured, moves from step to step in its unfolding, through the Seven Last Words from the Cross. But if we accept this about Christ, who is our image, then we must accept it for ourselves, too; we, too must carry the cross or we cannot find our place in him. And above all else, we must have

the humility, the meekness before God to accept that all of this is a gift, that what we are talking about in every line of this booklet is the recognition, the image of the gift of grace. It is Christ himself who shows us this way, and this vision of what the present world of suffering means:

The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world! (John 16:32-33)



***Now when the centurion, who stood facing him,
saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was God’s Son!”***

Mark 15:39

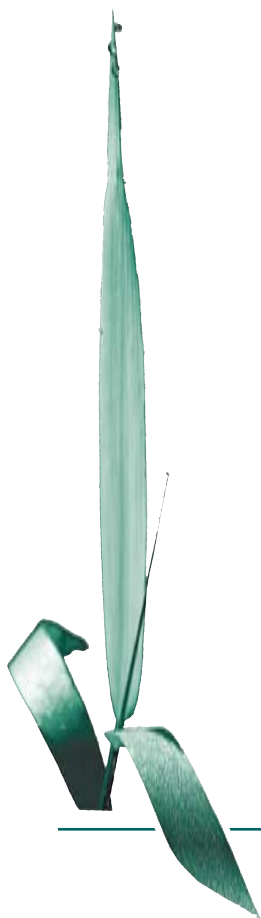
One Foot in Eden

One foot in Eden still, I stand
And look across the other land.
The world's great day is growing late,
Yet strange these fields that we have planted
So long with crops of love and hate.
Time's handiworks by time are haunted,
And nothing now can separate
The corn and tares compactly grown.
The armorial weed in stillness bound
About the stalk; these are our own.
Evil and good stand thick around
In the field of charity and sin
Where we shall lead our harvest in.

Yet still from Eden springs the root
As clean as on the starting day.
Time takes the foliage and the fruit
And burns the archetypal leaf
To shapes of terror and of grief
Scattered along the winter way.
But famished field and blackened tree
Bear flowers in Eden never known.
Blossoms of grief and charity
Bloom in these darkened fields alone.
What had Eden ever to say
Of hope and faith and pity and love
Until was buried all its day
And memory found its treasure trove?
Strange blessings never in Paradise
Fall from these beclouded skies.

Edwin Muir





Appendix

Contributors

Hymns for Suffering and Hope

Additional Resources



Contributors

Stories

Bishop George Elliott

For the past seven years, George Elliott has served as the Area Bishop of York-Simcoe in the Anglican Diocese of Toronto. Previously, he was the incumbent of the parishes of King City and Minden. He is married and is the father of two adult children.

Rita Marrocco

Rita, author of *The Light from One Candle* (2006), is the daughter of MLA Lauritz and Florence Larsen. Raised in depression-era Saskatchewan, she went on to study journalism and secretarial science, and later became a teacher. She is married, mother to eight children and grandmother to sixteen.

Christie Neufeldt

Christie Neufeldt works as the Education for Justice Program Coordinator at the General Council Office of The United Church of Canada. Part of her work involved coordinating the Beads of Hope HIV/AIDS Campaign of the United Church between 2002 – 2004 which raised over two million dollars to support global partner HIV/AIDS programs and collected forty thousand signatures of people in The United Church requesting the government of Canada take important steps regarding HIV/AIDS in Canada and globally.

James Loney

James Loney is a Canadian peace activist who worked for several years with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Iraq and Palestine. On November 26, 2005, James was kidnapped in Iraq with three other CPT members. On March 23, 2006, Loney and companions Norman Kember and Harmeet Singh Sooden were freed in a clandestine operation by multinational troops; on March 9, team member Tom Fox had been found dead.

Andrew Wesley

Andrew Wesley was born and raised in the hunting ground on the shores of James Bay which is called in Cree, "weneebaykook," meaning "the shores." He lost the use of his legs when he was about four and regained good health after one year. His father decided he should attend residential school so he attended Anglican and Roman Catholic church schools. He lives in Toronto with his wife, Esther and grandson, Elmi. He works for the Anglican Diocese of Toronto and became the first Aboriginal Priest. His work is with Toronto Urban Native Ministry as an Inner City Worker for the Aboriginal community.

Rev. Andrew Allan

Ordained with the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec (BCOQ), Andrew works for the Toronto Christian Resource Centre (TCRC) as Community Chaplain in Regent Park, supervises seminary students and fosters church planting.

Rev. Fred Demaray

Rev. Fred Demaray is a minister of the Baptist Convention of Ontario and Quebec, now retired and available as an intentional interim minister. He currently lives in Ottawa, and is serving as Interim minister of a Presbyterian Church there.

Theological Reflections

The Rev. Elisabeth Wagschal,

Lutheran

The Rev. Fred Demaray,

Baptist

Dr. Paul Ladouceur,

Orthodox

Keith R. Maddock,

Religious Society of Friends

Dr. Mary Marrocco,

Faith and Witness Commission

Dr. Richard Schneider,

Orthodox



Hymns for Suffering and Hope

Hymnal code

VU: Voices United, The United Church of Canada
PCC: Book of Praise of the Presbyterian Church in Canada
CH: Chalice Hymnal of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
W: Evangelical Lutheran Worship
CBW: Catholic Book of Worship III

In Suffering Love

Rob Johns
© Elinor Johns 1983
VU 614; PCC 696; CH 212.

Hope is a Star (Advent)

Brian Wren
© Hope Publishing 1989
VU 7; PCC 119; CH 132.

How Shall I Sing to God

Brian Wren
© Hope Publishing 1989
PCC 697.

On Eagles' Wings (You Who Dwell)

Michael Joncas
© New Dawn Music 1991
VU 808; PCC 57; CH 77; W 787.

God, When I Stand

Herbert O'Driscoll
© Herbert O'Driscoll 1980
VU 618; PCC 679.

Goodness is Stronger than Evil

text © Desmond Tutu, admin. Random House, 1995
Music © Iona Community, 1996, admin. GIA
W 721.

How Long, O God

text Ralph F. Smith © Augsburg 2003
Music North American traditional, arr. © Augsburg 2006
W 698.

In the Bulb There is a Flower

Natalie Sleeth
© Hope Publishing 1986
VU 703; PCC 674; CH 638.

Just a Closer Walk with Thee

North American Traditional
W 697.

My Life Flows on in Endless Song

Robert Lowry
W 763.

Pray for the Wilderness

Daniel Charles Damon
© Hope Publishing 1991
PCC 716.

O God, Why Are You Silent

Text Marty Haugen
© GIA 2003
Music Hans Leo Hassler, arr. J. S. Bach
W 703.

Our Cities Cry to You, O God

Margaret Clarkson
© Hope Publishing 1987
PCC 720.

When Pain of the World Surrounds Us

Jim Strathdee
© Desert Flower 1978
W 704.

Hymns in the Public Domain

The following hymns in Public Domain can be found in most hymnals.

All the Way My Saviour Leads Me

Fanny Crosby

How Firm a Foundation

John Rippon's *Selection of Hymns* 1787

My Faith Looks Up to Thee

Ray Palmer

Jesus, Lover of My Soul

Charles Wesley

I Heard The Voice of Jesus Say

Horatio Bonar

The Lord's My Shepherd

Unto the Hills

Blessed Jesus, at Your Word

Tobias Clausnitzer

Creator of the Stars of Night

Anonymous – Latin, 9th Century

Christ Is Coming

John Ross Macduff

Dialogue Between the Saviour and the Mother of God *

"Do not lament me, O Mother, beholding in the sepulchre the Son whom you have conceived without seed in your womb. For I shall rise and be glorified, and as God I shall exalt in everlasting glory those who magnify you with faith and love."

"O Son without beginning, in ways surpassing nature was I blessed at your strange birth, for I was spared all travail. But now beholding you, my God, a lifeless corpse, I am pierced by the sword of bitter sorrow. But arise, that I may be magnified."

* from the *Orthodox Holy Saturday Matins service, Canticle Nine*

"By my own will the earth covers me, O Mother, but the gatekeepers of hell tremble as they see me, clothed in the blood-stained garments of vengeance: for on the cross as God have I struck down my enemies, and I shall rise again and magnify you."

"Let the creation rejoice exceedingly, let all those born on earth be glad: for hell, the enemy, has been despoiled. You women, come to meet me with sweet spices, for I am delivering Adam and Eve with all their offspring, and on the third day I shall rise again."

Stabat Mater

At the Cross her station keeping,
stood the mournful Mother weeping,
close to Jesus to the last.

Through her heart, his sorrow sharing,
all his bitter anguish bearing,
now at length the sword has passed.

O how sad and sore distressed
was that Mother, highly blessed,
of the sole-begotten One.

Christ above in torment hangs,
she beneath beholds the pangs
of her dying glorious Son.

Is there one who would not weep,
whelmed in miseries so deep,
Christ's dear Mother to behold?

Stabat Mater (Latin Text)

Stabat mater dolorosa
juxta Crucem lacrimosa,
dum pendebat Filius.

Cuyus animam gementem,
contristatam et dolentem,
pertransivit gladius.

O quam tristis et afflicta
fuit illa benedicta
Mater Unigeniti.

Quae moerebat et dolebat,
Pia Mater cum videbat
Nati poenas incliti.

Quis est homo qui non fleret,
Matrem Christi si videret
in tanto supplicio?

By the Cross with you to stay,
there with you to weep and pray,
is all I ask of you to give.

For the sins of his own nation,
She saw Jesus wracked with torment,
All with scourges rent:

She beheld her tender Child,
Saw him hang in desolation,
Till his spirit forth he sent.

Can the human heart refrain
from partaking in her pain,
in that Mother's pain untold?

O Mother! fount of love!
Touch my spirit from above,
make my heart with you accord:

Make me feel as you felt;
make my soul glow and melt
with the love of Christ my Lord.

Holy Mother! pierce me through,
in my heart each wound renew
of my Saviour crucified:

Let me share with you his pain,
who for all my sins was slain,
who for me in torments died.

Let me mingle tears with you,
mourning him who mourned for me,
all the days that I may live:

Let me, to my latest breath,
in my body bear the death
of your dying Son.

Virgin of all virgins blessed!
Listen to my fond request:
let me share your grief divine;

Wounded with his every wound,
steep my soul until it faints,
in his very Blood away;

Be near to me, O Virgin,
lest in flames I burn and die,
in his awful Judgment Day.

Christ, when You shall call me from here,
by your Mother my defence,
by your Cross my victory;

When my body dies,
let my soul be granted
the glory of Paradise.

Amen.

Quis non posset contristari,
Christi Matrem contemplari
dolentem cum Filio?

Pro peccatis suae gentis
vidit Jesum in tormentis
et flagellis subditum.

Vidit suum dulcem natum
moriendo desolatum,
dum emisit spiritum.

Eia Mater, fons amoris,
me sentire vim doloris
fac, ut tecum lugeam.

Fac ut ardeat cor meum
in amando Christum Deum,
ut sibi complaceam.

Sancta mater, istud agas,
crucifixi fige plagas
cordi meo valide.

Tui nati vulnerati,
tam dignati pro me pati,
poenas mecum divide.

Fac me tecum pie flere,
crucifixo condolere,
donec ego vixero.

Iuxta crucem tecum stare,
et me tibi sociare
in planctu desidero.

Virgo virginum praeclara,
mihi iam non sis amara:
fac me tecum plangere.

Fac ut portem Christi mortem,
passionis fac consortem,
et plagas recolere.

Fac me plagis vulnerari,
fac me cruce inebriari,
et cruore Filii.

Flammis ne urar succensus
per te Virgo, sim defensus
in die iudicii

Christe, cum sit hinc exire,
da per matrem me venire
ad palmam victoriae.

Quando corpus morietur,
fac ut animae donetur
Paradisi gloria.

Amen.

Prayers for Healing from the Orthodox Book of Services (Euchologion)

We pray you, O Lord our God, that you hear the voice of our supplication and prayer, and have mercy on your servant(s) N., and by your grace and compassion, pardon him (her) (them) all transgressions voluntary and involuntary; let his (her) (their) prayers and almsgiving be acceptable before the throne of your dominion, protect him (her) (them) from all enemies visible and invisible, from every temptation, harm and sorrow, deliver him (her) (them) from all illness, and grant him (her) (them) health and length of days: let us all say, O Lord, hear us and have mercy.

Look down, O Master, Lover of humankind, with your merciful eye upon your servant(s) N. and grant our supplications offered with confidence, for you yourself have said: "Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them and you will have them" [Mk 11:24]; and again: "Ask, and it will be given you." [Mt 7:7]. Therefore we, unworthy though we be, yet confident in your loving-kindness, ask you to be merciful to your servant(s) N., and fulfil his (her)(their) good intentions, preserve him (her)(them) in peace, serenity, health and length of days. In order that we may glorify you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.

O Physician of souls and bodies, with compunction and contrite hearts we bow down before you, and crying out we beseech you: Heal the sicknesses, heal the passions of the soul and body of your servant(s) N. and pardon him (her) (them) all transgressions, voluntary and involuntary, you who are loving, and quickly raise him (her) (them) up from his (her) (their) bed of sickness; we pray you, hear us and have mercy.

You who desire not the death of sinners, but rather that they should return to you and live: Spare and have mercy on your servant(s) N., O Merciful One; banish sickness, drive away all passion, and all ailments, assuage chill and fever, and stretch forth your mighty arm, and as you raised up the daughter of Jairus from her bed of sickness, restore him (her) (them) to health; we pray you, hear us and have mercy.

O Master Almighty, O Holy King, who chastens without delivering unto death, who strengthens those who fall, who uplifts and heals the bodily afflictions of humankind, we pray you, O our God: in your lovingkindness, visit your ailing servant(s) N., pardon him (her)(them) every fault, both voluntary and involuntary. Yes, O Lord, send down your

healing power from heaven to touch his (her) body (their bodies), quench all fever, subdue all sufferings and hidden infirmities, heal your servant(s) N., raise him (her)(them) healed and whole from his (her)(their) bed of suffering, and restore him (her) to your Church, that he (she)(they) be blessed in your sight and accomplish your will. For it is in your power to be merciful and to save us, O our God, and we glorify you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages.

You who by your touch healed Peter's mother-in-law who was sick with fever, now, in your loving-kindness, heal your suffering servant(s) N. of his (her) (their) illness, quickly granting him (her) (them) health; we urgently pray you, O Fount of healing, hear us and have mercy.

We pray to the Lord our God, that he may hear the voice of the supplication of us sinners, and have mercy on his servant(s) N. and protect him (her) (them) from all tribulation, harm, wrath and necessity, and from every sickness of soul and body, granting him (her) (them) health with length of days: let us all say, quickly hear us and have mercy.

O Master Almighty, O Holy King, who chastens and does not destroy, who strengthens the falling, who sets aright the fallen, and who corrects the bodily afflictions of mankind: We pray you, O our God, visit your infirm servant N. with your mercy, pardon him (her) every sin, voluntary and involuntary. O Lord, send down your healing power from heaven, touch his (her) body, quench the fever, subdue passion and every subtle infirmity. Be the healer of your servant N. raise him (her) from his (her) couch of sickness, and from his (her) bed of suffering healed and whole; grant him (her) to be pleasing in your Church and to accomplish your will. For it pertains to you to show mercy and to save us, O our God, and to you do we send up glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages.

O Mother of God, our hope, our most excellent Queen, refuge of orphans, intercessor for the homeless, joy of the afflicted, protectress of the oppressed: look upon our misfortune, see our affliction, and come to help us, for we are without strength, and assist those who wander to and fro. You know how we are oppressed; free us, we pray you, for we have no helper, no intercessor, no consoler, except you, O Mother of God; may you preserve and protect us unto the ages of ages. Amen.



Additional Resources

The following have been recommended by church representatives on the Faith and Witness Commission. We invite readers to visit our website (www.ccc/cce.ca) for a more complete bibliography in both French and English; for further resources relating to suffering and hope, including theological reflections on Romans 8 and on the Book of Job; for a collection of the discussion papers which engendered this publication.

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Suggested Ways to Use This Resource

Individual

- Choose one of the eight stories on which to reflect. Start with time of silence.
- Read story aloud
- Silence
- Read story again, aloud or silently
- Reflect on questions; journal
- Read theological reflection that accompanies the selected story; add reflections to journal
- Time of silence or prayer to end.

Group

- Begin with introduction and prayer time
- Take silent time for each person to reflect on one or more of these questions:
 - What comes up when I hear the word “suffering”?
 - What have I found helpful in my own suffering? What have I found unhelpful?
 - What difference does my faith/church make in how I approach suffering?
 - What questions do I have about my church’s approach to suffering? To hope?
 - What is hope?
 - What do I think people might be hungering for in an evening on Hope and Suffering?
- If dividing into smaller groups for reflection, may give same story to each group, or use different stories.

In small group

- read story aloud
- group members share their responses to the story
- read story aloud again, possibly by different member
- discuss reflection questions

In large group

- share reflections
- facilitator adds input from the theological reflection that accompanies the story
- finish with prayer, including hymn

Note: We found that the stories and reflections may touch on deep places in a member or members, and asked group members to speak to a facilitator if they needed personal time.

