

God & Human Suffering

Douglas John Hall, *God & Human Suffering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986),
Douglas John Hall is former Professor of Christian Theology at McGill University in Montreal.

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Introduction

The tradition of Jerusalem takes its stand on two basic affirmations concerning the human condition: the first is that suffering is real and is the existential lot of 'fallen humanity' – 'All flesh is grass...; surely the people is grass.' The second is that suffering is not the last word about the human condition and therefore that it need not and must not become our preoccupation, the object of our *ultimate* concern, for '... the Word of our God will stand forever.' 19. Hall suggests this where we must begin in our First World situation, particularly in North America.

How does the fact of our being part of the first world, the still-affluent peoples of the northern hemisphere, affect our handling of the age-old theme of God and human suffering? We belong to the have-nations rather than to the have-nots; we are part of 6% of Earth's population which consumes 40% of the planet's natural resources; *those who suffer most conspicuously in our society – the aged, the dying, the poor, the socially or physically 'abnormal' – are for the most part hidden from everyday view, sequestered in places which effectively insulate them from public notice; and the oppressed in our midst – racial minorities, sexual minorities, the unemployed, and others – can still seem to the majority of us to be well and wisely treated?* 26

To use Paulo Friere's term, the 'conscientization' of the *nonpoor* must mean our coming to a radical, informed, and sensitive awareness of the depths of suffering – particularly the massive corporate suffering – of those who cannot camouflage their pain, as we do, through the diversions of Dives. The conscientization of the nonpoor is vital, not only because the diversions of rich Dives are killing poor Lazarus at our gates, but also because it is indispensable to the healing of our own First World soul, whose dis-ease is far more complex than the malaise of the world's obvious victims and is indeed a 'sickness unto death' (Kierkegaard). 26

Our temptation is that we fall into superficial belieffulness – credulity – healing the wounds of the people lightly and degrading the hope that belongs to the gospel of the cross. In short, our temptation is: *cheap hope.* 27

The tradition of Jerusalem regards the fact of human suffering very earnestly. The reality of human suffering is the thing to which biblical faith clings most insistently. There is in this tradition a commitment to humanity and the earth which not even loyalty to God must usurp. For instance, the psalmist voices many expressions of utter and almost blind trust in the Lord; but, when this trust is tempted to protect itself by turning a deaf ear to the cries of the oppressed and suffering, it changes to *lament* – and even accusation – for it will not abandon those whom *its God has aught it* to befriend. 27

Hall's point is this: Only if we are ready to begin our contemplation of this problem by reaffirming Jerusalem's commitment to the creation and its dogged honesty about the

creaturely condition shall we be able to work our way through to hope that is not cheap. Costly hope is hope that is hammered out on the anvil of historical actuality. Costly hope is never a completed and undialectical statement of the positive.²⁸

The creation theology requires about ‘the will of God.’ Regardless of what *is*, what is *willed*? According to this faith tradition, is human suffering intended and will of the Creator God? What is the problem or the predicament that must be overcome, the evil that must be undone, if what is *intended* is to be realized? What is the thing that is ‘wrong,’ and what is the cause of it? This means asking whether suffering, according to our tradition, is wrong, and if so to what extent or in what sense. What is the source of this ‘wrong’ suffering? If, according to the tradition of Jerusalem, suffering is in some way bound up with sinful ‘fall’ from divine intentionality, how shall we understand and articulate this connection between sin and suffering? Decisive focus is redemption. ²⁹

As Christians we are obligated to ask how, according to the gospel of the Christ, human suffering is met, addressed, engaged, altered, redeemed. ‘the confession that while suffering is real it is not *ultimately* real, not the last word. Obviously, this confession implies the perspective of salvation or redemption. ³⁰

1. The Reality of Human Suffering

A. Biblical Faith Confesses the Radical Reality of Human Suffering

For Christian spirituality, the suffering that inheres in existence under the condition of ‘the fall’ is given primary symbolic expression in the life and death of Jesus, the Christ. In both of the historic creeds of the early church (the Apostle’s and Nicene Creeds), the only word that depicts the *life* of the Christ as distinct from his birth, death, resurrection, and kingly reign, is the word *suffered*: In order fully to identify himself with the human species it was necessary for the incarnate Logos to become a broken man. If it is the object of the divine *agape* in the advent of the Son to identify completely with broken human being, then ‘the Son of Man must suffer...’ In human condition ‘with’ which God would now enter into full communion. The Christ must suffer because suffering is the condition of those in relation to whom God would be ‘Emmanuel’ (God with us). Suffering, to put the matter in contemporary *koine*, is ‘where it is at’ with ‘us’; Therefore, a God who would achieve solidarity with us *must* become a suffering God.³³

Why Christ suffered? This suffering is not only the suffering of the flesh but the more significant suffering to which the incarnate Word ‘must’ be subjected is the suffering of the human spirit – and *that* suffering can be experienced long before one has reached threescore and ten. The young man of Nazareth, still no doubt strong of limb and certainly in possession of all his mental faculties, experiences the apex of human suffering, in fact, long before his body is broken at the Place of the Skull. As one who must endure the fickleness and weak loyalty of his closest friends; as one who knows loneliness and alienation from family and society; as one who finds no haven from the *Sturm and Drang* of daily existence, no home, no place to lay his head; as one driven by a destiny, the rationale of which he is by no means certain; as one rejected by his kindred and race; as one frustrated by the continued failure of others to grasp even his best and simplest insight; as one seeking the kind of absolute sense of meaning that Providence neglects to provide; as one, in short, ‘tempted in every respect as we are tempted’ – as such a one Jesus of

Nazareth, long before his brief physical torment, enters into the passion and pain of human existing. And this is required. It is a condition of his messiahship. It is a ‘must’ – because, given the logic of incarnation and cross, only through solidarity with humankind in all the reality of its suffering is God able, from within, to affect the healing process. 34 **This is important interpretation** 그리스도는 육신의 고문으로 들어가지전에 인간으로 존재하는 아픔을 체험하셨다. 인간의 몸으로 오신 주님은 인류의 모든 고난과 함께하셔야 인간에게 치유/구원을 가져오실 수 있기 때문이다.

Unless we are willing at least to being to entertain, in existential senses, the reality of our dis-ease, we shall not be able to receive the ‘costly grace’ (Bonhoeffer) by which the pain of our existing has been, is being, and shall be met. 34

God has to participate in it if God would be with *us*.

B. Ideological Presupposition of First World Apathy P. 38

There are many different ways of characterizing the nature of the modern worldview and of the civilization that has resulted from it, but one of the most straightforward would be that the modern experiment is based on the assumption that human suffering can be overcome – can be, is being, and shall be! In other words, suffering is not a necessary or inevitable dimension of human existence, but represents rather a challenge to human ingenuity and inventiveness. It is frequently claimed in our society, suffering has been in great measure a consequence of human ignorance, indecisiveness, superstition, and lack of scientific knowledge, initiative, or resourcefulness.

C. The Incapacity to Suffer P. 41

We repress the pain when we cannot cope with it.

North Americans are not able to suffer:

The social consequence of the repression of suffering are devastating and, given the fact that our society is very powerful one technically and militarily, they are also patently *dangerous*. Three types of consequence of the incapacity to suffer as this is evidenced in our society may be noted.

In the *first* place, it is unusually difficult for most persons in our society to accept or articulate their own personal suffering. For instance, in the North American way of handling death, terminal illness, or great personal loss we cover up of negative experiences and the accompanying suppression of emotion typical of our dominant culture is not simply a contemporary extension of Anglo-Saxon (WASPis) stiff-upper-lip-ism, nor has it ‘always’ been the case. The symbolic images of success have replaced the wounded Jesus and the tormented saints. 44.

A *second* consequence of the incapacity to suffer is the inability of so many in our society to enter imaginatively into the suffering of *others*. Just as at the personal level people in our society find it taxing to visit their own sick and dying relatives in hospitals and nursing homes, so they appear incapable of absorbing at the level of feeling, compassion, or (in its deepest sense) sympathy the plight of the world’s hungry, politically oppressed, or war-ravaged – including the degradation and dehumanization of minorities within our own midst. The suspicion that we may be the *cause* of the suffering of others, that the very freedom from pain and want for which we have striven and are willing to fight may

be a source of gross injustice for others – this seems to be a conclusion that few of our contemporaries permit themselves concretely to entertain. 45

The *third* consequence of our cultural incapacity to suffer is perhaps the most alarming of all. It may be called the search for an enemy. For it belongs to the psychic state of a people which cannot consciously confront its own suffering, yet cannot avoid absolutely the shock of nonbeing ('future shock,' for example), that it is driven to look elsewhere for the source of its trouble. Just as individuals who are ill but cannot face their illness often rail out at persons around them, seeking to locate the cause of their malaise outside themselves, so societies which will not or cannot confront their own internal problems manifest an extraordinary need to blame their condition on external agencies. The Western – especially the American – attitude toward Russian bloc today surely has its genesis in something like a collective paranoia of this order (today it can be Iraq-note added). 45

Hall conclude that the incapacity to suffer – including the incapacity to acknowledge, accept, and articulate suffering – may be the most terrifying social reality, the thing that determines the fate of the earth. 46

D. The Question P. 47

The question becomes: *How can one at the same time acquire sufficient honesty about what needs to be faced, and sufficient hope that facing it would make a difference, to engage in altering the course of our present world towards life and not death?*

Hall began by insisting that the tradition of Jerusalem takes human suffering very seriously: It is real, it is not illusory, it is the common lot of fallen humanity. Some things must be accepted; but also to change, to the altering of conditions which make for meaningless suffering, to the mending of creation. The mere acknowledgment of suffering would suffice only for a religion that was finally indifferent to the fate of the earth and human life upon the earth. Acknowledgment of the reality of suffering is only the first step. It is a necessary step, for without it there can be no depth of understanding and no will to press on to the second phase 47

2. Creation: Suffering as Becoming

3. The Fall: Suffering as Burden

4. Redemption: Conquest from Within P. 93

A. Not by Might

B. Intimations of an Alternative: The Theology of the Cross

The change for which faith hopes, which it believes *possible* cannot be effected through power, might, majesty, domination, and the like, but only through a divine *modus operandi* that stand all such preconceptions of God's way of working in the world on their head. Perhaps we have come to a moment in our history as a religion, we Christians, when more of us can be open to the alternative to power-oriented thinking that is present in the depths of our tradition – in the declaration that “*Jesus is the Christ.*” Sensitive Christians in our time have already for a long time sensed the inappropriateness of the power motif in an age so gravely threatened by a surfeit of power, and are therefore at least open to radical alternatives. We may discover another way of being in the world, another way of serving, and even another kind of message. 104

As we emerge out of the Constantinian captivity of the faith, the need to think triumphalistically is replaced by a new seriousness about the meaning of the event which stands at the cent of our confession, the sacrificial suffering and death of the Christ. Hall quotes Kosuke Koyama, saying,

The name, Jesus Christ, is not a magic name which transforms the broken world into an instant paradise. Has not the true dimension of the glory of this name suffered since the faith associated with this name became the state religion of the Roman Empire? Has it not been difficult to maintain the quality of the stumbling block of this name when the church became the powerful social group? How could the prestigious church proclaim the crucified Christ? The name of Jesus Christ is not a powerful name in the manner of the imperial power. It is a ‘foolish and weak’ name (I Cor. 1:21-25)!...Jesus Christ is not a quick answer. If Jesus Christ is the answer he is the answer in the way portrayed in crucifixion. 105

Koyama is here drawing upon the alternative to theological triumphalism that Luther named *theologia cruce*s. Luther contrasted the ‘theology of the cross’ with what he called ‘theology of glory’ (*theologia gloriae*), whose essential metaphor is that of power. The theology of the cross, which, as Jurgen Moltmann has so aptly put it, ‘is not a single chapter in theology, but the key signature for all Christian theology, does not altogether eschew the idea of power and such related terms as triumph, victory, or conquest. **The theology of the cross does not intend simply to discard the metaphor of power, but it does want to transform it;** for it is an adequate way of speaking about the redemptive work of God only if it is conformed to the image of God revealed *in the crucified One*. As Koyama suggests, a ‘prestigious church,’ the official cult of empire, can hardly afford to be known through the symbol of a crucified man – or a crucified God! It belongs to empire (‘superpower’!) to establish itself and to subsist on power alone. 105.

Jesus, in our hymns and liturgies, turns out again and again to be the Victor, the Conquerer, the Warrior-prince, the Captain of souls, and the Slayer of foes. The church is ‘like a mighty army,’ a powerful and glorious movement, a crusade, waging battle against all comers. The life of faith, accordingly, is a fight, a conflict with unbelievers, a struggle against the flesh, and so on. The language of our religion has been so consistently informed by the spirit of might, winning, success, and related concepts that it is difficult to use any of the *scriptural* nomenclature of glory and triumph without conjuring up the whole theology of empire. 106

The only power that can address suffering humanity is the power of love, and that is a power ‘made perfect in weakness’ (2 Cor. 12:9). The only victory that is both real and credible in face of human suffering is a victory to faith, not sight, a victory *sub contraria specie* (‘hidden beneath its opposite’ - Luther). What Reinhold Niebuhr called ‘the logic of the cross’ must interpret power in terms the world calls weakness, and victory in terms the world calls failure, because the thing that this power would overcome and the victory win is delicate indeed; it is the human spirit. The root causes of our suffering in its burdensome sense being inseparable from our very selves, the conquest of them *must* be an intensely subtle one – a conquest *from within*. 107.

C. The Conquest from Within

God identifies with humanity. God, who in the faith of Israel certainly transcends creation, but who in this same faith is from the outset oriented in love *towards* the creation, now enters into full solidarity with the creature. God will not be God in isolation but only a God who is with *us* and for *us* – who ‘will be your God and you shall be my people’ – this same God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, declares the apostolic witness, takes the final step and gives flesh to the Word (the *same* Word) that from the beginning God spoke through the Law and the Prophets. Through an impossible act of grace and self-sacrifice, God bridges the unbridgeable gulf between eternity and time. The One who is never mentioned in the Hebraic Scriptures except in conjunction with the world of human and other created beings – this earthward-yearning God of Israel becomes now ‘Emmanuel.’ It is this movement of solidarity and identification, of full participation in the life of the world, that is fundamentally intended in the dogma of the incarnation, whatever the language may be. For faith in the Incarnate Word (which is very different from ‘believing in Jesus’ divinity) means confessing the unconditional and unreserved presence of God *with us*. 108

‘...The Son of Man must suffer...’ ‘Must suffer’- not on account of *external* pressure, but on account of the compelling internal necessity that the apostolic tradition names God’s love – *agape*. Behind the ‘must’ of Jesus’ passion there is the ‘must’ of the divine *agape* – and it is visible all the way from Eden! 109

It *was* the intention of the incarnational theology to say that Jesus – precisely this human being (*vere homo*) in all of his earthly vulnerability – is truly God-in-our-midst (*vere Deus*), that God is not other than this, that God’s nature and intention is not other than what they are declared to be in and though this One. 112

Moltmann stated:

When the crucified Jesus is called ‘the image of the invisible God,’ the meaning is that *this* is God, and God like *this*. God not greater than he is in this humiliation. God is not more glorious than he is in this self-surrender. God is not more powerful than he is in this helplessness. God is not more divine than he in this humanity. 112

Moltmann further stated:

To recognize God in the crucified Christ means to grasp the Trinitarian history of God, and to understand oneself and this whole world with Auschwitz and Viet Nam, with race-hatred and hunger, as existing in the history of God. God is not dead, death is in God. God suffers by us. He suffers with us. Suffering is in God... God does not ultimately reject, nor is he ultimately rejected, rejection is within God .. When he brings his history to completion, his suffering will be transformed into joy, and thereby our suffering as well. 113

The theology of Bethlehem and Golgotha – that is, of the enfleshment and the cross-bearing of the divine Word – directs us from the lonely and morbid contemplation of our own real suffering to the suffering of God in solidarity with us. Because God is ‘with us,’ our suffering, though abysmally really, is given both a new perspective and a new meaning – and the prospect of transformation. Not through power but through participation; not through might but through self-emptying, ‘weak’ love is the burden of human suffering engaged by the God of this faith tradition. *Engaged* is the right word. It implies that God meets, takes on, takes into God’s *own* being, the burden of our suffering, not by a show of force which could only destroy the sinner with the sin, but by assuming a solidary responsibility for the contradictory and confused admixture that is our life. God incarnate and crucified bears with us and for us the ‘weight of sin’ that is the root cause of our suffering, and that we cannot assume in our brokenness. 113.

C.S. Song has written:

The suffering of Jesus the messiah has removed all human barriers. It makes God available to human beings and enables them to be part of the divine mystery of salvation. The depths of God’s suffering ought to be the place where all persons, despite their different backgrounds and traditions, can recognize one another as fellow pilgrims in need of God’s saving power. Religious traditions tend to alienate strangers. Ecclesiastical structures become walls surrounding faithful believers. 116

To be human is to suffer, and God knows that. That is why God suffers too. Suffering is where God and human beings meet. It is the one place where all persons – kings, priests, paupers, and prostitutes – recognize themselves as frail and transient human beings in need of God’s saving love. Suffering brings us closer to God and God closer to us. Suffering, despite all its inhumanity and cruelty, paradoxically enables humans to long for humanity, find it, treasure it, and defend it with all their might. 117

God suffers because God would be *with us*, and suffering is our condition. Echoing Luther’s last written words (‘Wir sind Bettler, class ist wahr ...’ [We are beggars, that is certain]), the Roman Catholic theologian Johannes Merz writes: ‘We are all beggars. We are all members of a species that is not sufficient unto itself. We are all creatures plagued by unending doubts and restless, unsatisfied hearts. Of all creatures, we are the poorest and the most incomplete. Our needs are always beyond our capacities, and we only find ourselves when we lose ourselves.’ 117

Koyama says,

A strong Western civilization and the ‘weak’ Christ cannot be reconciled harmoniously. Christ must become ‘strong.’ A strong United States and a strong Christ! A Christ trampled upon, ‘broken on the wheels of living,’ is not the Christ whose praises are sung by electronic religion or, for that matter, in the more bourgeois sanctuaries of our nations. Yet beneath our surprise and distaste for a ‘broken’ Christ, beneath the *skandalon* of the cross, there is for us too – for the affluent, the wise of the world, the ‘have’ people – a certain basic relief in meeting the broken

Christ. We too know, in the depths of our souls, that we are lost and broken – that ‘We are all beggars.’ 118

D. Acceptance and Transformation **This part will be used in the theology of mission**

‘Give us,’ runs the famous prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr, ‘grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.’ The resurrection-courage that is given to faith in the presence of the crucified Christ is a courage both of acceptance and of transformation. Hall, *Suffering*, 119.

There are things we need accept and there is time we must rest (Sabbath). But Hall suggest this rest is for the purpose of flying. Theology leads inevitably (if it is *true* theology – *vere theologia!*) to ethics, the gospel to the law, the indicative to the imperative. Encountering the crucified Christ (as Peter is supposed to have done on his way *out* of burning Rome!) must mean wrestling with decisions about the *actual* suffering we encounter in our world. What is to be accepted, what can and must be changed? Where is transformation possible? .. The call of the gospel to its proclaimers consists in discerning the signs of the times in word and action so that people within the circumstances of their own lives may respond to the impetus of the Holy Spirit and move life in the direction of its glorious destiny in the kingdom of God. Hall, *Suffering*, 120-121.

It would be misuse of the great privilege of theology if, befriended by a suffering God, we were to take refuge in the comfort of this gospel away from the actual suffering of the world in which we find ourselves, whose destiny is to become fully God’s kingdom. 121

The gospel of Jesus as cross-bearer, the bearer of unbearable burdens, introduces all who hear it to a *process*: The process of bearing the burden of others. To *know* that God participates in human suffering – *really* to know this – is to do it! To *believe* that nothing can separate us from this participating love – *really* to believe this – is to accept the gracious invitation of this crucified God to participate in our Lord’s participation. The church is – *we are!* – a vital part of God’s response to human suffering. For how many will the adequacy of God’s response depend upon how *we are*? 121

5. The Church: Community of Suffering and Hope

Introduction: Faith, Religion, and Suffering 이것을 어데에 삽입 할 것인가?

The blessedness (the ‘beatitude’ that Jesus describes in every one of his famous sentences in the Sermon on the Mount) is contrary to the kind of divine favor that religion courts all the way from Babel to the Crystal cathedral. It is typical of ‘religion’ as distinct from faith that it seeks to gain the kingdom of heaven without the poverty of spirit which is the prerequisite of such a search (Matt. 5:3); comfort without ‘mourning’ (5:4); the inheritance of the earth without the meekness of the dispossessed (5:5); the satisfaction of all senses without hunger and thirst for unattained righteousness, justice (5:6); mercy for self without compassion for “those who trespass against us” (5:7); the beatific vision without striving for purity of heart (5:8); status, eternally, without the struggle for earth’s peace (5:9); the consolation of immortality without persecution, slander, rejection (5:10, 11). Hall, *Suffering*, 126.

It is the propensity of religion to avoid, precisely, suffering: to have light without darkness, vision without trust, and risk, hope without an ongoing dialog with despair – in short, Easter without Good Friday. Always, in an infinitive variety of forms but finally with the same monotonous motive underneath the forms, religion demands the *securitas* of those who “have arrived” and spurns “the Way.”

A. The Courage to Become

While mission of modern churches seem to be saving the church, its pride, name, fame, credit, and people who do mission often expect rewards, Hall stresses that mission is taking up our cross. It means to lose ourselves, to become sufficiently nonchalant about our personal condition to see the others with their needs – our neighbors. It means participation in the suffering of Christ *for the world*. As Bonhoeffer instructed it is costly. ‘When Christ calls a man,’ wrote Bonhoeffer, ‘he bids him come and die’; This caused Luther to see Christ in the needy neighbor. Hall, *Suffering*, 128-139.

Chris’s Participation: The Good Shepherd invites us as one who has first assumed, fully, our condition. With us he is caused to experience loneliness (for him, forsakenness); with us he must taste the limits of the finite (for him, a *kenosis*); like us he is tempted – and ; ”in *every* respect”. For us he must know anxiety. Only from within, only as the Shepherd who “lays down *his* life for the sheep” does this one issue to us his invitation to life: “Come, follow me.” “Come to me... This is invitation to discipleship. It is not an invitation to heaven but to earth, not to church but to life in the world. It is an invitation to become who we are. 131.

Discipleship means sacrificing all the little defenses and stratagems by which we shield ourselves from life, and accepting freely and gladly the gift of life *as it is given to us*. If it is costly it is because we, of course, want to have life on our own terms still, want to retain our hard-won securities. 133

The earliest Christians regarded their suffering as the mode and sign of their participation in the suffering of the Christ. Not only did they bear witness to a Messiah who participated fully in the human condition – who “though he was in the form of God .. emptied himself .. and became obedient unto death” (Phil. 2:6-8), but they regarded their own being as *soma Christou* as an ongoing participation in the Christ’s participatory life. 137.

Suffering is necessary for the body of Christ – and is the one indispensable mark of its authenticity – because there is still suffering in God’s beloved world, and God would still be involved in it. God’s involvement in the world’s suffering is not a once-for-all matter. It preceded the advent of the Son (“There was a cross in the heart of God long before a cross appeared on Calvary”), and it succeeds his ascension. As Christians we believe that the Christ achieved a decisive identification with and conquest of human suffering; in whatever ways God continues to suffer with those who suffer – and they are numberless – We are part of the response of God to the massive suffering of God’s world. In and through the church, visible and invisible, God provides in this world a

representative – a priestly – people, a people learning to suffer that they may assume in concrete ways the concerns of their neighbors, their society, their world. 141.

The object is to identify oneself with the suffering that is already there in one's world, to let oneself be led by the love of Christ into solidarity with those who suffer, and to accept the consequence of this solidarity in the belief – the *joyful* belief – that in this way God is still at work in the world, making a conquest of its sin and suffering from within. 145.

I have a friend who carries out homeless church. He claims that if we save their souls, that is all they need to restore their life. He is not totally wrong in a sense that their faith in God helps them to be sober and clean from substances and put themselves together. But this doesn't mean they can find jobs without education or job skills/experience and become self-sufficient. They can become easily homeless again and back on the substance. That is why saving their souls alone doesn't work. It has to be comprehensive salvation. To help achieve their long term self-sufficiency churches must be involved in direct service and public policy advocacy.

B. Suffering as Participation and Transformation

C. We Rejoice in Our Sufferings: Suffering and Hope

Appendix: Dialogue and Conclusion