

# MARS HILL REVIEW

Essays • Studies • Reminders of God



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# THE GLORY OF HIS DISCONTENT

The Inconsolable Suffering of God

*By Don Hudson*

*He who is satisfied has never truly craved.  
And he who craves for the light of God  
neglects his ease for ardor.*

— Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel

“**W**hat have you done with the Holocaust?” I asked.

The man sitting across from me resided squarely within the traditional evangelical attitude toward pain and suffering. Forty-five minutes earlier, I had invited him to tell me his life story. And he did—he told me of a very painful, tragic story. But there was something unsettling about the way he spoke of his life. Simply put, this man’s mood and manner did not match the suffering in his life. His eyes glazed over as he methodically recounted some very tragic scenes. His words were as vacant as his eyes, and he laced his stories with occasional hollow clichés and platitudes. “But as you well know, ‘all things work together for good.’” “God is good, but he’s not safe,” he would say. With every incident I heard from his life, I felt a connection to this man and was drawn to him with a deeply felt empathy. Yet each “Christian” cliché brought the conversation to a grinding halt and pushed me away from any connection with this fellow human being.

Every time he came to great tension in his story, he would relieve the moment by using some phrase to dismiss the tension. It was as if his soul were a balloon: as the tragedy would well within him, just at the right moment he would take the pin of Christian cliché and let the air out. “But what was meant for evil, God meant for good.” “The Lord has healed me from those memories now.”

I have seen those same eyes many times before and listened to the same soul-deadening words. It’s not that I differ with the *words* that this man used to make sense of his life; but I strongly disagree with the *way* this man

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used his words. His demeanor—and thus his words—disturbed me for this reason: there was something inhuman in his response. I use the word “inhuman” because there was nothing that engaged me or gripped me about what he told me. He wasn’t even a good reporter. At least a reporter has the instincts to make you feel something in the story reported. As I listened to this man, it was obvious that he was asking me to feel nothing. He was speaking in a way that asked me *to join him in his distance*.

In so many ways, this man cannot tell a true story because he has never truly engaged the conflicts and questions of his life. Christianity has become for him a system of dismissing doubt rather than embracing paradox. Like many modern Christians, he uses “truth” to deaden his emotions, dispel his questions, and distance himself from anything vaguely human. A good and true life story, however, never dismisses conflict but invites it, even welcomes it. Any story worth its salt does not begin until tragedy steals in.

### **A Terrible Beauty Is Born**

Compare the story of the Bible. If we as Christians are to model our lives on the very fabric of the Bible story, then let’s see how God tells a story. Would God tell a story the way the man sitting before me did?

First, the story that God tells begins in an innocent world, i.e., the Garden of Eden. In the beginning, the Almighty God confronts the chaos of nothingness and fiercely imagines a paradise. Adam and Eve live within this paradise totally unconscious of guilt or suffering. They do not know good from evil, and they stand before one another and God unaware of themselves. “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (Genesis 2: 25, NRSV). In the garden, man and woman are present with God, but I would argue that their presence is unaware of God’s world, just as infants would be of their parents’ world. For centuries the church has taught that the Garden of Eden was perfection, with no sin, no tragedy, no disillusionment. True enough. Yet existence in Eden was much more than perfection; life was also innocent. In other words, perfection had its glory—communion with God’s person—and perfection had its price—ignorance of God’s world.

So far so good. Up to this point in scriptures, the story that God tells is very similar to the story that the man sitting across from me recounts. Both begin in the innocence of Eden. But then we see a subtle difference. God’s story moves out of innocence; the Christian man’s story returns to innocence again and again. “But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil’” (3: 4-5, NRSV).

Now think of the rest of the Bible story. Do we see innocence or tragedy? For years I have thought it quite strange that only two chapters in the Bible are devoted to Eden, that innocent land. It is extremely important to note that the Bible story, from Genesis to Revelation, is framed by Eden and heaven. The first two chapters are devoted to life in Eden, and the last two chapters to life in heaven. What then is the rest of the Bible—everything else in between? The rest of the Bible is tragedy. Tragedy and redemption. Redemption of tragedy, but tragedy nonetheless. If the Christian life is a sojourn, which I believe it is, then the pilgrim on the way (*Homo Viatoris*) is moving from the innocence of Eden to the joy of heaven while trying to make sense of a tragic, suffering world.

It should be obvious to even the most casual or disinterested reader of the Bible that one tragedy follows closely on the heels of another. Indeed, beginning with Genesis 3, tragedy seems to waylay every traveler in the journey of faith, hope, and love. Tragedy intrudes into the lives of the Bible characters as easily as it does in our own lives today. Adam and Eve lose their first son at the hands of their other son. Noah trusts God wildly, and God delivers him, but soon thereafter gets drunk and indirectly curses his own grandson, Canaan. Moses, the great prophet, is not allowed to enter the promised land because he petulantly strikes the rock in rage. The kings of Israel lead the Israelites into great success one season and into utter failure the next.

In the New Testament, Paul and Barnabas are at each other's throats so badly that they can not work together. Most enlightening, though, is the story of Christ, the journey of the gospel. Christ, in his first coming, does not intrude into our history to be triumphant but to be humiliated at the hands of his own creation. This is the scandal that his disciples just could not, would not grasp. In the eternal scope of the gospel, the crux of the cross is tragedy. For the love of the world, the omnipotent God takes on tragedy in the torture and death of the cross. God does not see tragedy as some cosmic Freudian slip but as essential to the story of the ages; he does not step into the history of this world to be victorious only, but to be crucified.

This truth is quite overwhelming to admit. The church—that is, Christianity—is suspended in tragedy. We live between Eden and heaven, the God who was and the God who will be. In the story that God is telling in our lives, he asks us to live in the stark reality of the cross while we sight the glimmer of the resurrection. Suffering calls attention to God's silence and his absence. We do not *know for certain* that this life is more than tragic; we believe, we hope, we yearn, but we do not know without a doubt. Certainty destroys faith by distorting hope into presumption. And presumption subtly but obsessively seeks to eradicate suffering from our lives because it is suffering that ushers in the deepest questions of

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our existence. Suffering, like no other reality, demands that we live in the *not yet*. Indeed, we will not *know* until the end of the world whether or not tragedy or beauty wins in the end. We wait and yearn for the day that is not yet. "God is the beginning and the end. The middle of the day is ours."

Christianity, then, in its very essence is a religion of the discontented. How can we be content with a century that includes the Jewish Holocaust? How can we be content with the modern century that has slaughtered more than 100 million people in the name of ideology? How can we be content when children in the world's wealthiest nation are starving? How can we be content when AIDS is ravaging the gay community? How can we be content when nearly seven out of ten women in our culture are sexually abused as children? How can we be content when God is not content? Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: "We Christians need not be ashamed of showing a little impatience, longing and discontent with an unnatural fate, nor with a considerable amount of longing for freedom, earthly happiness and opportunity for work."<sup>1</sup>

Closing our eyes to the suffering of this world is choosing to live in an innocence that God does not live in. The serpent in the Garden knew all too well what he was inviting Adam and Eve to—tragedy and the suffering that ensues. Tragedy did as tragedy still does today: it wakes us up from our innocent stupor. The serpent promised Adam and Eve that if they ate of the fruit, they would know as God knows—that they would know sin and suffering. One of the most intriguing ironies of the fall is that we now know as God knows because we know sin and suffering. The serpent understood all too well that the fall would bring tragedy and death. But inherent within evil is one fatal blind spot: evil does not see that tragedy compels beauty and evokes repair (*tikkun*).

The intimate knowledge of suffering, which is a loss of innocence, constrains us to fiercely imagine truth, beauty, and goodness just as God did when he confronted the chaos in Genesis 1. God's imagination in the face of chaos resulted in the creation of heaven and earth. Acknowledging the suffering of this world places us every day in the image of our Creator—we can create beauty out of nothing or we can repeat suffering in an endless cycle of destruction. Confronting suffering in our world becomes the fulcrum between ultimate tragedy or redemption. So every Christian every day stands on the razor's edge of destruction or redemption. The truth is quite simple: the one who is content does not love. The one who is discontent loves, and the one who loves attempts to eradicate suffering by entering it rather than denying it. To suffer as God suffers is to refuse to accept life as it is. But we must be careful here. There is a world of difference between being discontent and being malcontent. One who is malcontent refuses to hope in a world beyond this world and so lives out hatred, despair, and cyni-

1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1967), 87-88.



cism. A person who is malcontent heaps suffering upon suffering. The discontent hopes in this world because there is a world beyond and so he or she lives out faith, hope, and love in the lives of other people. The discontented person is not a whiner who fails to imagine, but one who sorrows unto joy.

A few years back when my son was just a few months old, he became increasingly sick. He was not eating well, and as a consequence he was losing weight rapidly. For one week my wife and I were sent back and forth from doctor to specialist in an attempt to find the cause of his sickness. Each time we visited these physicians, we heard more discouraging news. At the time I was commuting between Denver and Philadelphia, where I was studying at Westminster Seminary. At one point, I needed to fly to Philadelphia for one day to take an important mid-term. My wife and I debated whether or not I should go, but in the end we decided I needed to take the exam; I could do very little back in Denver until we found out what was wrong.

I planned to fly into Philadelphia in the morning, take my exam, and catch the 5:35 p.m. flight back in time to join my family for dinner. With ten minutes left on my exam, I saw someone enter the front of the classroom and give a note to my professor. My heart sank and then began to pound as he made his way back to me. The note stated matter-of-factly that I needed to call home because the doctors had to rush my son to surgery to repair an intestinal blockage. I left immediately and tried to call home, but I could not reach anyone, even at the hospital. To make matters worse, I missed the direct flight back to Denver, so I had to be routed through Chicago on a later flight. I have never had a longer flight in my life. Finally, when I reached Chicago, I was paged and told where to call my wife. The good news was that they did not have to operate. The bad news was that they thought they had found the problem: the doctors thought that my son had a rare disease that might require removing his colon. We were to report to Children's Hospital the next morning for tests.

I was not prepared for what happened the next day in the hospital. After a battery of tests, we were told our son did not have the disease and probably had some kind of block that had worked itself out. Great news. But I will never forget the day for a very different reason: while waiting for his tests, we saw some very sick children—children who would not get well. The children had a deep sadness in their eyes, and their parents wore exhaustion and terror on their faces. Maybe out of weakness or maybe out of fear, I could no longer endure staying in that waiting room with those children. I left the room, found a hidden place, and burst into tears. For a few seconds I felt an inconsolable, desperate sadness. But within a very short time, my sadness turned to rage and rage toward God. *How can you look down on those children and not do something? How*

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*could you look down on the Holocaust of your chosen and their children? Why won't you do something?* I walked away from that day joyful that my son was well but deeply troubled over those children in the waiting room. Strangely, I also walked away thanking the God I doubted for the medical staff who had the courage to be discontented, to be present day after day in a starkly tragic world.

### The Tragedy of Christianity

Northrop Frye says that tragedy in the Bible is “ironic,” which means that tragedy is never an end in itself but always leads to a subtler, unforeseen truth. Thus when I speak of tragedy, I do not speak of tragedy that is final, ultimate, or the only stage in life. Ultimate tragedy is the evil one’s story; redeemed tragedy is God’s. Our lives then, if they reflect the big picture of the Bible, journey through a tragic, suffering world while yearning for a perfect world. But then, this is the theological rub, isn’t it? We sit around waiting for a perfect world or we miss the city built without hands because we are so busy building it here on earth. Much of the way we think as Christians attempts to bring heaven to this earth right now and in every situation because we deny the very real tragedy of suffering.

How should we live in tragedy then? If you agree with my foundational premise that God invites us to live as he does—in the full reality that tragedy is everywhere and a necessary part of the story—then we must answer the question, “How do I live well in this life?” Most importantly, we are discontent because *our world is not as it should be*. As we have seen, this means that we do not accept life as it is. Living back in Eden or ahead in heaven is ultimately an unreal life that saps the passion from our lives. This theology makes us content and calls us to nothingness. A Christian who is discontent, on the other hand, desperately seeks to join God in redeeming a tragic world, not dismissing a tragic world. When we are content we are satisfied, and this satisfaction ultimately slips into despair and arrogance. We lose moments of passionate connection and creativity. God invites us to live the questions and to yearn for resolution without dismissing the questions. Someone once said, “You can easily recognize false teachers by the fact that they know the answers to all the questions.”

Let me offer a very simple statement: suffering is the gateway to heaven. And I mean by heaven more than we normally think of suffering heaven. If we cannot accept suffering and the grief that accompanies it, then we are saying that grief is greater than the gospel. Yes, I am taking up an age-old topic that seems to be quite manageable by any moderately well-read Christian. But I want to approach the issue of human suffering from a very different vantage point—one that we rarely think from. When we speak of suffering, most of the time we mean human suffering. I want to think of suffering in this essay from God’s view—quite a presumptuous,

prodigious task, yet I believe our view of God's suffering will ultimately determine and dictate our view of human suffering. Our view of tragedy in God's purview will guide our own view of personal tragedy. The most pressing need here is to say that in the discussion of human suffering and tragedy we have invented a comfortable God who thinks of tragedy the way we do.

The problem is that most of us have a very skewed idea of how God looks at tragedy. We think of God very much the way the ancient Greeks did. He is *the unmoved mover*, the apathetic God. It is not that he does not care, but that he does not really *care* in his care. "Christian theology acquired Greek philosophy's ways of thinking in the Hellenistic world; and since that time most theologians have simultaneously maintained the passion of Christ, God's son, and the deity's essential incapacity for suffering—even though it was at the price of having to talk paradoxically about 'the sufferings of the God who cannot suffer.'"<sup>2</sup> We think of God as supremely rational, but rarely do we think of him as emotional. Even more so, we believe in a God who is quite content. In our obsession to create God in our own likeness, we have fashioned him to be a God who looks down on us with glib contentment. Our theology of suffering is really a theology of nonsuffering.

Have we American Christians very subtly replaced the God of the Bible with the Aristotelian god, the unmoved mover, the dispassionate god, the god who does not suffer? If this is true, is it because we are scandalized by the God of the Bible, the God who suffers, the God who is moved by our passions? Is this not the truly ironic tragedy of the Bible—that we have a God who not only allows or brings suffering into the world but also brings suffering into his heaven? God as the passionate God, then, is very discontent and his suffering is inconsolable. He is the God who lowered himself to the depths of suffering.

So how is it that our God can look down on us with contentment? I do not believe in a God who merely observes our tragedies with a cold reserve. I believe instead that he is a God who participates in our sufferings while we participate in his suffering of the cross. Does heaven really cancel out the suffering of the moment? Should we use the future to remove us from the present, or should the future increase the yearning for the day of the Lord?

Far too often our "faith" has neutered us, stripped us of passion, turned us into white-fleshed, pallid Christians who blithely accept the future as determined beyond us. The secular world understands a neglected truth that we do not: the world is potential, not just obstacle. Is this not the great sin of the contented modern church? It is the reason why I do not enjoy most Christian fiction. Such fiction is unsatisfying because most Christian writers weave the story with a heavy hand. It's the same feeling I get when I go to the

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2 Jurgens Moltmann, *The Trinity and Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), 22.



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movie theater and guess the plot in the first ten minutes. I know the ending, and immediately I am bored. Therefore conflict (which drives any good story) is hollow and fails to grip me. In the end, there is very little tragedy in American Christian fiction. Or perhaps there is tragedy, but the tragedy is resolved superficially.

This is one reason why I return to Dostoyevsky's writings. He does not bring tragedy to a closed, naïve resolution which in the end shuts down the questions of and yearning for God. He knows that the more a Christian grows, the more he or she feels the suffering of the world, and the more he or she searches for God and anticipates the day that is to come. Until that day, we are discontent over suffering and our sorrow is inconsolable. It is at this very juncture in our faith that we participate with God and he participates with us. It is here that we incarnate Paul's longing, "That I may know him and the fellowship of his sufferings."

### A Harmony Too Expensive

In Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan is the modern, rational atheist who rejects God because he rejects God's world. Ivan's atheism rises out of his constant struggle with God. He refuses to accept God but he cannot escape God. The spectacles of suffering and a God who would allow the suffering of children haunt him. He will not accept a harmony of life that justifies a child's tear.

In the final analysis, I do not accept this God-made world and, although I know it exists, I absolutely refuse to admit its existence. I want you to understand that it is not God that I refuse to accept, but the world that He has created—what I do not accept and cannot accept is the God-created world. However, let me make it clear that like a babe, I trust that the wounds will heal, the scars will vanish, that the sorry and ridiculous spectacle of man's disagreements and clashes will disappear like a pitiful mirage . . . at the moment universal harmony is achieved, something so magnificent will take place that it will satisfy every human heart . . . and enable everyone not only to forgive everything but also to justify everything that has happened to men. Well, that day may come; all this may come to pass—but I personally still do not accept this world. I refuse to accept it!

And while there is still time, I want to dissociate myself from it all; I have no wish to be a part of [the] eternal harmony. It's not worth one single tear of the martyred little girl who beat her breast with her tiny fist, shedding her innocent tears and praying to 'sweet Jesus' to rescue her in the stinking outhouse. . . . And those tears must be atoned for; otherwise there can be no harmony. But what could atone for those tears? How is it possible to atone for them?<sup>3</sup>

3 Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Andrew H. MacAndrew (New York: Bantam Books, 1981), 283, 295.

### Worthy Is the Lamb

In the video interview, *Facing Hate*, Bill Moyers interacts with Elie Weisel about the age-old problems of evil and hate. Weisel, as you may know, is a survivor of the Jewish Holocaust. He was forced to the Nazi death camps in 1943 and was the only member of his family who survived. Probably his best-known work on the Holocaust is the small, harrowing volume called *Night*. Though I mention the Holocaust in this essay, I do not want to dwell on it for the simple reason that it has been seen as more of a media event than the horrifying tragedy that questions the very essence of humanity in the twentieth century. I encourage all Christians to grapple with the reality of the Holocaust in their own lives—and reading *Night* would be a great but distressing beginning.

At one point in the video, Weisel tells the story of his release from the concentration camps. When certain Russians were released from the camp, they went into the nearest German town and waged a personal vengeance on the people there. Weisel states that he could not judge the Russians but retribution against the Germans was not his way. He instead gathered with fellow Jews and prayed the *kaddish*, the prayer for the dead. (Incidentally, they could not find the requisite ten people to pray the kaddish.) During their prayer, Weisel confesses that he had a question of God: “Is God worthy?” After the death and dismemberment of six million of God’s own children, is he worthy to hear the prayers of these survivors? To this day, I remember my thoughts of Weisel’s question. At first I winced and immediately said to myself, “You can’t say that! Of course he is worthy.” A few seconds later, though, a more troubling thought hovered around the edges of my mind. Deep down in my heart, I have asked this question many times. Weisel had the courage to ask it aloud and struggle with its implications. Is this not the question we all really ask: Is God worthy of our suffering?

My theology tells me, yes he is worthy—but what part of my theology tells me this? Is my answer to this question an effort to defend a God who does not defend himself from this question? My answer comes from a theology of suffering. The Father is worthy because he delivered his own son over to a world unworthy of his love. The Father did what in time past he had stopped Abraham from doing: he sacrificed his son for an undeserving people. But this is the story of the trinity. The Father gave himself by divesting himself of his son. He became destitute on our behalf. I have seen enough of the world and the people who inhabit it that I can answer quite candidly and forthrightly that the world is not worthy of *my* son. I have argued with a number of good people that had I been a father during the Vietnam War I would have begged my son to go to Canada—in fact, I would have sent him there. But this vigilant protection of the son was not the view of the Father. He gave over his own son to unjust war, a reprehensible cause, a civilization not worthy.

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If in eternity one day is a thousand years, then God is still suffering the crucifixion of his son. Because we as humans live temporal lives now, we can forget and move on and not necessarily live in the moment if we choose not to. Not so for God, who lives in eternity. He must suffer every pain of humanity every moment of his existence, and yet he enjoys every moment of joy. We have believed that for centuries the crucifixion is over in God's mind, and that the resurrection has canceled the cross. But this would mean that God lives very differently from the way he asks us to live. He asks us to live our lives taking up the cross while we rush toward the resurrection. He asks us to live as he does—with the suffering of the cross and the ecstasy of the resurrection in our hearts, not allowing the joy to resolve the sorrow or the sorrow to drown out the joy.

You needed his incarnation as much as I need it, though for an altogether different reason. You have always known man as he looks from the perspective of Godhead. But this does not give you the whole truth. It is suffering that teaches us to be human and from here we lead on to be godly. To be Christian means our godliness helps us come to a fuller expression of humanity—not to limit the image, the desiring, our inherent, inevitable humanity. From the cell on the other side of me a former judge tapped through the wall how he regrets all the prison sentences he has ever given. He passed sentence without knowing what it was to spend years in prison. You judged men without having lived and suffered and been tempted. You needed the experience of manhood. You were enriched by the experience of your Son becoming man.<sup>4</sup>

There will be remembrances in heaven. More importantly, there will be sorrow in heaven. The book of Revelation tells us that God will wipe away all tears in heaven, which means there must be tears there in the first place. All too often we project childish, naïve fantasies on heaven. We see heaven through the lens of Eden. Many of us want to return to Eden, when in truth God is calling us to heaven. With Eden there is no tragedy, no sorrow, no suffering. As a result, many Christians handle tragedy nobly but not with dignity, and we ask the same thing of our grieving brothers and sisters. With heaven there will be suffering, but it will be a suffering remembered and redeemed, never forgotten or denied.

This may be one of the most important distinctions between paganism and Christianity. A pagan mindset cannot handle a world full of guilt and suffering. The pagan must either deny it or revel in it. These philosophies are as old as Epicureanism and Stoicism, Isis and Osiris, Baal and Ashteroth. Thus every religion attempts in one form or another to return to the innocence of Eden again and again. Yes, Christianity began in Eden, but it ends in heaven. And heaven will not be innocence and naïveté. Heaven

4 Bonhoeffer, from  
*Sermons in  
Confinement.*

will be the fullest expression of truth up to this point in the journey of humanity—which now includes the knowledge of good and evil.

In conclusion, I return to Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan throughout the novel battles wits and soul with his brother, Alyosha, the mystical man of faith. As we have seen, Ivan very honestly reaches a terrifying conclusion in his discussions with Alyosha. He wants to believe in God, but how can he believe in a God who allows or creates such suffering in the world, especially the suffering of innocent children? Ivan, the nonbeliever, leads us into the right question: It is not "Where is God?" but "Who is this God?"

My own personal answer is multifaceted, and some days my questions overwhelm my answers. But in the midst of my questions, I do believe God is a suffering God and that his suffering is infinite as much as his joy is infinite. Therefore, he is a God who is discontent, and his suffering—at least for now—is inconsolable. Just like us, he too waits impatiently for the day that is coming. Perhaps as God participates in our lives, he refuses to be consoled until we are consoled. My image of God is as one who impatiently and dramatically paces back and forth as he longs for that day even more than we do. He is the Father who rises before daybreak and looks for the final return of his children. He will not sit still, he will look over the horizon again and again for the faint shadow of the returning one. In the meantime, even though he knows the scope of the human drama, he weeps with the Marys and the Marthas of this world who weep over death. He does not let his knowledge of the big picture wipe his tears away.

But what do *we* do with our suffering in the meantime? Once more I return to Dostoyevsky's Ivan. In the beginning of the novel, he does not accept a suffering world, nor merely waits for a future that would make sense of a hideous past. He wants to make sense of suffering in his lifetime; he wants to see the end now. "No, I want to see *with my own eyes* [italics mine] the lamb lie down with the lion and resurrected victim rise and embrace his murderer. I want to be here when everyone understands why the world has been arranged the way it is. It is on that craving for understanding that all human religions are founded. . . ."<sup>5</sup> Tragically, this is where American Christianity and atheism join ideological hands. The problem, though, is that demanding to see with our eyes *now* breeds cynicism in the atheist and contentment in the Christian. The atheist uses nonbelief to *build* a naïve world and the Christian uses faith to *inhabit* a naïve world. In both cases we do not care for our fellow human beings; we are not intimately responsible for the other. Ivan, the "humanitarian," would not step out of his way to help another human being. Ironically, Ivan had taken on the image of his own God—one who is apathetic and uncaring.

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5 Dostoyevsky, 294.

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HAVE INVENTED A  
COMFORTABLE  
GOD WHO  
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WAY WE DO.

In the end of the novel, however, Ivan comes to some kind of terms with his rationalization of a strange God. After seeing his rationalism run its brutal, irrational course, on his way back to his house he stumbles over a beggar freezing to death in the snow. He does something very unlike his nature: he stops and picks up the beggar, and he takes him to the nearest house where pays a man to help him carry the beggar to an inn. Ivan goes so far as to pay any expenses the beggar would incur. This subtle but moving scene evokes the memory of the good Samaritan.

The agony of suffering is a razor's edge. On the one hand, the profound mystery of suffering can lead to passivity arising out of cynicism or contentment. Or, it can make us mean-spirited in our attempt to force a more just world. In either case, we bring more destruction to a ruined world. We become the religious leader or the rationalist who passes by on the other side of the beggar. On the other hand, the mystery of suffering can lead to an active pouring out of ourselves. Is not this the madness of the gospel—that the destitute victim would be generous with other victims and even with enemies? Is this not God's approach to suffering? Out of the crucible of suffering emerges beauty, truth, and goodness. "No one can answer the theodicy question in this world, and no one can get rid of it. Life in this world means living with this open question, and seeking the future in which the desire for God will be fulfilled, suffering will be overcome, and what has been lost will be restored."<sup>6</sup> But for now we fiercely imagine great art in the lives of others by binding the wounds of our neighbors and repairing the world around us.

And then one day . . . one day we will surge toward the Father with the loss of Eden, the ache of the all the ages, and the desperate yearning for home in our hearts. And he too will surge toward us with the loss of Eden, the ache of all the ages, and the desperate yearning for home in *his* heart. Blessed be his name.

Nondum

*"Verily Thou art a God that hideth Thyself."*

—Isaiah 45: 15

God, though to Thee our psalm we raise  
No answering voice comes from the skies;  
To Thee the trembling sinner prays  
But no forgiving voice replies;  
Our prayer seems lost in desert ways,  
Our hymn in the vast silence dies.

We see the glories of the earth  
But not the hand that wrought them all  
Night to a myriad world gives birth,

6 Moltmann, 49.

Yet like a lighted empty hall  
Where stands no host at door or hearth  
Vacant creation's lamps appall.

We guess; we clothe Thee, unseen King,  
With attributes we deem are meet;  
Each in his own imagining  
Sets up a shadow in Thy seat;  
Yet know not how our gifts to bring,  
Where seek Thee with unsandalled feet.

And still th'unbroken silence broods  
While ages and while aeons run,  
As erst upon chaotic floods  
The Spirit hovered ere the sun  
Had called the seasons' changeful moods  
And life's first germs from death had won.

And still th'abysses infinite  
Surround the peak from which we gaze.  
Deep calls to deep, and blackest night  
Giddies the soul with blinding daze  
That dares to cast its searching sight  
On being's dread and vacant maze.

And Thou art silent, whilst Thy world  
Contentends about its many creeds  
And hosts confront with flags unfurled  
And zeal is flushed and pity bleeds  
And truth is heard, with tears impearled,  
A moaning voice among the reeds.

My hand upon my lips I lay;  
The breast's desponding sob I quell;  
I move along life's tomb-decked way  
And listen to the passing bell  
Summoning men from speechless day  
To death's more silent, darker spell.

Oh! til Thou givest that sense beyond,  
To show Thee that Thou art, and near,  
Let patience with her chastening wand  
Dispel the doubt and dry the tear;  
And lead me child-like by the hand  
If still in darkness and not in fear.

Speak! whisper to my watching heart  
One word—as when a mother speaks  
Soft, when she sees her infant start,

GOD  
PARTICIPATES IN  
OUR SUFFERINGS  
WHILE WE  
PARTICIPATE IN  
HIS SUFFERING  
OF THE CROSS.

THE SECULAR  
WORLD  
UNDERSTANDS A  
NEGLECTED  
TRUTH THAT WE  
DO NOT: THE  
WORLD IS  
POTENTIAL, NOT  
JUST OBSTACLE.

Till dimpled joy steals o'er its cheeks.  
Then, to behold Thee as Thou art,  
I'll wait till morn eternal breaks.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins

This Essay is my memorial to one man  
who did not accept life as it is.

I miss you—  
*Y viveré esperándote, Esperanza.*  
And I shall live in hopes of you, Hope.





