

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

May/June 1984

Christians Suffer—Part 3

Strength Out of Weakness - Why

Corrie ten Boom was a woman of strong faith and a radiant face. Why? She had suffered as most of us Americans can hardly imagine. She had responded to that suffering (in a concentration camp during World War II) with trust. Learning the depth of human helplessness and weakness, she turned to the only One who could be to her a strong tower. He was faithful to His promises. One of the most soul-fortifying pictures I have of her in my mind is of her getting up in the morning, standing up in her cell, and singing in a loud voice so that other prisoners could hear, "Stand up, Stand up for Jesus!"

"Oh, I could never have survived!" we say. The truth is that we could *if* the Lord allowed us to be put in her position, and *if* we looked to Him for the strength needed. I mean that we could "survive" spiritually. As Martin Luther wrote, "The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still."

It is the experience of weakness that puts us in the position of seeking another's strength. Paul had a "sharp physical pain which came as Satan's messenger to bruise" him. "This was to save me from being unduly elated. Three times I begged the Lord to rid me of it, but his answer was: "My grace is all you need; power comes to its full strength in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:7-9 New English Bible)

The refusal of grace is what causes breakdown. Acknowledge weakness, confess need, and come in humility to Him who promises to supply plenty of grace. It's all we need.

Visit to Dohnavur

Because I have been invited to write a new biography of Amy Carmichael of Dohnavur, last February Lars and I visited the work she founded in South India. We arrived on their monthly prayer day in time to attend the evening meeting. The House of Prayer is a beautiful terra cotta-colored building with red tile roof and a tower which holds the chimes that play a hymn at 6 A.M. and 9 P.M. There is no furniture inside except a few chairs for older ones and decrepit foreigners such as we who aren't used to sitting on the floor. Everyone filed in in perfect silence, bare feet moving noiselessly over polished red tile floors, and sat in rows according to age, the tiny ones up front, dressed in brightly colored cotton dresses. Behind them sat the next age group, girls in skirts and blouses; then came those in skirts, blouses, and half-saris; finally the *accals* (older ones who look after the younger) in blue or purple or green saris. All had smoothly combed and oiled black hair, many of them with flowers in it. An Indian man played the little pump organ while they sang several traditional hymns in English, as well as songs written by "Amma" (the Tamil term of respect, used for Amy Carmichael). There was Scripture reading, then a prayer of thanksgiving for the new child who had just come, a little girl of two whose mother could not keep her. Her new mother, an *accal*, carried her to the platform and stood holding her while they prayed and then sang "Jesus Loves Me."

At another service in the House of Prayer, Lars and I sat in the tiny balcony which leads up to the tower. We looked down on the lovely scene, made even brighter this time because the smallest children had been given colored flags to wave in time to the music of certain songs, a custom instituted by Amma which I think should be adopted by every Sunday School and church, for it

enables the tiny ones to participate by doing something even when they are too young to know the words by heart. Older ones played tambourines, triangle, and bells, while one drummed softly with a leather flap on the mouth of a clay pot.

I was allowed to use Amma's room for my reading and writing. Called the Room of Peace, it is spacious, has high ceilings and tiled floors, many doors and windows opening onto a verandah on three sides where there is a walk-in bird cage. A brick runway leads from the verandah to a platform under the trees where, following the accident which disabled her for the rest of her life, Amy Carmichael used to be taken to sit in the cool of the evening. Glass-doored bookcases, filled with her beloved books, stood around the walls of the room. Above them hung paintings of snowcaps by her friend, Dr. Howard Somervell of Everest fame. There were hand-carved and painted wooden texts, "Good and Acceptable and Perfect" (referring to the lesson she found so hard to learn after the accident, of acceptance of the will of God), "A Very Present Help," "By one who loveth is another kindled" (from St. Augustine), and, the largest of all, blue letters on teak, "God hath not given us the spirit of fear." Also on the walls are a mounted tiger head, a pendulum clock, and one of the very few photographs ever taken of Amma.

In that Room of Peace I was glad not to be wearing shoes (nobody wears shoes in the houses of Dohnavur)—it seemed holy ground as I studied the marginal notes and underlinings of her favorite books, read the handwritten notebooks in which she explained for members of the Dohnavur Fellowship the "pattern shewn," the principles and practices which the Lord had given her at the inception of her work. I thumbed through worm-eaten ledgers, clippings, photographs—priceless documents that trace the day-by-day history of a task accepted for the Lord, the rescuing of little girls from temple prostitution and little boys from dramatic societies in which they were used for evil purposes. In later years the work included children in other kinds of need.

The most powerful witness to the quality of the service Amma rendered is to be seen in the Indian men and women who were reared there and who have remained to lay down their lives for others. Pungaja, for example, lives in the compound called Loving Place, where some of the

mentally handicapped are cared for.

"I have no professional training," she told me. "The Holy Spirit gives me new wisdom each day to deal with them. Some are like wild animals, but the Lord Himself is my helper. I can't see on one side, but even in my weakness He has helped me. 1 Corinthians says that God has chosen the weak things of the world to confound the mighty, that no flesh should glory in his presence.

"One day I went to Amma with a burdened heart, but when she hugged me all my sorrow went.

"What work are you doing?' Amma asked me. I told her.

"Do you find it difficult?' I said yes.

"These are soldiership years,' she said.

"Now it is my joy to serve these very difficult people."

She spoke quietly, looking out into the courtyard where some of them went back and forth. She had lost an eye as a child, and her face revealed suffering, but I saw the joy she spoke of written there, the joy of a laid-down life. I saw it in very many faces in Dohnavur. They do not mention that there are no diversions, no place to go, no time off (except two weeks per year—I asked about that). They do their work for Him who came not to be ministered unto.

We came away smitten, thinking of Amma's own words from her little book *If*, "then I know nothing of Calvary love." The meaning of the living sacrifice, the corn of wheat, the crucified life, had been shown to us in twentieth century flesh and blood. Please pray that we may never be the same again. Pray, too, for help as I try to write the book. If I try to do it alone, I shall most certainly fail. It is divine help of the sort Pungaja draws on that I need.

Elisabeth Elliot's newest book *Passion and Purity* was excerpted in the January/February issue. Introduced at the 1983 Campus Crusade Convention in Kansas City, It sold several thousand copies at the conference alone. To purchase a copy, write: the Servant Book Express, P.O. Box 8617, 840 Airport Blvd., Ann Arbor, MI 48107.

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Can Birth Be Wrong?

The wildest science fiction cannot exceed in outrage some of the legal precedents that have been set in recent years. More than a year ago I read in a magazine (*Advance*, Spring 1983) about "wrongful birth" suits, in which parents sue a physician because their child was born as a result of practitioner negligence, for example a failed vasectomy, failed abortion (a "failed" abortion, don't forget, means one in which the child destined for the scrap heap happens to be born alive and kicking, so to speak), or failure by the physician to provide parents with adequate contraceptive methods.

There are also "wrongful life" suits in which the *child* sues the physician because he would have been better off not to be born at all. His very life is "wrongful." The child, in other words, had a right not to be born. How, exactly, does the court measure damages in the case of a healthy child, though there have been awards if there were defects.

The only good news in this appalling article was that in a wrongful birth case in Illinois in 1979 the court held that the birth of a healthy child is an esteemed right and not a compensable wrong. In England, at least up until the spring of 1983, the decision has been that entry into life should not be the basis for legal action.

"O Lord my heart is not proud, nor are my eyes haughty," wrote the psalmist (131:1), "I do not busy myself with great matters or things to marvelous for me." I am afraid we tamper far too much with the mysteries of life and death, instead of leaving them to Him who holds the keys.

Ever Been Bitter?

Sometimes I've said, "O Lord, you wouldn't do this to me, would you? How could you Lord?" I can recall such times later on, and realize that my perspective was skewed. A scripture passage which helps me rectify it is Isaiah 45: "Will the pot contend with the potter, or the earthenware with the hand that shapes it? Will the clay ask the potter what he is making? . . . Thus says the Lord,

would you dare question me concerning my children, or instruct me in my handiwork? I alone, I made the earth and created man upon it." He knows exactly what He is doing. I am *clay*. The word humble comes from the root word *humus*, earth, clay. Let me remember that when I question God's dealings. I don't understand Him, but then I'm not asked to understand, only to trust. Bitterness dissolves when I remember the kind of love with which He has loved me—He gave Himself for me. He gave Himself for me. *He gave Himself for me*. Whatever He is doing now, therefore, is not cause for bitterness. It has to be designed for good, because he loved me and gave Himself for me.

Letters

"It's six A.M., the baby's been up, fed, diapered. There's nothing like a crying, hungry baby with an oozing diaper to jolt you out of your dreams. Normally I get in bed as soon as I can and try to squeeze every last minute of sleep possible. But today was different. I decided to read God's word before the day started (that's when I need it) not after it's over. You're an example of the power of scripture in one's life. I want to thank you for taking time to speak God's clear simple message. . ."

(following several paragraphs in which the woman describes her childhood with a paranoid schizoid mother and later her marriage to the leader of a Christian organization. Her husband proved to be both homosexual and financially irresponsible.)

"Now I am in the middle of an annulment, putting the pieces of my life back together. Why do I share this? you may ask. Because for the first time I see that I cannot weigh God's love for me based on circumstances. It is *not* God's fault. God's working in me is to humble me, to test me, and to make me prosper. I realize deep within me that I truly want the will of God, not mine, and will again pray, *whatever the cost, Lord*. I see developing within me a deep inner strength only developed through suffering, and I'm willing to suffer again if I can manifest the deep inner strength I see. . .in our Lord. God is sufficient to meet our needs, and does truly love us.

"Trust and obey, for there's no other way."

Questions and Answers

Considering the fact that you worked with Indians in the jungles of Ecuador and now live in an academic community in Massachusetts, you obviously have experienced many changes. What things should one keep in mind when facing change?

Circumstances make no difference at all to:

1. Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and forever
2. His power, always available through prayer
3. His purpose for me—that I reflect His image, live for his glory
4. My job—to love Him and make Him loved

Paul wrote, "I have learned to find resources in myself whatever my circumstances. I know what it is to be brought low, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have been very thoroughly initiated into the human lot with all its ups and downs—fullness and hunger, plenty and want. I have strength for anything through Him who gives me power." (Phil. 4:11-13, New English Bible)

I have found, too, that when the Lord opens a new door, He closes the one behind. I must leave it closed, forget what is behind, press on toward the goal, "the prize of the high calling of God." Those who refuse to let go of the past stultify present opportunities, and stunt spiritual growth.

The rules Andrew Murray made for himself have helped me:

1. He brought me here, it is by His will I am in this strait place: in that fact I will rest.
2. He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace to behave as His child.

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3. He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends for me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow.
4. In His good time he can bring me out again—how and when He knows. Let me say I am here:
 - 1) by God's appointment
 - 2) in His keeping
 - 3) under his training
 - 4) for His time.

We want to thank those who contributed to the continuation of our newsletter and those who responded to our request for suggested changes. We're following some of those suggestions.

Travel Schedule May/June 1984

June 3-4 St. Louis, Missouri, Central Presbyterian Church, 314-727-2777

June 12 Wenham, Massachusetts, Gordon College Writers Conference, 617-927-2300

June 9-13 Columbia, South Carolina, Columbia Bible College. Course entitled "Christian Womanhood: Gifts, Responsibilities, Freedom." Larry McCullough 803-754-4100

June 14-15 Marion, Indiana, Wesleyan Church Festival of Missions, 317-674-3301

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