

The Elisabeth Elliot Newsletter

November/December 1984

Crowned Because He Suffered

Each newsletter of 1984 has had a meditation on some of the why's of a Christian's suffering. Now it is nearly Christmas time. We don't usually think of suffering during this glad season if we can help it. "It's Jesus' birthday!" we tell tiny tots, and we set about making cookies and gifts and trimming the house and the tree.

The very joyfulness of Christmas makes it especially hard for those who suffer. It seems incongruous that celebrations should go on as always when one's own roof has fallen in. Whatever the cause of the roof's collapse, Christmas can be far more than just a birthday. That birthday is the Feast of the Incarnation, of the Word made flesh—the happy morning when the myths about gods coming to earth in the form of men actually came true. This was "glorious news of great joy," not only for poor shepherds but for all people. Can it be *that* for someone two thousand years later who is nailed to a bed by pain, or who has lost something most precious, or been humiliated to the very dust? Perhaps it can if we think of what that glorious news entailed for the baby Himself. Richard Crashaw (1613-1649) described it far more beautifully than I can:

That the Great Angel-blinding Light should
shrink
His blaze to shine in a poor Shepherd's eye;
That the unmeasured God so low should sinke,
As Pris'ner in a few poor rags to lye;
That from his Mother's Breast he milk should
drinke,

Who feeds with Nectar Heaven's faire family,
That a vile Manger his low Bed should prove
Who in a Throne of stars thunders above;
That He whom the Sun serves, should faintly
peepe
Through clouds of Infant Flesh! That He, the
old
Eternall Word should be a Child, and weepe;
That He who made the fire, should fear the
cold,
That Heaven's high Majesty His Court should
keepe
In a clay cottage, by each blast control'd;
That Glories self should serve our Griefs and
feares,
And free Eternity submit to years,
Let our overwhelming wonder be.

Crashaw shows us a little of the relinquishment, the limitation, the humiliation that it meant for God to become a baby. "In Jesus we see one who for a short while was made lower than the angels, crowned now with glory and honor because he suffered death" (Heb 2:9). "We are God's heirs and Christ's fellow-heirs, if we share his sufferings now in order to share his splendor hereafter" (Rom 8:17). Let us measure our sufferings by the sufferings of the Son of Man. Let us think, then, of the glory and honor He received *because* He wailed as a newborn in the straw of a stable and was fixed with nails to a cross. Let us think of His glory and honor and remember the incredible promise that that glory will be ours too. Ours? Yes, ours—we are fellow-heirs, if we share his sufferings. His splendor hereafter is what they are for. Let us think on these things, think on the crown, and have a very merry Christmas.

A New Medical Breakthrough and an Old Question*

Some time ago I read of a new medical triumph involving unborn twins. Amniocentesis had shown that one of them had Down's syndrome. The mother decided she did not want that child, so with the simple expedient of piercing the heart of the baby with a long needle, it was killed in the womb. She carried the twins to term and delivered one child alive—the one she wanted to keep—and one child dead—the one she didn't want to keep. This was hailed as a remarkable breakthrough. I would ask you to pause for a moment here and consider this question: what was it, exactly, that was killed? What was it that was not killed? The answer to both questions, of course, is—a child. They were both children. They were twins. I used plain, ordinary words to tell the story—the words the news report used. Nothing ambiguous. Nothing incendiary.

I read the following week in the same magazine about another medical breakthrough. This time doctors had used an instrument inserted into a womb not to kill a child but to save one. This child had a serious heart anomaly which they were able to correct with intrauterine surgery. Can any honest and reasonable person fail to make the comparison here? In the second case, the instrument in the surgeon's hand enabled the tiny heart to keep on working. In the first case, the needle in the surgeon's hand made the heart quit working. What, exactly, should we call that? The intrauterine surgery was called *lifesaving*, because they fixed a baby's defective heart. What language are we allowed to use when we speak of destroying a heart that's working perfectly? There is a simple and obvious word, but we are not allowed to use it. Well, what about life-destroying? Is that permissible for this neat and efficient

technique? Well, not really. Because the word life is explosive. Life is not relevant here. It's the mother's life that we are supposed to consider, nobody else's. The other isn't a life—not one worth living, anyway, not one worth the mother's suffering for. So we must not use the ordinary words. They're too emotional. They're loaded. The fact is they stopped the heart. That's all. Just made it quit beating.

I was glad that the writer of the article on the baby whose heart was corrected acknowledged the possibility that fetal surgery might raise an ethical question which the medical world thought it had laid to rest. Might it be necessary, in view of these advances, to ask all over again whether a fetus is a person?

This is the issue today. It is, in the final analysis, the only question that needs to be considered when we speak of the unborn. Is the thing disposable? Is it an object with no life of its own, a bit of tissue which belongs to a woman who has the right to do with it what she chooses? If she needs it and wants it, she keeps it. If she doesn't need it and doesn't want it, she throws it away. So what's all the shouting about?

Truthfulness is the willingness to accept facts. Truth-tellers are always regarded as either ridiculous, or so dangerous as to deserve death. "No truth," wrote Hannah Arendt, "that crosses someone's profit, ambition, or lust, is permissible. Unwelcome facts possess an infuriating stubbornness that nothing can move except plain lies."

Here are the unwelcome facts. We were talking about children: the twin who was saved, the child with the defective heart who was also saved, and the twin whose heart was pierced with a needle. They were children. Choices were made regarding those children: deliberate, conscious choices. One, to allow a child to live. Another, to intervene surgically so that a child might live who would otherwise die. (Would the surgeon who performed that operation have dreamed of telling the mother that her baby was not a person? He saved its life,

* The text of a talk given at a coalition for life rally in the State House in Boston. The chief organizer and chairman was Jeanine Graf. (Other speakers included Archbishop Bernard Law.)

and the mother was grateful.) But in the other case, what was the choice? It was to kill a child. These are the unwelcome facts, but they are infuriatingly stubborn. They will not go away. It was a child. It was killed. Nothing will move those facts except lies.

I ask you earnestly to look at the little creature with eyes and hands and beating heart, held in that safest of places, the mother's womb. No woman who holds such a thing within her doubts that she holds a child. No doctor who extracts it by whatever swift and putatively safe means can deny that what he extracts is a human being, and that what he does is to kill it.

I ask you for God's sake to look at the truth. And I ask you, finally, to think about what Jesus said: "I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." Jesus will not forget.

Aucas

Last January I reported that the Auca Indians of Ecuador had been granted title to a certain portion of what had been thought of as their territory. I am told that what the government "gave" them is actually one thirty-second of their original land. I also hear that the New Testament has been translated, only rough-draft so far, into the Auca language.

Come, Holy Spirit

My friend Mari Jones, wife of a Welsh shepherd, not only helps John with the sheep. She is also a hard-working farm wife in every way, and a harpist and a poet. Every letter she writes to me contains some lovely "figure of the True." This was in her most recent: "When the tide is out every shrimp has its pool, but when the tide comes in there is no trace of the different pools—the Coming in of the Tide is our greatest need in Wales." Yes, and in America, too.

Recommended Reading

James I. Packer: *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (Fleming H. Revell, 285 pp.)

An eminently lucid and practical study of the Holy Spirit and His work. Many things which had confused me about the life of holiness, the fruits of the Spirit, legalism, the Spirit's gifts, and the application of these truths in our own time, were wonderfully sorted out and clarified for me in this book. Drop everything and get it. Here's a sample:

"All the Christian's human involvements and commitments in this world must be consciously based on his awareness of having been separated from everything and everyone in creation to belong to his Creator alone. Ordered, costly, unstinting commitment for the Lord's sake to spouse, children, parents, employers, employees, and all one's other neighbors, on the basis of being radically detached from them all to belong to God—Father, Son, and Spirit—and to no one else, is the unvarying shape of the authentically holy life. Other lives may be exceedingly religious, but to the extent that they fail to fit this description, they are not holy to the Lord." (pp. 104-105)

Prayer Requests

- Pray for the Inter-Varsity Missionary Convention to be held at Urbana, Illinois, between Christmas and New Year's. Seventeen thousand students are expected.

Pray for them and for the speakers and missionary organizations that will be presenting their work.

- Pray for the newly elected president of our country.

- Pray for Jeanine Graf who has a daily call-in radio show in Boston. She is a fearless Christian who speaks out clearly and powerfully against many forms of evil, and provides a platform for other Christians to do so too. The station is WEZE. Jeanine is on from 1-3 P.M.

Questions and Answers

I have a question about submission. I agree that a wife should submit to her husband, but is there a point of carrying it so far that the wife loses her identity?

I don't think so. The submission the Bible talks about is voluntary, wholehearted, and *for the Lord's sake*. Did Jesus lose His identity by submitting Himself to the Father? You'll say, "Oh, but it's a different thing when you have to submit to a sinner!" Yes, it is, in one sense, yet when we do so in obedience to the Lord (see Eph 5:22; 1 Pt 3:1, 5:5; Ti 2:5) we will not only not lose our identity, but we will in fact find it. "Whoever cares for his own safety is lost, but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, he will find his true self" (Mt 16:25).

TO GO FORWARD IS TO DIE
TO GO BACK IS TO DIE
LET US GO FORWARD

—Zulu warrior's motto

A New House

It's finished. Well, not entirely, but enough for us to move into in late July, and, three weeks later we had a kitchen. We cooked on a hot plate in the bathroom in the meantime. Today the carpenters left, and I miss them. I don't know how I'll get along without those three delightful workmen. They worked together in a harmony

that was wonderful to see, and were endlessly cheerful and patient and ready to make changes and add extras as we went along. "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." It wasn't done on *my* time schedule, but I believe the Lord built it. We are very, very, very grateful. Lars, bless his heart, is still painting. For about ten (sometimes twelve) hours a day he paints— every inch of every room, inside and outside, three coats, all by himself. He wants the job done right!

Travel Schedule

December 1984/February 1985

December 4 Little Rock, Arkansas, First Baptist Church. Mr. Chris Elkins, 501-227-0010

December 27-31 Urbana, Illinois, Intervarsity Missionary Convention. 608-257-8855

January 14-17 Kerrville, Texas, Laity Lodge Women's Retreat. Howard Hovde, 512-896-2505

January 17-18 Uvalde, Texas, Women of St. Philip's Church. Mrs. Phyllis McNelly, 512-278-5236

January 19-20 Burnaby, British Columbia, Mission Fest '85. Richard Dodding, 604-430-4154

February 19 San Jose, California, Bethel Church. Marylyn Drake, 408-246-6790

February 22-24 Sedona, Arizona, Women's Retreat. Mary Malouf, 602-840-0024

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