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**What Kind of Response Can Pastoral Theology Give
in the Midst of Suffering?—A Ritual Approach**

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Introduction

Suffering is not an easy topic to talk about, even though it is a natural part of life. Suffering is even more difficult to discuss when one asks how to respond to suffering, which is the topic of this chapter. Acknowledging its difficulty, we suggest ritual as a way that pastoral theology can be helpful for those who are in the midst of suffering. We examine the various roles of ritual in pastoral responses to human suffering:

- Establishing order amidst chaos and confusion,
- Reaffirming meaning of life,
- Bringing community together for support,
- Enabling to cope with ambivalence, and
- Encountering mystery in the presence of grace and hope.

These are a few of the functions that rituals facilitate.

Since ritual is biblically rooted, we will examine how suffering is understood in the Bible, as a witness of people of faith wrestling with God, who is “preoccupied with human and creational suffering.”² We also note the crucifixion of Jesus as a symbol of suffering and salvation, and we suggest ways to move beyond suffering understood as sacrifice and focus on the resurrection as the locus of salvation.

In that vein this essay theologically explores the relationship between suffering and sin and the responsibility people have and do not have for suffering in the world. Naming injustice is important to adequately deal with suffering. Human agency of hope and solidarity in seeking justice are stressed as crucial to bring about healing.

² Douglas John Hall, *God and Human Suffering: An Exercise in the Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 16.

A. The Cross as the Symbol of Suffering and Salvation³

In Christian doctrine, the crucifixion as the symbol of Jesus' suffering has long been interpreted in sacrificial terms to the point that, for many Christians, the statement that the death of Jesus was not a sacrifice seems nonsensical. It is no secret that crucifixion was a particularly painful, violent, and shameful form of execution suffered by many people in the ancient Roman Empire, including Jesus.

The early Christian fixation on the meaning of the death of Jesus is understandable in view of the traumatic impact of his execution on his disciples. However, even in the N.T., there is an important body of scripture that does not exclusively focus on the death in salvation, but that interprets the resurrection as the locus of salvation. This rings precisely true in Luke-Acts, a two-volume set that takes up about a third of the N.T. canon. As N.T. scholar Mark Alan Powell notes, "Luke finds the basis for salvation to be manifest in Jesus' life and in his resurrection/exaltation."⁴ In the Lukan writings, the crucifixion is not denied, but it is not given any soteriological significance. For example, in Peter's speech in the temple, he summarizes the arrest and execution of Jesus without explicitly mentioning the crucifixion:

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. (Acts 3:13–16)

The healing of a lame man that precedes the speech is likewise connected with the resurrection (Acts 3:1–9), and the salvific power of faith in the name of Jesus. There is no emphasis on suffering, sacrifice, or atonement. Throughout Luke-Acts: "Jesus is Messiah and Lord on earth during his life (Luke 2:11), and he is officially installed as Messiah and Lord in heaven by virtue of his resurrection and

³ A fuller examination of sin, salvation, suffering and sacrifice, see Mary Ann Beavis and HyeRan Kim-Cragg, *What Does the Bible Say?—A Critical Conversation with Popular Culture in a Biblically Illiterate World* (Eugene: Cascade, 2017), chapters 2 and 10.

⁴ Mark Alan Powell, "Salvation in Luke-Acts," *World and Word* 12, no. 1 (1992): 8.

exaltation (Acts 2:36). As such, he has the right to bestow salvation on whomever he chooses.”⁵

In short, we attend to the cross not to glorify suffering but to see its telos (inner aim) that points to life, the abundance of life, which is experienced sometimes only by way of an encounter with the reality of suffering that negates life. Suffering is, thus, an affirmative part of life, rather than the antithesis of life. The suffering of Jesus never condones our suffering or the world’s suffering. His suffering neither stops our suffering from happening nor numbs our feeling of suffering. But speaking of a Christology, Jesus’ humanity is determined by his suffering. To be more precise, the fact that he suffered just like us substantiates his full humanness and his full divineness—God incarnate. This human condition of suffering by Jesus enables humans and God to be in communion. “Emmanuel,” God is suffering with us: God as “co-sufferer” is confessed thanks to Jesus, as Canadian systematic theologian Douglas John Hall contends.⁶ The belief that Jesus suffered and that God in Jesus continues to suffer with us, therein, the very sharing enables a healing process. Jesus being “co-sufferer” generates a power of “compassion,” even a contagious care that comforts and may even change the lives of the ones who are suffering and the ones who share their sharing.

Hall further articulates this compassion by connecting the meaning of the Hebrew word *hesed*, expressed as a compassionate sufferer, the Holy One “who is not powerless but whose power expresses itself unexpectedly in the weakness of love.”⁷ The practicing of *hesed*, faithfully, and seriously following the teaching of God in Jesus, leads to “the cost of discipleship” clothed in costly hope rather than cheap grace.⁸ This hope is rooted in faith, a faith that enables people to be in solidarity to accompany one another and to face real suffering because they know that God suffers with them. Hall writes, “Paradoxical and even offensive as it may seem,

⁵ Powell, “Salvation in Luke-Acts,” 9.

⁶ Hall, *God and Human Suffering*, 36.

⁷ Hall, 158.

⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Macmillan, 1959).

solidarity with its suffering may be a better sign of hope for the world.”⁹

B. Is Suffering Attributed to God?

This question can be put another way: Is suffering related to sin? That is, does God chastise human beings for committing sin? Is the suffering from AIDS, for example, God’s punishment for homosexual people’s sinful act? Do children become sick because their parents are divorced? People who answer “yes” to these questions exemplify a pattern of thought that sees suffering as a result of sin. Sickness is therefore a sign that we need to repent. Or, if it is caused by someone else’s sin, there is a legitimate reason to blame others. But, of course, these responses are neither theological nor pastoral.

In the area of disability, American liturgical homiletical theologian Kathy Black provides six theological explanations connecting disability with sin that may result in further suffering rather than healing:

1. Disability is God’s punishment for the sin of the disabled person or their parents;
2. Disability is God’s test of faith and character;
3. Disability is an opportunity of relationship with God;
4. Disability presents an opportunity for the power of God to be made manifest;
5. Suffering through disability is redemptive; and
6. Disability manifests the mysterious omnipotence of God’s will which we cannot know.¹⁰

Black says that this kind of theology portrays God as a great puppeteer, as if God is in total control of all the sufferings in the world and also causes those sufferings.¹¹

German systematic theologian Dorothee Sölle also contests such theology calling it “theological sadism,” an approach which is inseparably connected to “Christian masochism.”¹² As long as we believe in theological sadism, we fall into Christian masochism. These two terms feed each other. Often apparent in abusive

⁹ Hall, *God and Human Suffering*, 147.

¹⁰ Kathy Black, *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 23.

¹¹ Black, *Healing Homiletic*, 34.

¹² Dorothee Sölle, *Suffering* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 9, 22.

relationships, the perpetrator can be the perpetrator only *when* and *because* the victim allows that to happen. This does not suggest that victims of abuse are allowing themselves to be abused willingly. It rather points to the vicious cycle that causes the victim to be tangled in this situation. Unless God intentionally creates this vicious cycle, human relationships with God should never be abusive.

Therefore, human suffering cannot be fully attributed to God, and the human predicament cannot fully be accounted for as one's own responsibility. If one suffers, it is not necessarily someone's fault. Soelle as a Reformed theologian notes that the Reformation strengthened theological sadism by stressing Christian submission. It is important to be acutely aware that all too often theological sadism and Christian masochism continue to operate in Christian life, and they only produce insensitivity and indifference to suffering and perpetuate the contempt for humanity and creation. It is imperative that we both avoid this trap and find a way to offer comfort in times of suffering.

C. Ritual Attending to Human Suffering

Christians often turn to ritual as a source of comfort and liberation. American pastoral theologian Elaine Ramshaw connects pastoral care and ritual, showing how especially corporate and public ritual cares for individuals, the community, and the world. She laments the unhelpful division between liturgical ritualists and pastoral counsellors and their biased understanding of each other. One is often viewed as distancing and insensitive to the specific needs of the one who is suffering, while the latter is accused of being overly privatized and lacking depths of tradition and corporate memory. One way to mend this division, Ramshaw claims, is through ritual that attends to human suffering with the same intensive focus as pastoral counselling.¹³

Ramshaw suggests five goals of ritual which are directly related to human suffering:

1. Establish order,
2. Reaffirm meaning,
3. Bond community,

¹³ Elaine Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1987).

4. Handle ambivalence, and
5. Encounter mystery.¹⁴

Inevitably, and admittedly as humans, we need to make sense out of suffering. This is especially the case when suffering occurs unexpectedly. Many accidents and natural disasters come without the warning. When unexpected things happen, people panic, and those who are in the midst of suffering experience chaos. “Why and How could this happen” are the questions that quickly rise as we seek to make sense out of suffering. Ritual establishes order, helping people in suffering to make sense by ordering their experience.

However, ritual does not mean that one should deny the reality of chaos. American pastoral theologian Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore suggests that the chaos of care should be redeemed as a site for God’s good news.¹⁵ The reality of chaos must be faced with care. Just as ordinary human experiences are sacred, chaos as a part of human experience and human life must be fully embraced as affirmative.

This point is closely related to the second goal of ritual, namely—to reaffirm meaning. Despite their suffering, people know that they are loved by God. They want to affirm that life is precious and worth living, in spite of what they are going through. Ritual helps to affirm this. Even a small and mundane matter is important and can help to engage theological issues of suffering, as feminists have taught us.¹⁶ Grandiose and abstract ideas rarely conjure up much healing, but more often the seemingly insignificant ordinary matters are what reconnect people’s spirit with their senses, illuminating profound wisdom for life and healing in suffering.

The third goal of ritual has to do with community and strongly highlights the value of ritual compared to pastoral counselling, which is often done individually in a private setting. While suffering is experienced individually and cannot be fully shared by others, an individual can be communally supported in their suffering through ritual. The suffering of another can never be completely understood

¹⁴ Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care*, 22.

¹⁵ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, *In the Midst of Chaos: Caring for Children as Spiritual Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), xiv.

¹⁶ Joyce Ann Mercer, “Feminist and Womanist Practical Theology,” in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 98.

or shared. However, there are elements of suffering that can be understood and shared between individuals or in groups. Those who have lost a child, for example, may find a source of comfort and strength to share in a ritual that acknowledges loss with others who have related experiences of loss. Ritual enables them to bond in community and as a community.

The fourth goal is related to the first goal. When suffering hits people, they are confused; their ordinary lives are interrupted and become convoluted. They feel lost. The questions of “Why” and “How” arise, and then they realize that these questions cannot be easily, certainly, or clearly answered. People begin to realize the ambivalence of life. Ritual helps handle this ambivalence. Such ritual does not provide a sure pathway to get out of confusing and messy reality, yet it acknowledges confusion and suffering, which is a necessary first step to any healing. It creates a safe space to name unresolved emotions, feelings of loss, confusion, anger, uncertainty, even that nebulous anxiety, and more. Once these negative and difficult emotions are let out, people who are in suffering begin to see that there is yet still much to be thankful for. That is when people also start to encounter mystery, something beyond their experience that is yet somehow still in relation to us. Ritual through symbols and silence, listening and singing, help people encounter mystery.

Attention to the presence of suffering, which often leads to an encounter with mystery, affirms that suffering is a part of life. While suffering caused by greed, injustice, and oppression must be challenged to be eradicated, suffering as a part of the human struggle in life must also, on some level, be accepted and recognized. One can neither trivialize it nor be overwhelmed by it. “Life is not given all at once, life must be lived, risked, and achieved.”¹⁷ Life is given *in time* as a process. That is why life is often called a *journey*. But this journey has no turning back. We may wish that today was already tomorrow or that we could turn back time or turn back the clock and live in yesterday, but we cannot change the course of time or the fact of our mortality. While one may want to avoid suffering and live in denial, still, suffering and death are a part of life and a certain portion of our destiny.

¹⁷ Hall, *God and Human Suffering*, 79.

That is why life-cycle rituals are important. Ritual helps people find meaning as each person goes through different stages of life, marking such crucial steps in life as graduation, marriage, getting the first job, giving birth, all of which are to be celebrated. However, life-cycle rituals become even more important when people go through difficult stages of life, whether they choose to or not. These stages include, but are not limited to divorce, losing one's job, miscarriage, losing one's parents, losing one's partner, and losing one's children. Crisis stages also include losing parts of one's own body or a function of the body due to accidents, illness, or simply being old (losing hearing or sight or mobility or memory).

American liturgical theologian Karen Westerfield Tucker was at a loss for words when she lost her baby during pregnancy, calling it “a silent tragedy.” She became more desperate when she learned that there was no ritual that speaks to her suffering. She searched for her church's worship book (United Methodist) and found out that there was no service for families that had lost a child during pregnancy. In response, not only did she write about the need for ritual as a pastoral response to help with her own suffering, she also helped create rituals for those in her Christian community who had the same life experience.¹⁸ Her loss gave birth to a new liturgy that became a service of hope and healing. In this service from *United Methodist Book of Worship*, scripture passages that describe the loss of a child were chosen. 2 Samuel 12:15–23, for example, points to David's utter despair at the death of his child. In the ritual, the pastor, family, and friends are invited to speak the feelings of their loss. This verbal witness is followed by the ritual of the exchange act of signing faith, hope, and love.¹⁹ In the service of death and resurrection for a stillborn child, a prayer includes speaking the name of the baby who died, as well as the names of the mother who carried the baby in her womb, along with the father and other family members who are mourning. The opening prayer conveys the expressions of the

¹⁸ Karen Westerfield Tucker, “A Pastoral Response to a Silent Tragedy,” *The Christian Ministry* 20, no. 1 (January–February 1989): 11–13. With her initiative, the following rituals were included in the *United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992). “A Service of Hope after Loss of Pregnancy” (623–26) and “A Service of Death and Resurrection for a Stillborn Child” (170–71).

¹⁹ United Methodist Book of Worship, “A Service of Hope after Loss of Pregnancy,” 625.

disappointment and the loneliness and the heaviness of heart. The prayer of commendation includes a ritual, a symbolic act of standing near the coffin or urn, and laying hands on it.²⁰

D. Don't Confuse Healing with Cure

Healing is not to be confused with cure. Not every disease and illness can be cured. But this does not mean that people cannot be healed. Even when the physical self cannot be restored to its full health or the way it was before, still a measure of wholeness can be achieved. Black helps here: “*Cure*,” she writes, “almost always means healing, the opposite is not true; *healing* often does not mean *cure*.”²¹ Such distinction becomes especially critical when a person with a disability is viewed as the one who needs healing as if the cure (being free from that particular disability) is equated with healing. Such a view may cause more suffering and even oppression, because people with a disability are not being able to be accepted by society, as *they are*, Black notes.

Not being able to accept one's self leads to isolation. French philosopher and social critic Simone Weil says that isolation has three dimensions: physical, psychological, and social.²² Healing comes when a person (and the community) begins to recognize and accept the presence of affliction. To recognize one's affliction is a step on the road to healing. The same must happen if a community is to be healthy. Black, resonating with Weil, argues that healing happens “through the loving presence of another person.”²³

Black's following story illustrates of this presence:

A little girl was late getting home from school. Her mother became more and more worried as the afternoon wore on. When she finally arrived, the mother said, “Where have been?! I've been worried sick!” The little girl responded, “Well, I was almost home, but then I saw Suzie sitting on the curb crying. Her dolly was broken.” Her mother, relieved, said, “Oh! So you stopped to help her

²⁰ *United Methodist Book of Worship*, “A Service of Death and Resurrection for a Stillborn Child,” 170–171.

²¹ Black, *Healing Homiletic*, 181. The emphasis is original.

²² Simone Weil, “The Love of God and Affliction,” *Waiting for God*, trans. Emman Craufurd, introduction by Leslie A. Fiedler (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1951), 117.

²³ Black, *Healing Homiletic*, 182.

fix her dolly?” The little girl with the wisdom of the universe said, “No, I sat down on the curb, and I helped Suzie cry.”²⁴

To recognize the presence of affliction is to fully attend to that state of brokenness in the hurting person. It also recognizes its limit. Suzie’s broken doll is not going to be fixed. Similarly, a still-born baby is not going to come back to life—even if we use or create a ritual. It is not the *cure* that the ritual achieves here, even if people who lost their baby so desperately wanted the baby back. The state of brokenness remains. However, through ritual a healing can happen. Ritual aids people to attend to suffering with the support in the loving presence of other people. Healing occurs because the healing presence of God is at work in and through others throughout a heartfelt ritual.

We cannot absolutely control the future or predict the outcome. Our temporality, mortality, and finitude require that we be humble. In order to be truly humble, we must surrender to and accept the limit of our knowing. Suffering reminds us of this limit of knowing. But to surrender to this limit does not mean that we become passive. To surrender is a stage to humility and in no way identical to passivity or indifference. Instead of passivity or a dreaded indifference, an honest humility recognizes that life is both limited and precious. Because life is precious, humility must be sought out actively by embracing suffering fully, unafraid of the darkness another is experiencing, while knowing that we are not masters of our own fate. Yet, God is present with us no matter how we succeed or fail. We give thanks to God and celebrate this preciousness of life through the act of ritual. Ritual expresses our depths of feeling, knowing and unknowing, while allowing us to encounter and walk through the mystery of it all.

Finally pastoral theology can respond to human suffering when it offers a robust theology that not simply comforts but also empowers people. This empowerment can be done with more than just words. It can be embodied in action through ritual and still involve critical theological reflections. The key to empowerment is connecting justice and compassion. In other words, without confronting injustice and orienting our thoughts and actions toward a more just world, then healing as the main goal of pastoral theology cannot be achieved. As one critically looks at the systematic historical layers of oppressions,

²⁴ Black, 186.

addressing injustice is one concrete way to attend to human suffering.²⁵

Injustice can be effectively addressed in the ritual of lament, rituals that faithfully hold and even caress the experience of the oppressed. One of the social ills of western modern culture is the absence of lamentation. People have forgotten how to grieve. This forgetfulness is buttressed by the myth that human beings are capable of basic independence and being in control. “Showing tears is a sign of weakness” is one example, which is in reality a state of forgetfulness, and not desirable or healthy. Many parts of modern society have “made the individual sacrosanct, self-sufficiency as eschatological aim.”²⁶

To heal this sickness, one must engage in public grief. “Public grief,” American counsellor and chaplain William Blaine-Wallace claims, “creates the strongest possibility for more genuine reconciliation between perpetrators of violence ... and their victims.”²⁷ The following testimony after the public hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa powerfully makes a point in this regard:

The world is wept.... The sound of your sobbing is my own weeping; your wet handkerchief my pillow for a past so exhausted it cannot rest—not yet. Speak, weep, look, listen for us all. Oh, people of the silent hidden past, let your stories scatter seeds into our lonely frightened winds. Sow more, until the stillness of this land can soften, can dare to hope, and smile and sing; until the ghosts can dance unshackled, until our lives can know your sorrows and be healed.²⁸

Here, Archbishop Tutu teaches us the value of a genuine effort of letting the victims and those in suffering share their pains wholeheartedly, so that their voices are neither silenced nor tokenized. This involves emotional, even irrational and physical acts. This posture is the beginning of healing and empowerment. This is the

²⁵ Katherine Turpin, “Liberationist Practical Theology,” in *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*, ed. Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S. Mikoski (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 157.

²⁶ William Blaine-Wallace, “The Politics of Tears: Lamentation as Justice Making,” in *Injustice and the Care of Souls: Taking Oppression Seriously in Pastoral Care*, ed. Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook and Karen Brown Montagno (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 185.

²⁷ Blaine-Wallace, “Politics of Tears,” 188.

²⁸ Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Random House, 1999), 119.

human agency involved in lamentation, a human state out of which the Spirit cries out.

In order to attend to human suffering as a response to and a goal of pastoral theology, we must pay attention to the voices of the marginalized, value their experiences of oppression as much as their power as agents to change their oppressive conditions for the sake of the well-being of all. Blaine-Wallace suggests that faith communities develop a “wailing-lamentation-solidarity” that can lead to “the faint promise of a new, unorthodox, organic, dependent, fragile community.”²⁹

E. A Few Rituals that Aid Pastoral Care

Ramshaw offers a few examples of ritual and care for the individual as rites of healing. She emphasizes the psychological and spiritual importance of touching. Jesus often healed people by touching.³⁰ The ritual of touching becomes especially meaningful and critical when a person is isolated by sickness or stigmatized by illness. She gives the example of the cruel shunning of persons with AIDS due to the irrational and ignorant fear of infection.³¹ She also introduces a need for rituals with people who have intellectual disability and psychiatric problems. This need is critical because ritual can involve not only cognitive realms but evoke affective and sensory experiences. People who have difficulty comprehending and conceptualizing abstract thoughts and ideas remind the rest of us that the full meaning of liturgical symbols has been impoverished by our heady, rationalistic, and solemn ways of worshipping. People with cognitive impairment of various kinds may help us both realize what we have lost and recover the enriching liturgical heritage that involves hearts, bodies, movements, senses as well as silence.³² Ritual with people who are mentally ill or unstable is also important. Ramshaw as a Lutheran invites us to explore Luther’s writing for helpful ways that he himself understood mental illness (the obsessive-compulsive mental disorder).³³ Thus, it is critical to develop rituals that enable

²⁹ Blaine-Wallace, “Politics of Tears,” 197.

³⁰ Matthew 8:3, 9:29, 20:34; Mark 7:33; Luke 5:13; and John 9:6.

³¹ Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care*, 64.

³² Ramshaw, 78.

³³ Ramshaw, 84–85.

those who experience anxiety and unworthiness to reclaim their dignity through God's grace and unconditional love.

One of the United Church of Canada's worship books, *Celebrate God's Presence*, offers various rituals that address cases of crisis and tragedy requiring healing. The broad range of pastoral prayers include:

- Prayers after a difficult childbirth,
- Prayers for couples in distress,
- Prayers when one partner leaves,
- Prayers before and after surgery,
- Prayers when natural disaster threatens, and
- Prayers after one has suffered from a violent crime.³⁴

Beyond concern for individuals, Ramshaw also shares rituals for the world. Examples include a ritual of Maundy Thursday foot-washing portrayed in Alan Paton's novel *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful*.³⁵ As the story in the novel goes, a white judge is invited to the black church of his family's housekeeper. As he is washing the housekeeper's feet, his heart is stirred to kiss the servant's feet. This act was not required but became an extravagant outpouring of the heart. It was powerful and even scandalous, given that this story was written during the Apartheid era. Ramshaw introduces this novel to demonstrate the power of ritual that can denounce the structures of injustice, while connecting people yearning for reconciliation. The judge's ritual act, she writes, is spontaneous, intimate, and personal, yet it speaks a volume of "a thousand sermons."³⁶

Conclusion

The question of this paper, "What kind of response can pastoral theology give in the midst of suffering?" has emerged from the bigger questions of "Why must we suffer?" "Should we learn from suffering?" "What is the meaning of suffering?" and "Under what conditions can suffering make us more human?"³⁷ "What conditions

³⁴ Emily R. Brink, *Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Services for the United Church of Canada* (Etobicoke, Ontario: United Church Publishing House, 2000), 556–565.

³⁵ Alan Paton, *Ah, But Your Land is Beautiful* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983).

³⁶ Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care*, 92.

³⁷ Sölle, *Suffering*, 1, 5.

enable people to end suffering?” is as important a question as what created the suffering in the first place. These questions beg a critical examination of the biblical understanding of suffering.

We have also considered conditions under which pastoral theology responds to create a more just and more humane world. These conditions include the cultivation of learning to create the loving presence of another person, while recognizing the other’s affliction. We countered the myth of self-sufficiency, while seeking to restore interdependent relationships. To do so, we have suggested creating and participating in ritual as an important pastoral response to suffering. In and through ritual, one’s pain can be shared, while creating a safe place to grieve and lament.



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