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## Tracy Pryor

Riddick Weber's thesis forces us to look again at the sacred moments that break into our ordinary lives. He calls us to reconsider the theology of one of our most controversial leaders while at the same time challenges us to embrace the incarnational nature of God as experienced in Jesus Christ. Weber points out our human tendency to limit people and their ideas by placing them into categories, thereby forming changeless impressions of their life and character. When we classify and qualify those who speak of their experience we deny the reality of continued growth and change in response to the experiences of a lifetime. We limit not only in the way we form quick opinions of others (regardless of their validity) but also in our desire to control the interpretation of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, thus denying the possibility of theological development within the texts and ourselves. This same phenomenon can be found in our own limited human attempts to understand the nature and character of God.

Small children frequently view their parents with admiration and it is not until adolescence or even adulthood (unless there is unexpected tragedy) that they begin to truly recognize and accept their parents' humanity. As adults we learn of the suffering that shaped our parents' lives, and as we come to recognize their mortality, we come face to face with our own. Like children and their view of parents, we often come to faith with an initial concept of God

that is immature. As we encounter the realities of life we find our initial impressions of God's nature are challenged and transformed by our experience of God in the midst of human life and suffering. Although we may understand or relate neither to Zinzendorf's mysticism nor an experience of the side wound of Christ as being the womb of our soul, the woundedness of Christ is essential to a mature expression of faith in a compassionate God who longs to be in relationship with the creation. Therefore, the development Weber points out in Zinzendorf's theology is a natural and expected transformation of his faith as he experiences the suffering of humanity that led him to new revelations of God's redemptive presence in all of life.

Zinzendorf was not alone in experiencing the woundedness of Christ through the *Ecce Homo*. Throughout European history, artists represented the search for meaning in the suffering of their own times in shockingly realistic and even gruesome depictions of Christ's suffering and woundedness. Grunewald's agonizing image of the crucifixion in his *Isenheim Altarpiece*, painted for the hospital chapel at the monastery of St. Anthony at Isenheim, was intended as a spiritual aid to the sick and infirm who came to prepare themselves for the treatment of blood and skin diseases. In this painting, patients were encouraged to find both hope and blessing in their own suffering through a reminder of God's own suffering through Jesus Christ.

The controversial language used by Zinzendorf and the Moravians during the so-called "sifting period" was actually quite

commonplace in their time. The later (Victorian) reaction against grotesque, visceral, or earthy language and realism conditions us to be shocked by it; however, there seems to be a growing need within our culture, particularly within the youth subculture, to embrace an experience of the wounded Savior. Each night on the news (whether we see it via the television or the World Wide Web), we are confronted with the realities of violence, suffering, abuse, loneliness, and woundedness in our world. We have only recently come to the frightening realization that we have the power to end our own existence through nuclear and biological warfare. Monika Hellwig addresses the theological implications of this situation in her statement, "The following of Jesus in our times confronts us constantly with human suffering on a massive scale, caused by structures of society which are the solidified deposits of the consequences of evil deeds in the world." <sup>1</sup> Gaining a more mature understanding and experience of God's own wounded nature, as described by Zinzendorf, may offer us a way to live with our own human failure and suffering. In the wounds of Christ, we may find a place of comfort and the nurturing reassurance of God's unconditional love.

In ministry I find that the acceptance of our own fractured nature often involves an ability to accept and recognize the presence of God's blessing in the midst of our suffering. Acceptance and recognition may help someone with depression gradually find within their suffering a source of personal creative inspiration. Someone grieving because of a death can move towards a newness of life. Someone whose body suf-

fers from the physical limitations of an acquired or genetic disorder may experience wholeness. Entering into our own suffering involves an examination and blessing of our losses no matter how great or small. As Diognes Allen writes, "Naturally we seek to avoid what is painful and unpleasant and to alleviate suffering. But we should not refuse to think about it, for we will then miss an opportunity to discover the redemptive presence of God." <sup>2</sup>

Weber indicates that there is a distinction between the power of the imagery of blood and that of the wounds to someone who is suffering. Although the body and blood of Christ are both images of grace, a wound is the hole or scar that remains after the flow of blood ceases. It is Christ's wounds that identify him as the one who was crucified and raised into newness of life. Human suffering is transformed when Jesus takes his humanity and his wounds, the scars that bear witness to his suffering, back into heaven and thus into the very nature and character of God. Unless Christ's wounds have healed, we cannot experience Christ as the wounded healer; thus our own experience of suffering is hopeless. The Risen Christ willingly shows us his scars, offering evidence that wholeness and healing await us as we enter into our suffering and into the suffering of others. I would agree with Weber in saying that an awareness of Christ's wounds, where there remains a flow of blood, can offer solidarity in the midst of suffering. However, it is only after the wounds begin to heal that humanity is offered a source of strength, hope and transformation.

The wounds of Christ allow us to enter into our own suffering and the suffering of

others in a way that is redemptive and transformational rather than self-serving or encouraging a pointless acceptance of oppression. Henri Nouwen makes this point in *The Wounded Healer*. "Christian leadership is accomplished only through service. This service requires the willingness to enter into a situation, with all the human vulnerabilities a man has to share with his fellow man...Indeed the paradox of Christian leadership [I would add of the gospel message] is that the way out is the way in, that only by entering into communion with human suffering can relief be found." <sup>3</sup>

"No one can help with out becoming involved, without entering with his or her whole person into the painful situation, with out taking the risk of becoming hurt, wounded or even destroyed in the process... who can take away suffering without entering it?"<sup>4</sup> We cannot alleviate the suffering of others until we choose to see it, accept it, and offer our own suffering in order to bring about change. Likewise, God knew that to offer salvation and reconciliation with humanity, its suffering would have to be embraced and experienced in God's own nature. God's self-limiting powerlessness on the cross offers companionship in our own experiences of powerlessness within a fractured community. "There can be no human beings who are completely alone in their sufferings, since God, in and through Jesus, has become Emmanuel, God with us." <sup>5</sup>

A denial of this aspect of God's nature, wanting God to be above or in some way separate from the suffering of the world, may indicate a denial of our own humanity - a denial of our own human frailty and

woundedness. This denial not only keeps us from speaking to one another about our own painful experiences but it also limits our openness to relationship with the wounded Christ. It is the role of disciples, both lay and ordained, to be a reflection of Christ in the world. Out of compassion they may be called to give expression to the unspoken suffering within the community. "Compassion implies a movement towards the other to help, but also a movement into the experience of the other to be present in solidarity and communion of experience. It implies sensitivity, vulnerability, to be affected by the experience of the other but it also implies remedial action against suffering and oppression. Most of all, it implies involvement in the situation." <sup>6</sup>

Bearing witness to the wounded Savior means bearing witness to our own wounds. However, making one's own wounds a source of healing does not call for a sharing of superficial personal pains. On the contrary, it requires a constant willingness to see one's own pain and suffering as rising from the depth of the human condition which is the shared experience of humanity. "Ministry can indeed be a witness to the living truth that the wound, which causes us to suffer now, will be revealed to us later as the place where God intimated his new creation." <sup>7</sup> If we are open to the wounded nature of God, then out of our own experience of suffering we can identify with and recognize the presence of God in the midst of daily life. Exposing our wounds to God and those we trust within the community of faith can be painful as we lift away the blood-caked dressing and allow the stench of infection to be released into the air. Some keep the sore hidden too long and the infec-

tion from the wound begins to spread into the surrounding areas of their life. Uncovering the wound allows it to receive fresh air and healing ointment so that the individual can begin to heal and find the way to freedom and newness of life.

Out of compassion for others, a follower of Jesus Christ enters into the suffering and the hope of all human persons with Christ. Moravians today, along with the entire body of Christ, the Church, have the opportunity and the responsibility to recognize the significance of this particular theological tradition within our faith and our world. The presence of the wounded Savior in the suffering around us calls us to “bring good news to the poor, proclaim release to the captive and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”<sup>8</sup>

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- <sup>1</sup> Monika Hellwig, Jesus: The Compassion of God (MN: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 121.
  - <sup>2</sup> Diogenes Allen, Traces of God In A Frequently Hostile World (MA: Cowley Pub., 1981), 13.
  - <sup>3</sup> Henri Nouwen, The Wounded Healer (NY: Image Books Doubleday, 1972), 77.
  - <sup>4</sup> Ibid, 72.
  - <sup>5</sup> Ibid, 178.
  - <sup>6</sup> Hellwig, 121.
  - <sup>7</sup> Nouwen, 95-96.
  - <sup>8</sup> Luke 4: 18-19, NRSV

## The Author Responds

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After reading the responses to my article several times, it indeed became a pleasure to read them, though I must admit they were not what I was originally expecting. Some articles in *The Hinge* have sparked lively debate. This one did not.

So after I took off my unused intellectual boxing gloves, I began to appreciate the divergent thoughts of the respondents and attempted to play the weaver. I looked for common threads and ways to tie some far-ranging concerns together. Both Tracy and Keith remind us that Zinzendorf’s theology is a part of a