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THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING
AS SEEN IN THE LIFE AND LETTERS
OF
SAMUEL RUTHERFORD

BY

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THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING
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OF
SAMUEL RUTHERFORD

INTRODUCTION

A. Subject

1. The Subject Stated and Explained

This thesis will center in the problem of suffering as it was experienced in the life of Samuel Rutherford and dealt with in his Letters.

This man knew suffering and trial throughout his life, yet seemed able to rise above these experiences to a closer fellowship with the Lord. One is impressed not only by his ability to find strength and a goal outside himself during times of affliction, but also by his insight into the experience of others, as evidenced in his Letters.

This study will attempt to discover the relationship between the life of Rutherford and his own thinking on the problem of suffering as it is found in his Letters. There will also be an attempt to discover the adequacy of his thinking for the present day.

2. The Subject Justified

The problem of suffering is one to which men have given thought throughout the ages, and one with which a Christian is confronted today. Therefore, it seems worthwhile to consider the experience and insight of one who was close to this problem and relate his experience to contemporary times.

3. The Subject Delimited

This study will be made primarily for use on a lay level, thus an intensive theological study of the problem of suffering will not be attempted. Contemporary thinking on the problem will be considered only in a general sense, by using four representative writers who have addressed themselves to lay audiences.

B. Method of Procedure

The first chapter of this study will give a sketch of Rutherford's life as it was a part of the Covenanting period.

The second chapter will consider the Letters which were produced from that life, concentrating on Rutherford's thoughts in regard to trial and affliction.

The third chapter will relate Rutherford's thinking on the problem of suffering to current thought and experience.

C. Sources for Study

The main source for this study will be Rutherford's Letters, as edited by Andrew A. Bonar. Because of their chronological arrangement, the letters referred to in Chapter II will be designated in the footnotes by number rather than page. Others of Rutherford's writings will be used as a general basis for discovering the life and thought of this man.

Secondary works will be used for information on Rutherford's life and for the general background of the Covenanting period. Also in this category will be the books by contemporary authors who have considered the problem of suffering.

CHAPTER I

SAMUEL RUTHERFORD: THE MAN IN HIS TIMES

A. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter will be to give a sketch of Samuel Rutherford in his times. John Macleod has said:

There are great times in which a crop of great men is raised up... The quiet times see the stream of life running a more smooth and less exciting course. They may be said to be the days of the average man or of the leading man that is distinctly small. The days of the Second Reformation were not of the tame and uneventful kind. They were days when things happened that are not forgotten and great men appeared on the field and had a chance to show their quality.¹

One of the great men of these times was Samuel Rutherford, for whom the Covenant and its cause, in its varied aspects, religious, ecclesiastical and political, meant everything. He lived for the Covenant, was inspired by its ideals, and for it was ready to die.²

B. A Background of the Covenanting Period

1. First Reformation

The principle for which John Knox and the Scots had contended at the Reformation was the suprem-

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1. John Macleod: Scottish Theology, p. 66.
2. Robert Gilmour: Samuel Rutherford, p. 8.

acy of the Word of God, as the law to which the individual, the church, and the nation must yield. Upon his death, Knox left foundations for the furthering of this principle well laid, but there was yet work to be done before the Reformation, and Presbyterianism in particular, could be considered an accomplished fact.¹

2. James VI

With the ascension of James VI to the throne in 1578, the troubles of the Church seemed to be ended. A deed known as the King's Confession, and later as the National Covenant, which renounced Popery and promised necessary support to the Protestant faith, was signed by the King on January 28, 1581.² But the Scots' hopes in James were shattered as it became evident that he was determined to reduce the Scottish Kirk to an ecclesiastical pattern which he favored. The way was being paved for a complete restoration of Episcopacy.³

With the passage of the "Black Acts" by Parliament the General Assembly was undermined and the King and Council were given absolute power.⁴ Bishops were restored to civil privileges, and in 1610 two Courts of

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1. John Beveridge: The Covenanters, p. 11.

2. Ibid., p. 13.

3. Gilmour, op. cit., p. 63.

4. Beveridge, op. cit., p. 14.

High Commission were established in Scotland, allowing the bishops to exercise full control over the life and doctrine of the Scottish ministers. Next, the King turned to tamper with the Church's mode of worship, imposing on it in 1618 the Five Articles of Perth.¹

3. Charles I

James died in 1625, and the incapacity of his son, Charles I, precipitated a crisis in Scotland which provoked Covenanters, such as Rutherford, to resistance. They rose "to maintain the purity of their Church and the liberty of their country and to defend the free institutions that have been the pride and admiration of three centuries".²

When Charles came to Scotland to be crowned he was greeted by cheers, for it seemed that he could not fail to be an improvement over his predecessor. However, it was soon evident that affairs were going from bad to worse, and on July 23, 1637, opposition reached a peak in Edinburgh when Jenny Geddes entered her protest against the first use of Laud's Service Book by throwing a stool at the head of the Dean of St. Giles. The Scots were not opposed to the use of form prayers

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1. Gilmour, op. cit., p. 63.

2. Ibid., p. 65.

as such, but they did object to being compelled to read them. Also, this Service Book of Laud's was particularly distasteful because of its tinge of Romanism. As feelings arose against the detested book, petitions were signed and the Privy Council, alarmed by the excitement, consented to a renewal and enlargement of the King's Confessions of 1581, protecting the liberties of the Scottish Church.

These events led to the assembling of a large group of nobles, gentry and common people at Greyfriar's Church in Edinburgh on February 28, 1638. Here the National Covenant, as the enlarged King's Confessions came to be called, was read, eagerly signed, and sent throughout the Kingdom, where multitudes subscribed to it.¹ The National Covenant was skillfully constructed, combining an affirmation of loyalty with an assertion of personal rights.² The King's attempts to persuade the signers to withdraw were in vain, and toward the end of 1638, the first really free Assembly in forty years met at Glasgow.

There were 238 members present at this Assembly, which condemned the Service Book; swept away bishops and their authority, rites and ceremonies; and restored Pres-

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1. Beveridge, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

2. Charles Stewart Black: The Scottish Church, p. 163.

byterianism. Charles answered by leading an army into Scotland, but this proved unsuccessful, and finally, at Westminster in 1641, he yielded to the Covenanters and confirmed the Acts of the Assembly. However, by this time Charles had lost the loyalty, as well as the love, of Scotland.¹

In 1643 the Solemn League and Covenant, a religious as well as civil document, was drafted in Edinburgh and intensely subscribed to in both England and Scotland. This bond of union was designed to secure the ascendancy of Presbyterianism and uniformity of religion in England, Ireland and Scotland, preserve the freedom of Parliaments and the liberties of the people, defend the King in maintaining the Reformed religion, and set forth the adherents themselves as worthy examples in living. The King intimated in December, 1647, that he would confirm the Solemn League and Covenant by Act of Parliament on certain conditions, but Oliver Cromwell ended matters in his own way with the crushing defeat at Preston in August, 1648.²

Charles I was beheaded at Whitehall on January 30, 1649, and England became nominally a republic. The Scots, for whom the quarrel with Charles had been entire-

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1. Beveridge, op. cit., p. 17.
2. Ibid., pp. 18-19.

ly on religious grounds, received the news of this execution with horror, and within a week of his father's death proclaimed Charles II as King of Great Britain and Ireland.¹ However, Cromwell's success made it necessary for Charles to flee from Scotland.²

4. Resolutioners and Protestors

There now arose a quarrel among the Presbyterians as they divided into the two camps of Resolutioners and Protestors. The latter insisted on using "God's saints" exclusively in fighting the Lord's battles and would not accept the Resolutioners' stand for uniting with "malignants", differing from the dominant party in politics or church affairs, in fighting the common enemy. This division hindered the consolidation of the Church and opened the way for a union between the Resolutioners and Royalists which brought Charles II back from exile in 1660.³

5. Restoration of 1660

The Restoration found the Scots unshaken in their Protestant and Presbyterian faith and in their attachment to the Kirk. However, there was little protest against displeasing acts committed by the King, due partly

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1. Black, op. cit., p. 172.
2. Beveridge, op. cit. p. 20.
3. Ibid., pp. 20-22.

to a lack of support from the nobles and upper classes. The General Assembly was a thing of the past and Presbyterianism nearly voiceless when Scotland found herself at the mercy of her King and her foe.

January 1, 1661, was a black day in Scotland. The first Parliament to sit in nine years assembled in Edinburgh, packed in favor of the King's Commissioners, and proceeded to overturn the work of the Reformation. Middleton, a former adherent to the Covenant, had been won over by Charles and made the King's Commissioner and representative in Scotland.¹ This Parliament sat for six and one half months, strengthening royal prerogative and pouring contempt on the Covenant. On March 28, 1661, the Act Rescissory was passed, destroying the legislation of the previous twenty years, and thus canceling Presbyterian polity. It was also resolved to deal with the four most distinguished members of the Covenanting cause, Argyle, Guthrie, Warriston and Rutherford. Of this group, the first two were executed and the third escaped for the time being, although he was condemned and his estates confiscated. Rutherford also escaped,² in natural death.

Throughout these times of trial for the Scot-

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1. Ibid., p. 24.

2. Gilmour, op, cit., pp. 221-224.

tish Church, Rutherford had bit by bit been drawn into the controversies, careless of the consequences. As he made his stand, he seemed aware of the dangers which lay ahead, yet in the strength of his convictions he could not turn aside. Thus he was able to say, "I know...I shall be accused as not wise nor circumspect enough. I seek no other thing but that my Lord may be honoured by me in giving a testimony.."1

If Rutherford was not the first and greatest martyr of the Covenant, it was only because he had received a prior summons from his God, for a place "where few kings and great folks come".2 He may justly be accounted among the sufferers of his time, as a "martyr in his own design and resolution, and by the design and determination of men".3

C. Early Years of Rutherford's Life

1. Birth and Schooling

Samuel Rutherford was born in the year 1600 at Nisbet, a village in Roxburghshire. According to M'Ward, he was a gentleman by extraction, having been born of "mean but honest" parents.

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1. Ibid., pp. 70-71.

2. Ibid., p. 8.

3. John Howie: The Scots Worthies, p. 240.

Having spent some years at the Grammar School of Jedburgh, he was sent to the University of Edinburgh in 1617.¹ Evidently he was early recognized here as one from whom great things might be expected, for shortly after his graduation in 1621, as a Master of Arts, he was made a professor of philosophy.² After two years in this capacity, Rutherford was forced to demit his charge because of some indiscretion connected with his marriage. There is no way now of knowing whether or not the man was actually in error, but the seriousness of the charge is somewhat lessened by the fact that he was never branded with this "scandal" during any period of his life, when purity of character was of vital importance.³

2. Experience with Christ

Rutherford, considering his early life as having been somewhat unprofitable, expressed sorrow that he allowed himself to reach manhood before yielding to God. Possibly this is why in his Letters he urged the young to turn to Christ in the freshness of their years, not to imitate him, "loitering on the road too long and trifling at the gate".⁴ If Rutherford was late in find-

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1. Gilmour, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

2. Howie, op. cit., p. 232.

3. Gilmour, op. cit., p. 29.

4. Alexander Smellie: Men of the Covenant, p. 51.

ing Christ, it would seem that he compensated somewhat for that tardiness in his subsequent zeal and devotion to his Lord.

D. Anwoth

1. Parish

For nine years, from 1627-1636, Rutherford was the spiritual father of the quiet parish of Anwoth, which lay among the soft green hills of Galloway.¹ This pleasant spot was beloved by Rutherford, and from his Letters one is made aware of his intense interest in the welfare of each individual soul in his flock. So dear was this parish to him, that when deprived of his ministry there, Rutherford wrote of counting the very swallows happy that built their nests in the old kirk.²

2. Affliction

It was in reference to his own experience that Rutherford said that "the thorn is often made to intertwine with the rose", for time and again he was tempered in the trials of affliction. Before five years in this pastorate had been completed, he had met with a great deal of illness and sorrow. At one time a fever left

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1. Ibid.

2. Gilmour, op. cit., p. 39.

him helpless for thirteen weeks, so weakening him that even the work he loved was a burden to him. Soon after this his wife died, following a protracted illness entailing suffering in mind and body. Under these "wrestlings of God", Rutherford could well say his "soul was filled with gall and wormwood". Previous to his wife's death, the couple had also lost each of their children. In his loneliness in the absence of his family, Rutherford's mother came to live with him, but her own illness and helplessness became another occasion for anxiety and distress. Yet, throughout these domestic trials, his faith enabled this man avoid despair.¹

3. Work

There evidently was success in the parish at Anwoth, but this success fell behind the expectations of Rutherford, who, in the intensity of his zeal, tended to underestimate the work he had accomplished. As a preacher, Rutherford was referred to as a "fair little man" who had a somewhat shrill, but commanding, voice and two quick eyes which seemed to be held toward heaven when he entered the pulpit. He was noted for his constant theme on the "loveliness of Christ",² and one parishioner said he "would have flown out of the pulpit

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1. Andrew Thomson: Samuel Rutherford, pp. 30-31.
2. Gilmour, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

when he came to speak of Christ, the Rose of Sharon".¹

During the period he spent in this parish, Rutherford rose at 3:00 a.m. for prayer and study. A contemporary minister said of him:

I never knew one in Scotland like him. He seemed to be always praying, always preaching, always visiting the sick, always teaching in the schools, always writing treatises, always reading and studying.²

4. Trial and Banishment

Rutherford is remembered as a writer as well as a pastor during the years spent at Anwoth. In 1630, near the time of his wife's death, he was summoned before the High Commission Court in Edinburgh for having written in opposition to the Arminians. However, bad weather and a friendly judge combined to prevent this trial's being carried through.³

Another summons came in 1636, and Rutherford faced this situation by saying, "There is no quarrel more honest or honourable than to suffer for truth." In July he was called before the High Commission Court in Edinburgh because of his work against the Arminians, Exercitationes de Gratia, and his nonconformity to the Acts of Episcopacy.⁴ This trial lasted three days, and

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1. Smellie, op. cit., p. 52.

2. Ibid.

3. Howie, op. cit., pp. 232-233.

4. Samuel Rutherford: Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. by Andrew A. Bonar, p. 12.

although the issue seemed doubtful for awhile, judgment was invoked against him in the end and he was deposed from his ministerial office, forbidden to preach in any part of Scotland, and sentenced to confinement within the town of Aberdeen by the 20th of August, to remain there during the King's pleasure.

His only regret at this time seemed to be that he must leave his beloved congregation at Anwoth. He wrote to his good friend, Lady Kenmure:

That honour that I have prayed for these sixteen years, with submission to my Lord's will, my kind Lord hath now bestowed upon me, even to suffer for my royal and princely King Jesus, and for His Kingly Crown and the freedom of his Kingdom that his Father hath given Him.

He looked to the future unafraid, saying, "Christ shall make Aberdeen my garden of delights."¹

E. Aberdeen

1. Seclusion

There was no warm welcome awaiting Rutherford at Aberdeen, which was noted for its adherence to the Episcopal cause against which this exile had stood. But in spite of the coldness which he experienced at first, he gradually won the affection of some, although they

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1. Gilmour, op. cit., pp. 74-76.

dared not openly show their sympathy with Rutherford.¹

2. Letters

He had been forbidden to preach, and his eighteen months of seclusion might well have been depressing ones, but before his death he was able to realize God's purpose and grace in this period of his life. A new field of work was opened; although his lips were shut, his pen was at work, producing 220 of his Letters, the best demonstration of his spiritual genius.²

His correspondents included Marion M'Naught and Lady Kenmure, both ladies of the Covenant, lairds of Galloway, faithful ministers throughout the land, the persecuted Church in Ireland, future leaders of the Church of Scotland, representatives of the nobility, young people, and members of his congregation at Anwoth. The spirit of these Letters draws the reader into Rutherford's feeling that "here is a spy sent into the wilderness of suffering to see the land and try to ford and bring back a report to others".³

As one reads the Letters, he sees a mighty spirit moved to its depths. The bitterness and depression of exile were felt, especially in its early months,

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1. Ibid., p. 77.

2. Smellie, op. cit., p. 53.

3. Gilmour, op. cit., pp. 78-80.

but Rutherford's faith was able to sustain him, and his Letters show evidence that the comfort of the Holy Spirit was abounding with him during his sufferings.¹ Experiencing ups and downs of faith, joy seemed to prevail, and Rutherford could say:

The cross of Christ is a crabbed tree, yet such a burden as wings to a bird and sails to a ship. Christ's cause even with the cross is better than the King's crown. Suffering for Christ is my garland.²

3. Freedom

Rutherford's influence grew so among the people of Aberdeen that the prelates determined to have him banished from the kingdom. There was some thought of sending him to New England or Holland during this time, but the Second Reformation was already dawning in the sky, and with the changes of 1638 Rutherford was restored to Anwoth.³

4. Return and Representation at the Glasgow Assembly

Having been restored to his parish at Anwoth in the early spring of 1638, Rutherford went to Edinburgh as a supporter of the Covenant at Greyfriar's Kirk. Henceforth he was to work side by side with outstanding Scotsmen to lead the Kirk through the stormy

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1. Howie, op. cit., p. 233.
2. Gilmour, op. cit., pp. 81-82.
3. Macleod, op. cit., p. 69.

times ahead.

Rutherford was a member of the General Assembly which met in Glasgow in November of 1638, representing the Presbytery of Kirkcudbright. The purpose of this Assembly, which embraced the most eminent of the nobility, the gentry and ministry, was to consolidate the energies of the Covenanters and complete the Second Reformation.¹

It was before this Assembly that Rutherford gave an account of his Aberdeen confinement and its causes, and by it that he was appointed to a position at St. Andrews.²

F. St. Andrews

1. Appointment and Work

It was a heavy blow to Rutherford when the General Assembly made their decision to send him to St. Andrews. Anwoth, with its quiet rural population, woods and secluded glen, and kirk, had become a part of the pastor's very self and held ties of affection and sympathy. His own petition to the Commission of the Kirk, containing reasons for his opposition to removal from Anwoth, was supplemented by passionate appeals from

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1. Gilmour, op. cit., p. 100.

2. Howie, op. cit., p. 234.

others also, but none prevailed, and in August of 1639 the affair was settled. Rutherford was to be a colleague with Robert Blair in the ministry of St. Andrews as well as Professor of Divinity in the New College, thus being allowed to practice his gift of preaching.¹

This new sphere was a busy one, but Rutherford remained diligent in his study, as well as effective in his roles as preacher and professor. Such was his success in the latter position that it was said that "the University became a Lebanon out of which were taken cedars for building the house of God throughout the land".²

In 1640, having been a widower for ten years, Rutherford married his second wife, a woman described as a "person of great worth and piety, worthy of such a husband".³ There were seven children by this marriage, but only one, a daughter, survived her father.⁴

2. Westminster Assembly

Although for his readers Rutherford's Letters will no doubt remain his greatest achievement, his supreme conscious effort lay in the help he gave at the Westminster Assembly from 1643-1647. He went to London as a Scottish Commissioner, accompanied by George Gil-

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1. Gilmour, op. cit., pp. 106-111.
2. Rutherford, op. cit., p. 16.
3. Thomson, op. cit., p. 79.
4. Rutherford, op. cit., p. 16.

lespie, Robert Baillie, Alexander Henderson, Sir Archibald Johnson, Lord Warriston, and John, Lord Maitland.¹ Here he debated the doctrine of the Church's freedom against the captains of Erastianism and argued with the Independents, although he held this latter group in great respect. He also played an important part in framing the Confession, Directory, and Catechisms drawn up at this Assembly.²

During his stay in London, Rutherford produced several writings, which contributed to the ecclesiastical controversy of the day and won contemporary fame. These writings included: A Peaceable and Temperate Plea for Presbytery in Scotland, 1642; The Due Right of Presbyteries, 1644; The Divine Right of Church Government and Excommunication, 1646; and A Survey of the Spiritual Antichrist, 1648. These were somewhat forbidding volumes, yet they embodied a vital and powerful idea of the time as they expounded and defended the Divine Right of Presbytery, or the true nature of the Church of Christ. To these Scotsmen the Church was as real, as essential, as important as Christ himself, and their concern for the glory of Christ led them to spend their time and strength vindicating that conception of the Church in

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1. Gilmour, op. cit., p. 131.
2. Smellie, op. cit., pp. 53-54.

which Christ had the scope to exercise His rights as their Head and King.¹

Toward the end of his stay at Westminster, Rutherford became distressed by the protracted and wearisome detention from his work in Scotland. His sorrow was made even greater because of family bereavement, in the loss of children.²

On November 9, 1647, Rutherford left for home. Several times he had asked permission to return, and, in spite of poor health, had been denied because it was felt he could not be spared. But now, after five long years, permission was granted for him to return to his students, his congregation and his home.³

3. Conflict Within the Scottish Church

Upon his return to St. Andrews, Rutherford was extended invitations to teach in Holland, but he could not bring himself to desert the cause of the Covenant at such a critical time as was approaching.⁴ Preferring to suffer affliction in his own country to leaving his charge in time of danger, he continued at St. Andrews until his death.⁵

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1. Gilmour, op. cit., pp. 142-144.
2. Thomson, op. cit., p. 107.
3. Gilmour, op. cit., pp. 166-167.
4. Ibid., p. 194.
5. Howie, op. cit., p. 236.

Scotland was beginning a critical period and she needed all the help of able men that she could muster. Rutherford now faced one of the bitterest controversies of his life, which estranged many of his dearest friends, and nearly shattered the Kirk of Scotland. On one side in the Church were the Resolutioners, for the King and the Covenant; on the other side were the Protestors, for the Covenant alone. Men of purest motives and life were found on both sides, but Rutherford, Guthrie, and Warriston were in the minority as Protestors. It was a sore trial for Rutherford to stand alone in the Presbytery of St. Andrews and to be separated from friends such as Dickson and Blair.¹

4. Restoration of 1660 and Rutherford's Death

Even darker days lay ahead. The Restoration of 1660 had been welcomed with rejoicing, even in Scotland, but such rejoicing was short-lived. In July, 1660, the Marquis of Argyle journeyed to London to pay his respects to the King, but was seized and thrown into the tower. In August, ten of the Protesting ministers drew up an address for the King congratulating him, expressing loyalty to him, and reminding him of the Solemn Covenant into which he had entered with the nation and

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1. Gilmour, op. cit., pp. 195-200.

the nation's God. But, by order of the Commission of Estates, these papers were seized as treasonable and their bearers were imprisoned. Rutherford was the next target, as the author of Lex Rex.¹

Lex Rex, which has been called the "political textbook of the Covenanters" was noticed by the government after Charles II's restoration because of its spirit of freedom. Two axioms set forth in this work were:

The law is not the king's own, but is given him in trust. Power is a birthright of the people borrowed from them; they may let it out for their good, and resume it when a man is drunk with it.²

Such words were too bold for the type of rule Charles intended.

In the autumn of 1660 Lex Rex was burned; early in the spring of 1661 its author was sought out for martyrdom. Rutherford lost his offices at St. Andrews and his pastorate, then in addition was summoned to appear before the House on a charge of treason. But Rutherford had been wasting away under a menacing disease for weeks, and, although it was a withering hand which received the document, his voice retained its fire in saying:

Tell them that I have a summons already, from a superior judge and judicatory, and I behave to answer

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1. Ibid., p. 218.
2. Smellie, op. cit., p. 50.

my first summons; and ere your day arrives, I will be where few kings and great folks come.¹

On March 30, 1661, Samuel Rutherford died.

Had he lived a few weeks, his might have been the cruel death suffered by his friend James Guthrie. Parliament, upon hearing of his dying, voted that he should not die in the College; but Lord Burleigh rose to his defense in saying, "Ye cannot vote him out of heaven."²

In his last days, Rutherford had seemed weary of life and longed for release.³ His health, which had never been good, slowly undermined him, causing much suffering and at times bringing him low. His greatest heartbreak though seemed to lie in the condition of his beloved Kirk. He lived to see the cause he loved, for which he had toiled, trampled under foot and persecution breaking out over the Kirk of Scotland.⁴ Still, those principles for which Rutherford stood so firmly have since triumphed, and his own life and devotion have been a source of inspiration to those who have come after him.

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1. Ibid.
2. Rutherford, op. cit., p. 22.
3. Gilmour, op. cit., p. 214.
4. Ibid., p. 217.

G. Summary

Samuel Rutherford lived in a period which required strong convictions if convictions were to be held at all. As a participator in this Covenanting period and a contributor to its events, Rutherford stood fast in his beliefs. This inevitably led him into hard paths, but he seemed well able to meet such situations. In addition to trials endured for political or religious causes, Rutherford also shared fully in personal sorrow and suffering. Yet, here too, his faith kept him from defeat.

In examining the experience from which this man's Letters arose, one is better able to appreciate their message and so look for their relevance to experiences of affliction and suffering in the present day.

CHAPTER II
THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING
AS SEEN IN RUTHERFORD'S DEVOTIONAL LETTERS

A. Introduction

In this chapter an attempt will be made to discover Rutherford's thinking on the problem of suffering as expressed in his 365 published devotional letters. Of these letters, 220 were written during his exile in Aberdeen, thus his words of consolation and admonition to his correspondents during this period came from a man who was in the throes of disappointment and reproach. Likewise, letters from other periods of his life arose from a man who was acquainted with problems faced by those to whom he wrote, for Rutherford himself had experienced affliction and sorrow throughout his mature life.

The consideration of Rutherford's writings in regard to suffering will be made on the basis of the following categories: persecution for one's belief, physical weakness and infirmity, and death. Included in these considerations will be Rutherford's underlying solution to the problem of suffering as it rests in faith in Christ.

B. Persecution for One's Belief

1. The Experience of Suffering in Persecution

As he poured forth his thoughts in regard to undergoing trial for faith and conviction, Rutherford at times seemed to go to extremes in his feeling and expression, but the reader is reminded that this man "lived in a time when men went to prison for their spiritual convictions and even suffered martyrdom for them". Matters which might appear as mere theological distinctions today were to Rutherford matters of life and death, thus his ideas reflect the strong feelings of the seventeenth century.¹

Rutherford had a deep affection for his parish at Anwoth and his ministry there, and during his exile in Aberdeen separation from this ministry lay most heavily on his heart.² Yet on an early occasion of possible removal from Anwoth, Rutherford could say that he was content to remain here where he had been planted until the Lord should desire to transplant him; his was not to hinder when the Lord should pull up his roots to better use him elsewhere.³ Trial was expected, but Rutherford saw this as an example of "God's wheat in the

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1. Samuel Rutherford: The Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. by Frank E. Gaebeline, p. 16.
2. Ante, p. 10.
3. Rutherford: Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. by Andrew A. Bonar, letter 16.

land[going]through Satan's sieve", and such trial was to be met with a steadfast faith.¹

In reply to Marion M'Naught's sorrow over his reproach from adversaries, Rutherford told of his own source of encouragement:

Howbeit you see all the hounds in hell let loose... their iron chains to our dear and mighty Lord are but straws, which He can easily break... Swallow [this reproach], and let it go down; our Lord give you a drink of the consolations of His Spirit, that it may digest.²

Anticipating the end of his ministry in Anwoth, Rutherford remarked that he must learn to suffer, committing his life to the One for whom he was suffering. He prayed for grace "to learn to be acquainted with misery", and a beginning of that grace is seen in his words:

I desire not to go on the lee-side or sunny side of religion, or to put truth betwixt me and a storm: my Savior did not so for me, who in His suffering took the windy side of the hill.³

Upon removal from Anwoth, Rutherford confessed the heaviness he felt and a fear that this sorrow had come upon him because he had not been as faithful among his flock as the Lord would have had him. Yet he could say, "Welcome, welcome, sweet, sweet cross of Christ... I know Christ shall make Aberdeen my garden of delights".⁴

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1. Ibid., letter 19.
2. Ibid., letter 48.
3. Ibid., letter 40.
4. Ibid., letter 62.

These were discouraging times, but Rutherford saw that one must be willing to "take strokes with weeping Christ", waiting in patience for the joy which will be shared with Christ when his cause triumphs.¹

Rutherford was aware of being upheld by Christ as he went into banishment and remarked, "Christ hath so handsomely fitted for my shoulders this rough tree of the cross, as that it hurteth me no ways." Already, in spite of the bitterness of being separated from his parish, the joy of the Holy Spirit was filling him as he faced this trial.²

2. The Purpose of Suffering in Persecution

In his persecution, Rutherford was able to see the Lord working out His will, and thus he was willing to submit himself to God. As he had seen the Lord making him more fit as a Christian believer because of persecution, so he desired that his fellow sufferers might see God's purpose in their trial.

a. Submission to God's Sovereignty

Rutherford spoke of the violent means the Lord uses to gain His children to Him. God never gains their faith and love in so large a measure as He does from the

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1. Ibid., letter 63.
2. Ibid., letter 65.

"furnace of tempting fears and sharp trials". Precious to the Lord are this faith and love that, having been threshed and beaten by Him, still look to Christ and would be with Him.¹ Trials are to be considered as from Christ, who is trying the vessels of His house.²

One is to ask what the Lord means in affliction and what is His further will. Rutherford inferred that "losses, disappointments, ill-tongues, loss of friends, houses, or country are God's workmen, set on work to work out good to [one]". There must be a willingness to be led as the Lord pleases.³

Rutherford admitted to having gone through a period of doubting God's providence, because it was at variance with his own will, but the Lord was patient in waiting for better understanding, and Rutherford came to the belief that God would "see to His own gold and save that from being consumed with the fire". He could say, "Grace tried is better than grace, and it is more than grace; it is glory in its infancy." He saw that faith tends to freeze without a cross.⁴ With such conviction, although he longed for deliverance, Rutherford accepted the possibility that he might not yet have come

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1. Ibid., letter 211.
2. Ibid., letter 284.
3. Ibid., letter 161.
4. Ibid., letter 76.

to the measure of trial the Lord was seeking in him.¹ Believing that Christ has His eye on the fire and melting gold, to separate the metal and the dross,² Rutherford offered himself to whatever might purify him, saying, "Lord cut, Lord carve, Lord wound, Lord do anything that may perfect Thy Father's image in us, and make us meet for glory."³

On another occasion Rutherford said, "Since we must have a devil to trouble us, I love a raging devil best; our Lord knoweth what kind of devil we have need of." There is further comfort in the assurance that God will stoop and take up His fallen ones and refresh their weary hearts.⁴ The Lord did not make His people for the fire, yet Rutherford knew that in some measure he had been made fit for trial. He praised the Lord that he did not wax paler, but that God's fire had simply made him somewhat thin in order that the Lord might pour him into any vessel pleasing to Him.⁵

Before one's birth his crosses have been written, in number, measure, and weight, and the Lord is able to lead through them and make Christ sure.⁶ Blessed

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1. Ibid., letter 94.
2. Ibid., letter 265.
3. Ibid., letter 282.
4. Ibid., letter 138.
5. Ibid., letter 223.
6. Ibid., letter 304.

are those who can willingly give to Christ action and blood, doing and suffering. Men would often desire to have crosses of their own choosing, but the Lord "who has brought many children to glory, and lost none, is [their] best Tutor".¹ Rutherford saw that any furnace might be welcomed since if it is God's choice, it must be best.²

Christ's testament left to His people was that they should have not only peace, but also suffering; therefore, fiery trials are no strange thing, and Christ will not be a loser by purging the tin and dross out of His church.³ The Lord knows how to lead His own in and out through these "little time-hells and the pieces of time-during wraths in this life". One need not fear allowing Him to strike and nurture, for therein is the very act of saving, and His rods are "steeped and watered in a flood and river of love".⁴ Rutherford saw suffering as being to Christ's advantage and glory, enabling Him to win a clean church out of His fire.⁵

The Lord taught things to Rutherford in his exile that had been mysteries before. He discovered God's "bottomless and boundless love and kindness" and

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1. Ibid., letter 332.
2. Ibid., letter 185.
3. Ibid., letter 288.
4. Ibid., letter 299.
5. Ibid., letter 160.

learned some measure of submission and mortification.¹
In one description of his trial, Rutherford said he found no better use of suffering than that in it man's dross of "impatience, unbelief, and quarreling" is discovered from Christ's gold of "faith, on-waiting, love, joy, and courage".²

b. Contrast of Temporal and Eternal

One of the blessings which Rutherford found in his exile to Aberdeen was an increasing knowledge of the unworthiness of the world as the source of one's delight as compared with heavenly joys. Thus he was aware, in the midst of adversity, that the world can take from a person nothing that is truly his.³

For Rutherford nothing was worth the buying but heaven, and, if necessary, even heaven would be sold in order to buy Christ. He saw that there is a better life than this present one to which a person may aspire, and that it is a part of the Father's mercy that by His rods He saves one from this perishing world. Christ's cross is a love-token of the Father.⁴

Rutherford esteemed Christ as being worth more blood and lives than any man has to give Him, and be-

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1. Ibid., letter 157.
2. Ibid., letter 215.
3. Ibid., letter 69.
4. Ibid., letter 72.

lieved that when eternity is reached one will look back to pain and suffering and see life and sorrow as but one step from a prison to glory.¹ One's heart must not be set on the world, for that is not man's portion. Rather, he must let go his grip on this life and look forward with hope to another treasure.²

In the midst of reproach Rutherford found solace in his confidence that he was suffering for Christ's truth. He wrote that one must not make heaven a city more easily taken than God has made it, but rather accept scourging and stoning with Christ in passing through death to life eternal.³ Suffering for the honor of Christ's Kingdom is the way to life, and when one lies "as pale clay upon the ground", earthly pleasures now naturally loved will seem as less than nothing.⁴ Eyes must be turned from the masked beauty of the world to see what is reserved in heaven, the only goal worthy of one's pain and seeking after.⁵

Believing thus, Rutherford could write of Christ from Aberdeen:

I know that He seeketh of us an outcast with this house of clay, this mother prison, this earth, that we love full well... When Christ snuffeth my candle, and causeth my light to shine upward, it is one of

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1. Ibid., letter 88.
2. Ibid., letter 192.
3. Ibid., letter 66.
4. Ibid., letter 136.
5. Ibid., letter 200.

my greatest wonders, that dirt and clay hath so much court with a soul not made of clay; and that our soul goeth out of kind so far as to make an idol of this earth..¹

Heaven is not to be taken without "fighting, wrestling, and sweating", and it is an honor and joy for one to be yoked with Christ in this struggle, "married to Him in suffering".²

Rutherford felt that from his experience he had discovered what it is to be crucified to the world. He would not now "give a drink of cold water for all the world's kindness", for, in suffering for Christ's truth, his affliction had been sealed with the comfort of the Holy Spirit.³

c. Testimony to Christ

During the early part of his banishment in Aberdeen, Rutherford wrote that if Christ's glory might be seen in his suffering, he would be satisfied and would ask no other kindness from Christ.⁴ The fruit Rutherford hoped to see as a result of this period of trial was that Christ's name might be spread about in the kingdom on his behalf.⁵ In this way, his praise, showing forth the Lord's lovingkindness, might enable

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1. Ibid., letter 276.
2. Ibid., letter 202.
3. Ibid., letter 166.
4. Ibid., letter 73.
5. Ibid., letter 99.

his suffering to preach during this time of enforced silence.¹

In one instance Rutherford remarked that if his suffering glorified Christ's name and encouraged others to stand fast for their Lord, his wages would be paid to the full.² His desire was that his furnace, of the Lord's kindling, might warm others' hearts to God's love.³ In another letter, his prayer was that the Lord might "leaven the north" by his suffering.⁴ This thought was well expressed in his words to a fellow minister, "The Lord knows what I would do and suffer by His own strength, so being that I might make my Lord Jesus lovely and sweet to many thousands in this land."⁵

3. Values from Suffering in Persecution

Rutherford was aware of values derived from his own persecution, and he desired that others might also find blessing in their time of affliction and reproach. His thinking in regard to these values was not merely abstract; it was the result of a life which had known trials and had also known victory in them.

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1. Ibid., letter 166.
2. Ibid., letter 171.
3. Ibid., letter 203.
4. Ibid., letter 222.
5. Ibid., letter 228.

a. Providence of the Lord

Rutherford confessed to having libeled the Lord as unkind because he had misunderstood His ways. But he passed from that stage, realizing that Christ had been disguised, so not apprehended in His sweet love. Having experienced Christ's kindness in his suffering, Rutherford observed, "Grace groweth best in winter." It seemed foolishness to complain of Christ during difficult times, for He bears the prisoner's trials with him.¹ Rutherford knew of no sweeter way to heaven than "through free grace and trials together".²

His suffering for Christ's sake was esteemed by Rutherford as even more glorious than he could express. It seemed that this was one of the steps of the ladder to heaven, and the more heavily crossed one is for Christ, the lighter the soul is for this journey.³

Since there must be chains and sorrow, because there has been sin, the Lord has chosen to give joyful sorrow, and water it with many consolations.⁴ Christ's presence with Rutherford displaced the bitterness of his suffering, for Christ took the larger portion of

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1. Ibid., letter 75.
2. Ibid., letter 95.
3. Ibid., letter 186.
4. Ibid., letter 206.

his cross,¹ making it seem but a feather.²

Rutherford knew that mercy follows Christ's crosses, and his prison is made of ivory and marble, whereas the best things earth can offer are corruptible.³ He saw his cross as his garland and enjoyed comforts given freely, yet his desire was not so much for these blessings as for God Himself,⁴ whom he had found in fuller measure through his experience of exile.

Although Rutherford had questioned providence at times in the midst of his exile, he came to a realization that whereas his eyes were bleared, God's vision was clear. Therefore, he desired a heart that would acquiesce even more completely to the Lord's way, believing that "infinite wisdom is the mother of [God's] judgments, and that His ways pass finding out".⁵

b. Joy of Christ's Presence

It was in his mention of the glorious joy of Christ's presence found in his trials that Rutherford became most ecstatic. Time and again he spoke of the comfort and sweetness of Christ's nearness and the lightness of his burden, shared with Christ.

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1. Ibid., letter 242.
2. Ibid., letter 247.
3. Ibid., letter 193.
4. Ibid., letter 168.
5. Ibid., letter 259.

Banished to Aberdeen by his adversaries, he found that here he was "feasted with love banquets" with his King Jesus. Christ's cross of suffering seemed hard only because of his weak and dim eyes; accepted willingly, it was found to be "such a burden as wings unto a bird, or sails to a ship".¹ There was further comfort in knowing that Christ prescribes how much pain and sorrow one must have and looks on with a sensitive heart and wet eyes.²

Christ had always been sweet to this prisoner's soul, but never so kind as during this time of greatest extremities. He expressed his joy in this trial, "I dine and sup with Christ. He visiteth my soul with the visitations of love in the night watches."³ Sweet and lovely was this burden, and its bearer came to "fear nothing now so much as the losing of Christ's cross and the love-showers that [accompanied] it".⁴ This prisoner was not so shut in but that the sun shone on his exile, for the Lord was a confined prisoner with him.⁵ His cross had become both a cross and a reward.⁶

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1. Ibid., letter 69.
2. Ibid., letter 183.
3. Ibid., letter 103.
4. Ibid., letter 104.
5. Ibid., letter 178.
6. Ibid., letter 105.

Christ sealed suffering for His truth with such unspeakable and glorious joys that Rutherford felt he would never be able to repay his debt to Christ. There was much cause to speak well of the Lord, for He had brought this believer to a degree of communion with Him that had not been known before.¹ This was a "sugared cross", not one that need be accepted with a faint heart.² Rutherford found that Christ's love defied reproaches and that suffering could not blunt the fiery edge of this love.³

Desiring that his fellow-sufferers might know the joy of Christ's presence with them even as he had, Rutherford reminded his correspondents that the same Lord is before one, regardless of where the enemy may carry him, and suffering does not hinder communion with Christ.⁴ Christ offers His fellowship during trial, carrying the heavier end of one's burden Himself.⁵ Man's part in the battle between the Lamb and the Dragon is to receive darts in patience, realizing that they light on Christ first, then rebound off on His servants.⁶

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1. Ibid., letter 113.
2. Ibid., letter 119.
3. Ibid., letter 143.
4. Ibid., letter 333.
5. Ibid., letter 288.
6. Ibid., letter 214.

Rutherford believed that Christ will count it His honor to back His weak servants, and as a reward for their incomes and losses, they will receive Christ, a King. Christ puts the garland of suffering on one's head, and He will bring him out of trial; therefore there is no need to fear any ordeal one may be called upon to face.¹

c. Endurance and Hope

Rutherford suggested that there is little one can do to resist persecution but wait for the Lord's court day; if today is not Christ's, surely tomorrow will be.² The deliverance of God's people is concluded, subscribed, and sealed in heaven; their goods are taken for truth's sake, and are but laid in pawn.³ Prisons, trials, and persecutions have a back door of escape; "death and hell, and the world, and the tortures, shall all cleave and split in twain, and give...free passage and liberty to go through toll-free".⁴

Although men, in their soft nature, would desire to be borne through life's misery in Christ's arms, the Lord, in His wisdom, causes His children to "go wet-shod and cold-footed to heaven". But there is

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1. Ibid., letter 59.
2. Ibid., letter 214.
3. Ibid., letter 288.
4. Ibid., letter 284.

reason to wait in patience for the Lord's will, for time will eat away woes and sorrows, and when the Lord's judgment appears, those who are found watching will gain their reward.¹

There was confidence with Rutherford that since the Lord had taken the ordering of his suffering into His own hands, and since Jesus would come for his deliverance, he could wait in patience. His conception of the love of Christ was so firm that he felt he could not lose that conception, even in the grave or hell.² Rutherford was content to let Christ tutor him and his crosses as He might think best, for there could be no danger in following such a Guide.³

His fellow-sufferers were encouraged by Rutherford not to weary of the Master's chains; since suffering brings one closer to Christ, such times may be a cause for rejoicing. He reminded them that their Deliverer does not slumber, nor is He unfaithful in His promises.⁴ One's cable to salvation can go through flames of fire and not be singed; men and devils have no teeth to bite it in two. Therefore, the afflicted were entreated to be firm until the Lord should come.

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1. Ibid., letter 131.
2. Ibid., letter 176.
3. Ibid., letter 178.
4. Ibid., letter 212.

Faith's eyes can hold fast in the dark, seeing through a millstone and the gloom of God to His thoughts of love and peace.¹

A multitude of trouble creates a heavy burden to be borne, but not beyond the measure of grace the Lord is able to bestow. Although nature's counterfeit work is often broken in shreds, God has never yet broken the back of His child.² If it is God for whom one suffers, his own personal safety and man's deliverance will not bring peace.³ One need not be dismayed if the Lord calls him to suffer, for there will be a new allowance of the King upon coming to trial. Christ lays a soft pillow under His witnesses' heads, "though often they must set down their bare feet among thorns".⁴

Rutherford observed that often a man is comforted with a word of God's promise, but stumbles at the work of holy providence, seeing earthly men flourish while men of God are being killed. But he reminded them that both the promise and the providence are from Him whose ways are "equal, straight, holy, and spotless". Therefore, a call was given for forgiveness of one's enemies and trust in God's judgment and salvation.⁵

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1. Ibid., letter 291.
2. Ibid., letter 295.
3. Ibid., letter 357.
4. Ibid., letter 165.
5. Ibid., letter 362.

A kingdom is appointed for those who continue with Christ through hours of tribulation, and as one partakes of Christ's suffering now, so will he one day partake of His glory.¹ Rutherford acknowledged that it is easy for those on shore to throw counsel to those tossed about in the sea, but, having been tossed himself, he still testified that "only by living by faith, and by fetching strength and comfort from Christ, can (one) be victorious, and have a right to the precious promises of 'the tree of life'.."2

C. Physical Weakness and Infirmary

In this realm also, Rutherford knew from his own experience the anguish and discouragement which bodily infirmity may bring forth, not only for the sufferer himself but also for those who have sympathy and concern for the one under affliction. Rutherford's Letters contain his reaction to illness in himself and his immediate family and also his words of encouragement and admonition to others undergoing like sorrow.

1. The Experience of Suffering in Illness

In one of his early letters, to Marion M'Naught, Rutherford revealed the heaviness of heart he felt under

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1. Ibid., letter 337.
2. Ibid., letter 359.

the burden of his wife's illness. This, in addition to his concern over the state of the Church, seemed to be almost more than he was able to bear.¹ His anguish was evident in his request for prayer at this time when he felt so comfortless, as though the Lord were his adversary.² Mrs. Rutherford's illness was severe, lasting a year and a month,³ and so bitter was her husband's grief over her distress that he expressed in one letter the desire that she might be relieved from her suffering by death.⁴

It was toward the end of his wife's illness that Rutherford himself was stricken with a fever which lasted many weeks, rendering him incapable of carrying on his regular duties among his congregation.⁵ To this pastor, whose joy lay in serving the Lord in his parish and who found separation from his flock a grievous thing, such forced idleness added to his concern and discouragement. However, in his acceptance of these afflictions, Rutherford revealed an ability to see beyond the immediate trial to One who has both strength and a purpose for such times.

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1. Ante, p. 11.
2. Rutherford: Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. by Andrew A. Bonar, letter 6.
3. Ibid., letter 11.
4. Ibid., letter 8.
5. Ibid., letter 11.

2. The Purpose of Suffering in Illness

Rutherford was familiar with the distress that can accompany physical infirmity, but in the midst of such experiences he held to his faith in the Lord's sufficiency and purpose, and it was this kind of faith that he sought to instill in his correspondents. His continual admonition was that one learn to look beyond things of the world, whether of joy or sorrow, to the One who is sovereign and good, leading men to Himself.

a. Fellowship with the Lord

On the occasion of his wife's illness, Rutherford said, "It is hard to keep sight of God in a storm, especially when He hides Himself, for the trial of His children." One detects a note of discouragement in his words, yet there was an awareness in Rutherford that because of this period and the inner conflict which arose from it, there would in future days be a purpose to seek the Lord even more than had been done in the past.¹

Asking for prayer at this time, Rutherford stated that it is the Christian's place "still to knock, and to lie at the Lord's door, until [he] dies knocking." The Lord has promised to open, and Rutherford trusted in His faithfulness. However, this trust included an ac-

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1. Ibid., letter 6.

ceptance of the fact that one cannot expect to arrive at a heavenly home without "wounds and blood", therefore this man could write, in the midst of distress on behalf of his wife, "Welcome, welcome cross of Christ, if Christ be with it."¹ Again, in this same vein, he wrote, "I know that an afflicted life looks very like the way that leads to the kingdom... The Lord grant us the whole armour of God."²

The Lord's design in sickness was brought to mind as Rutherford showed that although God's purpose may lie hidden, He is continually commending His love and care to His children. There must be no anger against the messengers of an afflicting and correcting Father. "All of the sad losses, trials, sicknesses, infirmities, griefs, heaviness, and inconstancy of the creature" may be considered the rods of God, who is contending with earthly loves to make His children's love for Him "single, unmixed, and chaste". Christ's aim is to gain the fellowship of His people with Him in heaven for eternity. Rutherford assured that the desire for enjoyment of Christ for evermore will be answered in heaven, and with such a hope one can well bear the lack of a healthy body and ease in the world if such a lack makes one

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1. Ibid., letter 8.
2. Ibid., letter 10.

more fit to receive this hope.¹

To one woman correspondent, Rutherford explained sickness as a kindness. This person had been brought to the brink of death, then recuperated, and Rutherford saw this as a provision for allowing this one to become "riper for eternity". Christ would require an undivided love from her and this illness might serve as a means of bringing her to a more whole-hearted devotion to her Lord.² Thus was expressed a central idea in Rutherford's thinking, that in all of God's dealings with men He is leading them to Himself.

b. Aspiration for Eternal Values

Rutherford saw that one of the Lord's purposes in sickness and sorrow is to make one aware of the shallowness of a confidence which rests solely in things of the world. In speaking to Lady Kenmure concerning her infirmity in body and health, Rutherford expressed the hope that this period would serve as a warning to her, saying, "If in this life only we had hope, we should be of all men the most miserable." One does well to make sure a life above those things with which the world is generally concerned. In seeing purpose that goes beyond immediate circumstances, one realizes that often when he com-

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1. Ibid., letter 313.
2. Ibid., letter 125.

plains of the times he is actually slandering the Lord's work and His governing of His world, forgetting that "He is good, and doeth good".¹ If the insufficiency of the world and earthly comforts is brought to the fore in affliction, then the purpose of setting one's sights higher has been met.

3. Acceptance of Suffering in Illness

Rutherford did not experience a life free from trials, nor did he give his correspondents assurance of such a life here on earth. The times were difficult for these Covenanters, and affliction sprang from various sources. Illness was one of many crosses to be borne, with patience and trust, and Rutherford's words of comfort to those in physical infirmity offered hope of release not primarily for the present, but rather in a promised future which will know no sorrow.

a. Trust in the Lord's Providence

Lady Kenmure was given the reminder that the Lord desires His children, in all states of life, to say, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven", having comfort in the fact that God knows each one's nature and what is most healthful for his soul. Each cup of affliction is held to one's head by the gracious hand of

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1. Ibid., letter 305.

the Lord, who knows each person's strength and will not "mix that cup with one drachm-weight of poison". Thus Rutherford expressed the desire that in infirmity and sickness this woman might learn to say, "It is the Lord, let Him do whatsoever seemeth good in His eyes."¹

On the occasion of her husband's sickness, Rutherford urged Marion M'Naught to welcome every rod of the Lord, saying, "In God's book one cannot find a greater note of the child of God, than to fall down and kiss the feet of an angry God." Though God might seem to be setting one aside, that person must, in faith, cleave to the Lord.² Here was expressed Rutherford's conviction that man's only hope lies with the sovereign God, who knows His own and His way for them.

Addressing this same woman again, during a time of illness in her family, Rutherford admonished that she take these rods from the Lord in patience. He compared one undergoing trial to the Lord's wheat, which must be ground to be bread in His house. Looking to the time when such earthly cares will be past and Christ will be seen face to face, he urged her to hope and believe to the end.³

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1. Ibid., letter 3.
2. Ibid., letter 12.
3. Ibid., letter 49.

b. Endurance and Hope

Rutherford pointed to the future in one of his letters to a fellow pastor, in regard to a lingering illness of the latter's wife. This manifestation of the Father's rod was to be received as the mark of "a lawfully begotten child, and not of a bastard". Foul weather and vacillating fortunes may be expected until heaven is reached; but although twenty crosses be written for one in God's book, these will come to nineteen, then at last to one, and finally to none, when the believer will dwell with Christ for evermore and enjoy His tenderness and comfort.¹

Like encouragement was given Lady Kenmure during her illness. Rutherford's desire was that she might have eyes to see through sickness, recognizing that even though hell itself lay between Christ and her as a river to be crossed before coming to Him, she must willingly step in, knowing that the Lord would lend her His hand. However, rather than hell she had but two shallow brooks to pass through, sickness and death, and, as Rutherford reminded her, Christ had promised to do more than meet her, even bear her in His arms through these experiences.²

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1. Ibid., letter 112.
2. Ibid., letter 3.

Thus, hope lay in a promised future.

A letter written to Marion M'Naught following a dangerous illness through which she had passed also pointed through present affliction to eternal joy. Rutherford's attitude here was expressed, "What matters ill entertainment in the smoky inns of this miserable life? We are not to stay here, and we will be dearly welcome to Him whom we go to." This friend was advised to pray and be content with God's will, trusting that His mercy would be seen in the end.¹

These letters would hold small comfort for one who knew no hope beyond this present world. But for Rutherford, who had found much bitterness in this life, eternity, with its fuller experience of fellowship with the Lord, was well worth whatever crosses might need be borne as the Lord prepared one for that future. Suffering remained, but was seen through Christ and in the light of His presence.

D. Death

For Rutherford, whose life and writings represent one devoted with all his being to Jesus Christ, death meant an entry into eternal blessing and fellow-

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1. Ibid., letter 26.

ship with the Lord, a joy which might not be fully realized in this life. Therefore, in Rutherford's thinking, death was not rightly a cause for sorrow. Having experienced various trials throughout his life, and believing in the glory prepared for him, this man could well desire a quick passing from earthly life into the heavenly, seeing death into Christ as preferable to life.¹

1. Rutherford's Experience in Bereavement

On the occasion of the death of his first wife, Rutherford, believing as he did in God's providence and heavenly reward, could say, "The Lord hath done it; blessed be His name."² When his mother, who lived with Rutherford after his wife's death, became weak and it was evident that she would not live long, Rutherford realized that again he would be left alone, yet he could add, "But I am not alone, because Christ's Father is with me."³

Rutherford also experienced the loss of children in each of his marriages,⁴ thus was well acquainted with bereavement in his own immediate family. It was

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1. Ibid., letter 324.
2. Ibid., letter 11.
3. Ibid., letter 49.
4. Ante, pp. 11, 17.

from these experiences that his views regarding death and his words of comfort to others came.

2. Acceptance of Death

Rutherford was concerned that death be accepted in a Christian spirit, that the bereaved be able to see beyond the immediate sorrow to God's eternal plan and glory. Thus, in his Letters he attempted to turn the eyes of his correspondents from themselves to the Lord's purposes.

a. Preparation for Death

In one of his letters to Lady Kenmure, at a time of affliction for her, Rutherford reminded her that she might not understand God's providence, yet whatever He might do, she could be certain that it was not only good, but best. The Lord was directing her steps to heaven, and now, when she was reaching the end of that journey, she would do well to examine herself and see if she was ready to receive the kingdom of heaven in humility. Having given this admonition, Rutherford continued by offering assurance of God's presence and help in every trial. This woman had seen God's love and care manifested in recent afflictions, therefore she could well "believe and cast anchor in the dark night", approaching God's end for her in trust.¹

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1. Rutherford: Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. by Andrew A. Bonar, letter 39.

Rutherford was aware of the problem presented in the loss of a loved one in a family and sought to provide consolation for such a loss. In one instance he remarked that the worst possible aspect of death is that it is necessary to leave behind "children, husband, and the church of God in miseries". But one must be resolved to the fact that although at present he cannot join with the deceased, there will come a day when none will be missing in the Kingdom.¹ To George Gillespie, lying on his deathbed, Rutherford stated that his wife must be left to a more choice Husband, and his children to a better Father.²

Recognizing the human sorrow that naturally arises from death in a family, Rutherford, in urging submission to the Lord's will, reminded that this Lord has His children "written upon the palms of his hand", and is able to establish their hearts in His grace.³

b. Submission to the Lord's Sovereignty

Rutherford saw that the death of a young child often causes questioning because one cannot understand why a life which has barely begun to ripen should be taken, but he met this problem in the light of God's

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1. Ibid., letter 317.
2. Ibid., letter 324
3. Ibid., letter 35.

sovereign will.

The loss of a young one was set forth as a purging by the Lord, who made the wound and can also heal it. Rutherford believed that faith could teach one to "kiss a striking Lord; and so acknowledge the sovereignty of God (in the death of a child) to be above the power...of mortal men.." The Lord sends His people, as to market; some stay long, and others, the infants, "but look about them a little, and pass presently home again". It is the Lord who says how long one will remain, and none can change His decree.¹

Another figure used by Rutherford was that of a rose or an apple, which the Lord may gather or shake at whatever season of the year He desires. The parents' place is to learn to know and love God's sovereignty, which is "lusted with mercy".² Christ's having taken a child indicates that the parents' lease of him has expired, and their part is to "worship and adore the sovereignty and liberty that the Potter hath over the clay". Rutherford encouraged those who had been loaned a child for a time to give him back, willingly and laughingly.³

Although it seems strange to humans that the

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1. Ibid., letter 35.
2. Ibid., letter 298.
3. Ibid., letter 300.

Lord at times takes the bottom from one's worldly comforts, His people do not always see the ground of the Almighty's sovereignty. They see only "pieces of the broken links of the chains of His providence". Therefore, Rutherford saw that it is man's part to allow the Former to work His clay into whatever frame He pleases. It is a Christian art to learn to say:

I was obliged to render back again this child to the Giver: if I have had four years' loan of him, and Christ eternity's possession of him, the Lord hath kept condition with me... I am satisfied.¹

In his letters concerning the death of a young person Rutherford's emphasis on submission to the Lord remained, but he saw the problem as being slightly different from that occurring in the death of an infant, in that in the former case a mature and possibly fruitful life had been partially developed, only to be cut off. Again, he reminded that "earthen vessels are not to dispute with their Former", but rather recognize the wonderful counsel of the Lord.²

Believing that death and its manner are written and appointed in God's holy decree, Rutherford advised that the bereaved be silent, commanding his heart "to utter no repining and fretting thoughts of the holy dispensation of God". Only a godly submission will

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1. Ibid., letter 287.
2. Ibid., letter 314.

quiet and calm the heart in the face of loss, a submission that says to the omnipotent Lord, "Thy will be done," adoring His holy method and order.¹ One might feel that death had come too soon, at too early an age, but the Lord's sovereignty must silence such thoughts. The reminder was also given that none can be too early in heaven.² The Christian's responsibility is to read what the Lord has written on each cross, not to put slanders and mistakes on it, since the Lord may well mean it for good in the end.³

Submission to God's way was also urged for a husband or wife, on the grounds that the sovereign Lord, who orders all, "cannot be challenged in the order He hath made of things without souls, and some order He must keep also here, that one might bury another". Therefore, the partner left alone was called upon to accept this loss in silence, remembering that it was the Lord who had brought it about.⁴

c. Correction from the Lord

Rutherford saw in affliction, such as bereavement, a desire on God's part to teach and correct

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1. Ibid., letter 361.
2. Ibid., letter 310.
3. Ibid., letter 361.
4. Ibid., letter 315.

His children, and these lessons were pointed to as letters of comfort were written. Rutherford showed the necessity of examining one's crosses closely, reading them over and over, as messengers of the Lord. By tasting God's cup, one might grow and find blessing in His correction. Although one's cross might at times seem heavy, it has the purpose of making one "white and ripe for the Lord's harvest-hook", weaning him from the world.¹

Since the Lord had devised these crosses in wisdom and laid them on in love, their recipients were to accept them as visitations of God, seeing in them the Lord's fire casting out scum or refuse.² Rutherford observed that it is a good thing to pass through the Lord's school of trials, if one comes from it wiser and more experienced in the ways of God. But "it is a sad thing when the rod is cursed, that never fruit shall grow on it".³

Rutherford knew that there is deception in placing one's confidence in any created thing, whether husband, wife, or child, and therefore he saw God, in His providence, placing a hedge of thorns in one's way, with the gracious intention of saving a soul, whether

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1. Ibid., letter 35.
2. Ibid., letter 387.
3. Ibid., letter 315.

that soul was willing or not. The Lord would teach that He alone is sufficient, and, seeing that one is able, by His grace, to bear the loss of a loved one, he manifests the providence which will make Christ seem dearest to that soul.¹ Thus, God's purpose in taking a loved one may be to prevent an earthly creature's wooing one's love away from the Lord.²

In the bitterness of the loss of one's husband or wife, Rutherford advocated a special trust in the Lord and His ways. Man sees so little a portion of God, ruling the world in wisdom, far above the narrow thoughts of humans. Yet one may learn of "heavenly wisdom, self-denial, and mortification, by [a] sad loss".³

Faith and patience were called for, that Christ might be seen as one's first and last love. The Lord at times pierces His human vessel that it may be known "whether there be in it wine or water". Christ is the only suitable object of one's love,⁴ and the death of a dear one may enable this greatest love to increase. A bereaved wife was instructed to allow Christ to have the room of her husband; that husband no longer had need of her since "he [was enjoying] as much of the

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1. Ibid., letter 326.
2. Ibid., letter 56.
3. Ibid., letter 312.
4. Ibid., letter 37.

love of Christ as his heart [could] be capable of". Such a loss had a purpose, that more of the wife's love and heart might be in heaven rather than on any earthly creature.¹

Rutherford saw God's mercy as a strong basis for comfort during such lessons. The Lord who strikes will also bind up the wound He makes.² It is not in the Lord's mind to feed His children with judgment and wormwood; rather, His cup is sugared with mercy, bringing one's heart and love to their rightful owner.³ Rutherford wrote that Christ's trials might be taken gladly, for the Lord "never yet slew a child with the cross". Since it is the Lord who brews one's cup, that cup may be drunk with patience and good will. The afflicted were encouraged to allow God to wring and wash them, for in His training He displays a Father's heart and hand.⁴

Rutherford spoke of the "school of suffering [as] a preparation for the King's higher house", displaying the vanity of the world and the fairness of "eternity that is above sickness and death".⁵ It is a part of one's glory to be among the afflicted, con-

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1. Ibid., letter 312.
2. Ibid., letter 35.
3. Ibid., letter 287.
4. Ibid., letter 300.
5. Ibid.

formed to Christ and His suffering, remembering that "they lose nothing who gain Christ".¹

The rod of affliction has in it something of heaven and God that one may miss. "The majesty of the unsearchable and bottomless ways and judgments of God is not seen in the rod; and the seeing of them requireth the eyes of the man of wisdom." Rutherford assured that the Lord does no wrong, and may, through the experience of sorrow, be aiming at a greater degree of mortification.²

In affliction, Rutherford saw the Lord wooing one's love away from the world, making him ready for the Father's country.³ Although this might not be the sweet and pleasant manner in which one would wish to gain Christ, yet it is enough if He is gained, regardless of the way in which He comes.⁴ To Lady Kenmure, who had known much unhappiness in the world in addition to her recent widowhood, Rutherford said:

Your Lord hath been leosing you at the root from perishing things, and hunting after you to grip your soul. Madam, for the Son of God's sake, let Him not miss His grip, but stay and abide in the love of God..⁵

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1. Ibid., letter 4.
2. Ibid., letter 311.
3. Ibid., letter 176.
4. Ibid., letter 122.
5. Ibid., letter 37.

3. Consolation and Hope

Rutherford's words of hope to the bereaved came from his own experience and his own assurance. The Lord he had known and loved so well in this life was the Lord to whom death would lead, and herein lay comfort in time of bereavement. Through his Letters, Rutherford hoped to instill this same confidence in his correspondents.

a. Trust in the Lord's Goodness

One of Rutherford's letters expressing particularly deep thoughts of consolation is that written to a friend on the occasion of his daughter's death. He was reminded that even "as sown corn is not lost... so also it is in the resurrection of the dead". Then Rutherford continued:

[Since one does] not take it ill if [his] children outrun [him] in the life of grace, why then [should he be] sad if they outstrip [him] in the attainment of the life of glory?

A daughter could not fall into the hands of a better Husband than the Lord, and, even as this girl had been entrusted to God while she lived, now she was resigned "unto Him in whose bosom do sleep all that are dead in the Lord".¹

It does not matter whether a child be in its

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1. Ibid., letter 316.

parents' keeping or the Lord's.¹ A child lost in time is gained in eternity, and rather than being sent away, that child is only "sent before, like unto a star which...shineth in another hemisphere".² Likening a little one to a flower, Rutherford wrote that he "hath but changed a bed in the garden, and is planted up higher, nearer the sun, where he shall thrive better than in this outfield muir-ground".³ Surely a child could have no better care than that given him by a heavenly Father.

Rutherford reminded another in grief that the King has said He will send a Comforter, and the Christian has a claim to and interest in that promise.⁴ During trial, one's soul must be fixed upon the Lord's good will; He leads through these waters, on the way to glory. Rutherford assured that regardless of the sorrow felt at present, one year's time in heaven will swallow such sadness, beyond all comparison.⁵

Grief would be justified were it not that the deceased has left a place of sin for a place where the Savior is King of the land. Faith in the resurrection is seen by Rutherford as cause for one to suspend long-

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1. Ibid., letter 28.
2. Ibid., letter 4.
3. Ibid., letter 298.
4. Ibid., letter 176.
5. Ibid., letter 302.

ing in an earthly loss, believing that this experience is best because the Lord has done it.¹

b. Christ as Forerunner

One of the reasons set forth by Rutherford for confidence in approaching death was the fact that Christ is one's Forerunner. There is cause for rejoicing in the knowledge that one does not go to heaven without Jesus' having been there before; His greeting will make one realize that it is not an uncomfortable thing to die.²

The footprints of this Forerunner are clear and manifest, and Rutherford assured that one "will not sleep long in the dust, before the Daybreak". In approaching death, the Christian can be sure that he has a good Guide, who knows this way and its ups and downs. Christ may be allowed to tutor as He sees fit, for one "cannot be marred, nor miscarry, in His hand".³

c. Presence with Christ

Writing in regard to the death of a young person, Rutherford remarked that whatever is Christ's gain cannot be another's loss. Death is the act of going home to a Friend, where there will be a welcome.⁴

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1. Ibid., letter 315.
2. Ibid., letter 317.
3. Ibid., letter 324.
4. Ibid., letter 314.

Death may have come at an early age, before much service had been rendered to Christ on earth, but though the deceased changes service-houses, he does not change services or Master.¹ Consolation was also given in the fact that by death "a man is beyond the hazard of dispute; the precious youth is perfected and glorified".²

The Christ known and loved in this life is the same as will be found in the next, yet He will appear far above what He has been here in His "excellency, beauty, sweetness, irradiations, and beams of majesty". One's soul will be a more capacious vessel, better able to take in more of Christ. Rutherford further expressed this:

You would be willing to give many days journey on earth, to go up to heaven, and fetch down anything of Christ; how much more willing...to make a journey to go in person to heaven to enjoy the full Godhead!³

Rutherford's views on death, since they included a view of heaven, contained a strong element of hope and encouragement. The loss of life means a gain for the Christian, for he is assured that he goes to a Friend in death, the same Friend with whom there has been communion during life.

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1. Ibid., letter 310.
2. Ibid., letter 361.
3. Ibid., letter 317.

E. Summary

In this chapter the Letters of Samuel Rutherford have been examined, with the purpose of discovering his thinking in regard to the problem of suffering. The areas considered were persecution for one's belief, physical infirmity and weakness, and death. Rutherford was acquainted in his own life with these sources of affliction and grief, and thus was in a position to write with sympathy and understanding to others undergoing similar trials.

A recurring theme found in these Letters has been a deep devotion to the Lord and a confidence in His purposes and final triumph. Rutherford desired fellowship with the Lord, both in this life and the next, above all else, and his words of comfort and admonition to his correspondents contained the hope that they too experience this fellowship and its blessings.

CHAPTER III
THE RELEVANCE OF RUTHERFORD'S THINKING
ON THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING IN THE PRESENT DAY

A. Introduction

The preceding chapters have set forth the life and experience of Samuel Rutherford as a Covenanter, then examined his thinking on the problem of suffering as he was confronted by it in his own life and the life of his family, parishioners, and friends.

It will be the purpose of this chapter to relate Rutherford's thinking to the present day. This will be done by considering briefly the ideas of four contemporary writers as they have expressed themselves in regard to suffering in areas similar to those with which Rutherford dealt. The primary basis for having selected these four writers is the fact that they are representative of recent thought for a lay level, which is the main concern of this study.

The four men who have been selected, and their works, are as follows: C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain; Henry Wheeler Robinson, Suffering Human and Divine; George Stewart, God and Pain; and Leslie D. Weatherhead, Why Do Men Suffer?

B. Purpose in Suffering

In his own experience of suffering as well as in that of others, Rutherford believed that God was at work, shaping lives and bringing them to a place of accepting His will and purpose. This submission to the Lord and His ways, in trust, is also found in the thinking of three of the contemporary writers under consideration, although Leslie D. Weatherhead does not stress this particular theme in his book.

1. Submission to God

C.S. Lewis states that "the proper good of a creature is to surrender itself to its Creator", thus it is necessary that men in some way learn self-surrender to God.¹ One of the ways God accomplishes this purpose seems to be through pain. "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world."² That which is good in any painful experience for the sufferer is his submission to the will of God.³

George Stewart sees suffering as a disciplinary act of God, whereby one learns to obey. "Suffering is the only school master to whom all must listen."⁴ Preparation by pain and restraint is never an easy proc-

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1. C.S. Lewis: The Problem of Pain, pp. 78-79.
2. Ibid., p. 81.
3. Ibid., p. 98.
4. George Stewart: God and Pain, p. 22.

ess, and one is apt to be especially impatient with discipline of the spirit, but through such experience, if one learns obedience, he has achieved "that dignity and serenity of life known only to those who do God's will".¹ In the face of weakness, an independent self-righteousness, vanity and willfulness are replaced by the way of dedication. Thus Paul could say, "When I am weak, then am I strong."²

H. Wheeler Robinson states that pain may be a path to the first real discovery of God in that it reveals the fact that men belong to Someone bigger than themselves.³ Until proven incomplete in himself, one is not apt to be conscious of the need for God.⁴ Suffering in the spirit of submission to the Father's will, regardless of what one loses, leads to the hope of entering into a "closer knowledge of God in Christ through the right endurance of suffering".⁵

Rutherford's thinking in this area was similar to that of the writers cited in that he also sensed the need of submission and acquiescence in God's purposes and saw that suffering is one means used by God to

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1. Ibid., pp. 31-32.

2. Ibid., pp. 89-91.

3. Henry Wheeler Robinson: Suffering Human and Divine, p. 14.

4. Ibid., p. 207.

5. Ibid., p. 218.

bring about His desired end.¹

2. Awareness of Highest Values

Lewis conceives of God as the only good of all creatures and believes that God wills the best for men, that best being to know and love Him. He states, "God intends to give us what we need, not what we now think we want." Therefore, God may in His love for man cause pain, in order that necessary alterations be made.²

The operation of pain serves to shatter the illusion that all is well, that what a person has in himself, good or bad, is sufficient for him. God knows that one's happiness lies in Him, so when men are unaware of this fact, in His providence He takes away sources of false happiness.³ Tribulation is necessary because it seems that only by taking all else away from a person is God given possession of His creature. As soon as trial is over, the tendency is to run off from God, forgetting His support.⁴ Thus God withholds the settled happiness and security one might desire, for security would teach one to rest his heart in the world.

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1. Rutherford: Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. by Andrew A. Bonar, letters 10, 27, 157, 300.
2. Lewis, op. cit., pp. 41-43.
3. Ibid., pp. 83-84.
4. Ibid., pp. 94-95.

As Lewis expresses it, "Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home."¹

Robinson feels that men are not using all of the resources open to them until they learn to:

...interpret the unwelcome guest [affliction] as the divine ambassador, and listen to his challenge, not as an unwelcome interruption to the pleasures of life, but as an invitation to rise to a higher level of living.²

Stewart sees pain as a means of correcting and amplifying the intellectual and spiritual life of a man.³ He says, "Renunciation is the necessity and the glory of men who live in a material world but whose citizenship is in the realm of the spirit."⁴ Each person has some sting in life, and, by responding to God in the face of this tribulation, may discover that he cannot achieve fulness of life in his own might, but in yielding himself and his infirmity to God, his weakness may make him perfect unto God.⁵ When human resources fail, one tends to return to God, who "alone can say to those without resource, whose only possessions are a life full of problems, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness!'"⁶

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1. Ibid., p. 103.
2. Robinson, op. cit., p. 205.
3. Stewart, op. cit., p. 39.
4. Ibid., p. 75.
5. Ibid., p. 121.
6. Ibid., p. 130.

Rutherford also knew and emphasized the vanity of placing one's value and devotion in earthly things, and he gave thanks for affliction that brings an awareness of such folly. Christ is worth suffering for, since He only is of ultimate worth.¹

C. Endurance and Hope

One of the elements of suffering which makes it bearable, and even a blessing, is the fact of the Lord's presence in trial, and His strengthening and consolation. Although He may not destroy the affliction in one's life, the Lord is willing to come into that life and share the trial. Neither Rutherford nor the contemporary writers with whom this study is dealing propose hope in final relief from suffering and affliction in this life; affliction must be borne in a way which glorifies God. But there is a final consummation of God's purposes to which the believer may look, and in which he may hope for eternal blessedness with God.

1. Divine Consolation

Robinson finds in the experience of suffering in the Old Testament that it is somewhat of a mystery and its burden cannot be fully interpreted, but

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1. Rutherford: Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. by Andrew A. Bonar, letters 223, 242, 250, 200, 88.

these experiences do illustrate "the power of personal trust in God to carry that burden, unexplained as it might be". This supports Robinson's conception that the challenge of suffering cannot be met by reason alone, but only by a religious faith which can lift that suffering to a higher level.¹ Further, this author sees God Himself present in men's suffering. If God is directly or indirectly responsible for man's suffering, partially because of the gift of moral freedom to man, this responsibility "seems to require that He should Himself help... to carry the burden of suffering".²

Stewart points out that although there is bitterness in trying experiences, this bitterness is not meant to be the goal of life, but rather a life "rich, sweet, abundant..., in scorn of consequences, in the face of sorrow, defeat, sickness, [or] death..". The adequacy of God to sweeten the bitterness and stay by His people remains. As Stewart phrases it, God does not promise ease or give assurance of victory, but "He does promise to be with [one] and to give [him] courage and to save everything of value, no matter how great or terrible the crash may be".³

Possibly Rutherford's outstanding expression

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1. Robinson, op. cit., p. 48.
2. Ibid., p. 138.
3. Stewart, op. cit., pp. 103-105.

of the consolation he knew in his suffering is found in his praise of Christ's dear presence with him, giving sweetness and joy to his cross. Any affliction was well worth these "feast-days with King Jesus".¹ He was convinced of God's continual presence with His people² and Christ's sharing in their trial, taking the heavier portion of burdens.³

2. Future Glory

In his discussion regarding pain, Lewis deals with a consideration of heaven, saying, "A book on suffering which says nothing of heaven is leaving out almost the whole of one side of the account." Both Scripture and tradition have habitually balanced the suffering of earth with the joys of heaven, and Lewis feels that no solution to the problem of pain which omits this can be called a Christian one. Regardless of jeers concerning "pie in the sky" and "escapism", either the "pie in the sky" exists, or it does not, and if the latter be true, Christianity is false.⁴ The final solution to the problem of suffering is not to be found in this world.

Robinson believes that so long as the present

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1. Rutherford: Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. by Andrew A. Bonar, letters 61, 68, 92, 175, 205, 318.
2. Ibid., letters 333, 357.
3. Ibid., letters 214, 242, 288.
4. Lewis, op. cit., p. 132.

order lasts, suffering will have to be endured by members of the Kingdom. "The disciple's primary purpose is not to escape suffering but to seek first the kingly rule of God." It would seem that the passing of the period of suffering into one of joy will be a "visible and future vindication of God and the faithful".¹

Robinson concludes thus:

Whatever be the affliction, it does not imply a situation that has escaped from the weak hands of God, but is an event that is controlled by His purpose and interpretable, though at long last, in the light of a divine love from which nothing can separate us.²

...the first step of suffering without consolation [will lead] to the second step of suffering with divine consolation, and this to the third step of blessedness without suffering.³

In Stewart's presentation he mentions that one explanation given Job for his suffering was that "there is no answer to the problem of suffering in the mystery and majesty of God". The explanation must come from a larger universe; all an earthly being can do is trust.⁴

Leslie D. Weatherhead states it thus:

[God's] purposes are so vast and glorious, beyond all guessing now, that, when they are achieved and consummated, all our sufferings and sorrows of today, even the agonies that nearly break our faith... shall, seen from that fair country where God's age-

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1. Robinson, op. cit., pp. 119-120.
2. Ibid., p. 206.
3. Ibid., p. 208.
4. Stewart, op. cit., p. 40.

long dreams come true, bulk as little as bulk now
the pieces of a broken toy..¹

In like manner, Rutherford shows in his thinking that hope for the Christian lies ultimately in a future in which Christ will be triumphant. He exhorts his correspondents to bear present persecution and trial in faith, believing that God's judgment will come and His truth be vindicated.² Also, the glory of eternity with Christ is seen in such magnitude that suffering of the present, whether physical or emotional, is of no import in comparison. In that day there will be nothing but sweetness, and it is anticipation of and preparation for that time which is to wholly grip the believer in this life.³

D. Answers to the Problem of Suffering

Robinson's argument on suffering is described in the motto Solvitur Patiendo, which entails winning peace through suffering, not by evasion of it.⁴ "The answer to the most difficult problems of suffering is to be found through bearing it (in the right way)." Although one may not fully understand the mys-

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1. Leslie D. Weatherhead: Why Do Men Suffer?, p. 46.
2. Rutherford: Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. by Andrew A. Bonar, letters 135, 362, 363.
3. Ibid., letters 30, 84, 247.
4. Robinson, op. cit., p. xx.

tery of suffering intellectually, he may "live through it into the light". No abstract argument can adequately cope with suffering, but one who has faced it triumphantly has solved a fundamental problem of life, in spite of the fact that he may never be able to satisfactorily put his solution into words.¹

In the Christian faith, "the ultimate answer to all questions which suffering raises is to be found in the ever-deepening assurance of the love of God".² The peace which the Christian seeks is not the peace of escaping from the sufferings of life, but rather "the peace of a victory won in their very midst and through their endurance".³

Weatherhead observes that it is those who have actually experienced suffering who are able, far better than the theorists, to understand that "somehow pain and sorrow are caught up into God's heart and carried there". To the greatest sufferers, pain does not deny God's love and power, nor mock Him. These know that in some way suffering "has been met and dealt with and is being redeemed".⁴

Rutherford, as a man who experienced suffer-

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1. Ibid., pp. 201-202.

2. Ibid., p. 219.

3. Ibid., pp. 223-224.

4. Weatherhead, op. cit., p. 11.

ing in his own life and knew a deepened faith and devotion because of such experience, testified to the fact that the answer to the problem of suffering lies in one's confrontation with it. His joy in his crosses, because of Christ's part in them, and his longing for the Lord's provided a well of comfort which was never dry.

The first edition of Rutherford's Letters was entitled Joshua Redivivus, that is, "Joshua resurrected," and, as Gaebelein has observed:

Like Joshua of old who spied out the Promised Land and brought back a glowing report, Rutherford took flight on the wings of the spirit and spied out the heavenly Canaan, bringing back as his report the surpassing spiritual eloquence of these pages.¹

E. Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine selected contemporary writers who have considered the problem of suffering and observe the relevance of Rutherford's thinking, of the seventeenth century, to theirs. It has been found that in spite of a difference in situation and historical setting, fundamental problems, and thought in regard to those problems, have remained the same. Rutherford wrote with

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1. Rutherford: The Letters of Samuel Rutherford, ed. by Frank E. Gaebelein, p. 17.

deep sympathy and insight, possibly because he was so aware himself of the reality of trial and affliction, and knew through experience the victory and joy which may be manifested in a life at such times. Thus, although the language and setting of Rutherford's Letters may be foreign to today's reader, still the message under these elements seems applicable for the present. One finds in these Letters not only comfort and encouragement, but also stimulation, of a kind that is not confined to any one century.

CHAPTER IV
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

It has been the purpose of this study to examine the life and Letters of Samuel Rutherford in an attempt to discover his thinking in regard to suffering, then relate that thought to the problem of suffering in the present day. Since Rutherford experienced affliction, in political and religious as well as personal realms, throughout his life, his Letters arose from one who knew the reality of suffering and could thus write to others undergoing like trials with deep sympathy and insight.

In order to understand the situation from which Rutherford's Letters came, the first chapter presented a historical and biographical background. This man lived during the Covenanting period in Scotland and was an important contributor to it, largely as a writer. However, this was not his only field of endeavor; during his life time he also spent fruitful years as a pastor and professor.

This was a time when men often paid for their convictions with persecution, or even martyrdom, and Rutherford was one who was acquainted with trial for his beliefs concerning the Church. In addition, he experienced fully disappointment, loss, and anguish in

his own personal life.

In the second chapter Rutherford's Letters were examined, with the purpose of discovering his views concerning suffering, as he experienced it in his own life and as he wrote of it to his correspondents. Suffering was considered under the three categories of persecution for one's belief, physical weakness and infirmity, and death. It was found that in suffering Rutherford saw the Lord both teaching His children, making them more fit for His Kingdom, and revealing Himself to them in close fellowship. Thus he considered times of trial as times of blessing sent from the Lord, and his crosses were received without fear, for he knew Christ's presence in them.

In the third chapter the views on suffering of four contemporary writers were compared with Rutherford's, and it was found that basic ideas were very similar. Affliction carries with it the purpose of submission and correction, the blessing of Christ's presence, and the hope of His final triumph over sorrow and wrong.

One may conclude that Rutherford's Letters are adequate for gaining an insight into the problem of suffering in the present day. This study has shown that trials are best understood by those who have experienced them and known victory in them, and Ruther-

ford illustrates such a life. His Letters reveal that he found his answer to the problem of suffering in a devotion and submission to his sovereign Lord.

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