

The Long Silence

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne.

Most shrunk back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly---- not with cringing shame, but with belligerence and anger.

'Can God judge us? How can he know about suffering?' snapped a pert young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. 'We endured terror...beatings...torture...death!'

In another group a Negro boy lowered his collar. 'What about this?' he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn. 'Lynched for no crime but being black!'

In another crowd, a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes murmured: 'Why should I suffer? It wasn't my fault. I was raped.'

Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups. Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he permitted in his world. How lucky God was to live in heaven where all was sweetness and light, where there was no fear, no hunger, no hatred. What did God know of all that people had been forced to endure in this world? For God leads a pretty sheltered life, they said.

So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he or she had suffered the most. A Jew, a Negro, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a thalidomide child and a person who suffered from mental illness.

In the centre of the plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever.

Before God could be qualified to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured. Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth---as a human!

Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted.

Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think he is out of his mind and mentally deranged when he tries to do it. Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudicial jury and convicted by a cowardly judge. Let him be tortured.

At the last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die. Let him die so that there can be no doubt he died. Let there be a host of witnesses to verify it.

As each leader announced his portion of the sentence, loud murmurs of approval went up from the throng of people assembled. When the last had finished

pronouncing the sentence, there was a long silence. No one moved. For suddenly all knew that God had already served his sentence. (and ours).