

# MOVING FROM LAMENTATION TO HOPE AND HEALING

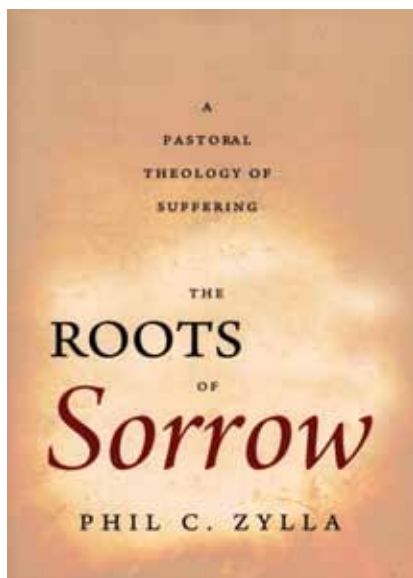
REVIEWED BY LAURA RICHTER, M.DIV.

In *The Roots of Sorrow*, Phil Zylla, academic dean and associate professor of pastoral theology at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, wanted to write “a practical and theologically sound book” on suffering. His work strategically weaves systematic principles, biblical interpretation, pastoral recommendations and personal stories into a single tapestry that thoroughly explores the topic’s many aspects.

In the first two chapters, Zylla offers common explanations — ranging from punishment for wrongdoing to pedagogical formation of character and tragedy serving as a test of faith — and the components of a theology of suffering. He notes most traditional explanations do not exhibit a mature understanding of suffering, nor do they comfort the sorrowful.

Zylla then begins to construct the components needed in order for a mature theology of suffering to emerge. Suggestions include applying the power of language to the concept of mystery, as well as providing a four-pronged model of the different kinds of pain involved in sorrow: physical pain, psychological anguish, social degradation and spiritual despondency.

The second part of the book outlines a three-step movement for a pastoral theology of suffering. The steps include moving from silence to lament, from indifference to compassion and



**THE ROOTS OF SORROW: A PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING**

BY PHIL C. ZYLLA

Baylor University Press, 2012

209 pages, \$29.95

from loneliness to community. Zylla carefully constructs these movements, building on the framework created in the opening chapters. He declares mutism the first step, as the person afflicted lacks words to explain the suffering, which demolishes previously held meaning systems and hope. The importance of lamentation, which has a strong presence in biblical literature, is then highlighted as critical for the suf-

ferer to move toward healing.

The second step focuses on caregivers, who may be tempted to move away from suffering. Zylla provides an active theology of compassion; encouraging companions to not only enter into personal suffering, but to also step into the anguish present in all creation. In the last step, he suggests that authentic spiritual communities can help the distressed move from loneliness to community. This three-step movement connects the sufferer with the caregiver, creating a larger community, better able to engage each other and the world’s suffering in a meaningful way.

The last two chapters consider the heartbreak seen in creation and the subtle persistence of hope in the face of overwhelming suffering. Zylla sketches out the three-fold “groaning” — wordless lamentation — in our midst, including the groaning of the whole creation, the struggle of Christian communities and the groaning of the Spirit, which intercedes for us. In this last section he presents the work of several systematic liberation theologians, including Dorothee Soelle, Jürgen Moltmann, both German theologians, and Gustavo Gutiérrez, who is from Peru. All three experienced suffering in their lives and each developed a theology of hope. Zylla presents Soelle’s understanding of hope which calls for solidarity, while he invokes Moltmann’s theology of the cross to find hope. He then explores hope as seen in the spiritual struggle of Job, which Gutiérrez uses to explain the suffering of the innocent. In this last section, Zylla weaves systematic theology and personal stories, transitioning the reader to a conclusion directed towards those providing ministry to the

**EXCERPT FROM *THE ROOTS OF SORROW: A PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF SUFFERING***

*Suffering is not a problem to be solved or a riddle to be explained, but rather it is a reality to be confronted in cooperation with God’s own expressed intentions in the world.*

afflicted.

Zylla clearly pondered this topic professionally and personally for many years. He includes his own narrative and poems, and it seems that his personal experience fueled a professional interest in crafting a thorough and systematic exploration of the roots of sorrow. This book does what it set out to do, and indeed it is both practical and theologically sound.

As one trained in theology, I feel the book leans more toward the systematic approach, and less toward the pastoral side, but certainly both can be found in Zylla's exploration of sorrow. As a person who experienced several personal losses in the last four years, I appreciated Zylla's exploration of suffering

and his recommendations to caregivers ministering to those who suffer. His bold recommendation to compassionately and fully enter into others' suffering was welcome from a personal perspective as well as providing a good professional reminder for me as I minister to others. I clearly heard his challenge to go beyond personal suffering, truly entering into the groaning of our communities and the earth.

This book could be a great read for theologians, ethicists or caregivers involved in health care, as well as anyone looking for a thoughtful consideration of suffering. They will find sound thought, carefully constructed theory and compassionate pastoral application.

The sorrowful may appreciate Zyl-

la's personal approach and sage advice to those ministering to those suffering. Caregivers will find helpful education as well as practical suggestions that could be easily adopted by those in clinical care, social services or pastoral care. This work delves deep into the roots of sorrow and provides insight, help and hope to those experiencing sorrow, as well as to those who care for them.

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# HANDBOOK HELPS CAREGIVERS

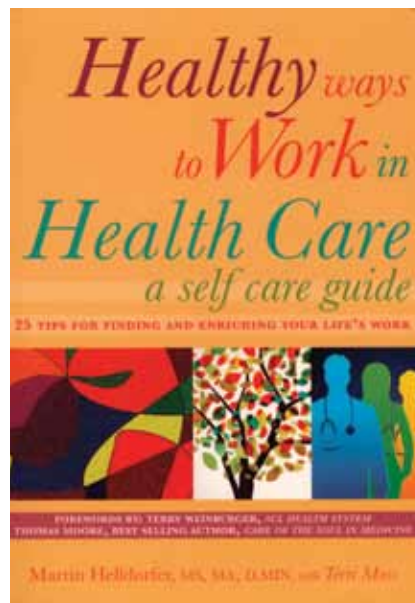
REVIEWED BY PAMELA A. MAIDENS, M.A., C.L.E.M.

*To be a healer you don't have to be in perfect condition whether physically, emotionally, or spiritually. But you need to be in the process of healing yourself."*

— Foreword by Thomas Moore

**W**e know that health care entails more than standardized practices and clinical procedures. In their reflective guide to well-being, Martin Helldorfer and Terri Moss recognize that something else is necessary in order to heal the body, mind and spirit — a healthy caregiver. It isn't surprising to learn that Helldorfer is a clinical psychologist and was a monk for 30 years. Moss, founder of Moss Communications, brings her own richness to the text with, as she writes, an "appreciation for the importance of clear communication among staff and volunteers."

The authors provide real-life examples of what it means to care (or to not care) for oneself. Those of us who have worked in health care or any service



## HEALTHY WAYS TO WORK IN HEALTH CARE: A SELF CARE GUIDE

BY MARTIN HELLDORFER WITH TERRI MOSS

Moss Communications, 2012

360 pages; \$22.95

profession for a number of years are invited to pause and become more aware of the characteristics of healthy and unhealthy ways of working. Although this book required me to do a good amount of serious soul searching, it gave me a sense of camaraderie when I read that millions of other people are seeking work-life balance.

If you like short chapters filled with insight, this book is for you. The combination of text, case studies, reflections and space for personal journaling is a format that allows the reader to concentrate on individual concepts and explore them with ease. A preface offers an important overview of how to use the book individually or in teams during workshops or retreats.

Chapters focus not only on finding the right work and achieving a healthier work-life balance; they offer constructive suggestions. Universal challenges like work fixation, addiction and exhaustion will be surprisingly familiar to any reader who can complete a life

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