
Native Thought, Suffering, and Spiritual Formation as Theological Education

Inaugural Lecture of the Floy and Paul Cornelsen Chair of Spiritual Formation

The Rev. Dr. Gordon J. Straw

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President Nieman, Dean Menn, members of the LSTC board, faculty, staff and students of LSTC; members of the Paul Cornelsen family, all to whom I am grateful for this opportunity and this call; to the presenters and participants of the LSTC Vine Deloria Jr. Symposium; and to my dear family and all who are gathered here: thank you for coming. I consider it a great honor to be with you tonight, to share a bit of what inspires and motivates me, both in my work and in my life.

Tonight, I want to weave some things together that aren't normally considered weave-able, perhaps. The ambitious lecture title and even more ambitious task it implies reveals the nature of the things with which we all engage. That life, too often, is frustratingly complex and we wonder how on this earth and when in this lifetime they will make sense. This weaving, as life itself, has many strands, they are put together in ways that are, at the same time, easy to follow and difficult to trace, tight in some places, unraveled in others. My hope, tonight, is that our engagement with these topics is more fruitful than logical, more enlightening than certain. I will weave together three strands, then setting them in story at the end. These strands are: Seeing the universe as living and personal, rather than a mechanical and objective universe; challenges to theological education which largely come from viewing the universe as mechanical and objective; and finally, spiritual formation as theological education—three points and a story. I hope that I will think of a joke in there somewhere, too.

A Personal Universe Part One: Power and Place equal Personality

Before we move to spiritual formation as theological education and as a segue from yesterday's great discussions, I want to share some thoughts about the metaphysics of a personal universe, weaving in the wisdom of Vine Deloria Jr., Daniel Wildcat, and Johannes Schwanke's interpretation of Martin Luther. As we begin, it is perhaps enough to say that metaphysics are, as Deloria describes them in *Power and Place*, "simply that first set of principles we must possess in order to make sense of the world in which we

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live."¹ Vine Deloria Jr. has spent much of his scholarly effort on the encounter between the metaphysics of a Native sacred view of the universe and the metaphysics of an American material and mechanical view of the universe. It hasn't always been pretty. Deloria writes, "For many centuries whites scorned the knowledge of American Indians regarding whatever the people said as gross, savage, superstition, and insisting that their own view of the world, a complex mixture of folklore, religious doctrine, and Greek natural sciences, was the highest intellectual achievement of our species."² I assume that we all know a good deal about the Modern West's metaphysical assumptions (I know that American Indians have had to know a good deal about this, anyway): that the universe is essentially material and that the universe was set in motion by universal principles that were either given by God or created themselves from logic and the material given-ness of the earth. They are best known and studied through the accumulation and manipulation of objects and abstract concepts of a (mainly) mechanical universe. So, allow me to describe an American Indian metaphysics, particularly as it has been described by Vine Deloria Jr. and Daniel Wildcat, in their book, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America*. I know it's a bit unfair, but I do want to finish tonight. Deloria describes Native metaphysics thusly,

"The best description of Indian metaphysics was the

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1. Vine Deloria and Daniel Wildcat, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Pub., 2001), 2.
 2. Deloria and Wildcat, 1.

realization that the world, and all its possible experiences, constituted a social reality, a fabric of life in which everything had the possibility of intimate knowing relationships because, ultimately, everything was related. . . . Even though we can translate the realities of the Indian social world into concepts familiar to us from the Western scientific context, such as space, time, and energy, we must surrender most of the meaning in the Indian world when we do so.”³

Within this metaphysics of experience, there are two primary aspects necessary for making sense of the world: Power and Place. Power can also be described as life-force, energy, or spiritual power. Place is any locus within this social reality of relationships among all beings, since all things are related.

American Indian ways of knowing take a metaphysical stance of what Deloria calls “suspended judgment.” A stance that accepts the totality of an experience and keeps it “in view” until it becomes clear, whenever that occurs. Black Elk, after telling the story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman to John Neihardt, said, “Whether these things actually happened this way, I do not know. But, if you think about it, you will know that it’s true.”⁴ That is a suspended judgment. Western science reaches answers that are specific, yet temporary and incomplete. In Deloria’s view, the grievous sin of the West is misplaced concreteness (a phrase from A.N. Whitehead that Deloria loved to use)—“the desire to absolutize what are but tenuous conclusions.”⁵ American Indian knowledge instead seeks to combine seemingly unrelated observations and place them in suspended judgment, confident that one day it will become clear. Importantly, the unity of this approach is not in the data or observations themselves, but that these observations come from a specific place. It is the study (as it were) of persons, who possess power and agency, in a local environment. This is different from the West’s desire to study objects in a sterile or contrived environment, in order to gain abstract knowledge. What we know as American Indians is not the result of a scientific method, but the result of living in a place, keenly observing and remembering over a long period of time. Our knowledge comes from thousands of years of paying attention to our relationships with all the other persons around us. It’s this understanding of the interconnectedness and relatedness of the universe that is our first principle of spirituality. It’s not romanticism or superstition; it’s acknowledging a living people’s experience of life in a particular place.

The West has argued that American Indian knowledge, based on a foundation of relationships, is “imprecise,” since we do not create self-determined abstract concepts, which are then categorized and used to create universal laws by means of logic. Our imprecise knowledge is not capable of explaining the general workings or laws of the universe. We give you that. However, the disadvantage of this abstract, mechanical view of the universe,

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which Dr. Wildcat calls “Modern Western intellectual asceticism,”⁶ is that it is reductionistic, leading to a logically accurate, but detached picture of the world. When one forces natural experiences into predetermined conceptual categories, one cuts out much of the total experience itself (including emotion); this fails to explain anything about the relationships that is necessary to maintain a spiritual universe. This abstract, reductionistic worldview has no moral basis (the science, not the scientists), i.e., no attachment of value to individuals; studying everything as if it were a machine, or a mathematical problem, or a commodity to be traded or consumed. This may be “value-free” perhaps, but it is certainly not assumption-free. It prioritizes the study of objects over maintaining relationships among persons.

Although American Indians didn’t have a detailed conception of the whole planet, they did (and do) have very accurate knowledge of the lands, plants, animals, and other life-forms that shared specific environments. We prioritized specific knowledge over general laws. This stance requires keen observation and a robust memory, as well as humility about what we see and how we understand what happens around us. It is this priority of the particular that shapes our metaphysics of “power and place” in these three ways:

1. The universe is personal (but not individualistic). It is personal in the sense that the world is made up of persons, each of which has their own power and agency, yet are related to all other persons. Particular knowledge is always personal. It is impossible to project it out into universal laws.
2. The personal universe demands that each and every person seek and maintain personal relationships within one’s environment (place), whether it be humans, plants, other animals, features of a landscape, stars, etc. Focusing on relationship is an axiological focus—all things are inherently of value.
3. The spiritual aspect of knowledge teaches us that relation-

3. Deloria and Wildcat, 2.

4. Deloria and Wildcat, 6.

5. Deloria and Wildcat, 6.

6. Deloria and Wildcat, 17.

ships should not be left incomplete, nor intentionally broken. Completing a relationship assumes that one's attention is always focused on another, not oneself, also on the results of one's own action or inaction, considering the effects of such action to the seventh generation both forward and back. The goal of completing relationships is to take appropriate action. Appropriate action is the moral dimension of respect for those who are affected by our actions. This is part of the task of sustaining cooperative and fruitful relationships. That is why every action, includes a ritual of paying respect. Accumulation of knowledge is done via observation, out of respect for the personhood of all beings, as opposed to the Western scientific method of investigation—forcing nature to perform functions in a sterile environment that it does not do naturally.

Perceiving the universe as personal finally means that not only is the natural world personal (composed of persons), but all relationships within the natural world are moral or ethical (concerned about the effects of one's action on other persons).

A Personal Universe Part Two: Luther's theology of creation

The Rt. Rev. Steve Charleston, once quipped in a course on Native theology and ministry at Luther Seminary, "You know, Luther would have made a great American Indian." I think there is no better place to show this to be true than Luther's theology of creation. I am indebted to the work of Dr. Johannes Schwanke, both in a presentation he made here at LSTC, in the early 2000s, and in the chapter on Luther's theology of creation that appears in the *Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*. Dr. Schwanke shapes from the work of Martin Luther and the work of David Loefgren, a powerful and succinct description of this "good Indian's" understanding of creation.

Most importantly, Martin Luther's theology of creation hinges upon the first sentence of his explanation of the First Article of the Apostle's Creed in the Small Catechism: "I believe that God created me, together with all other creatures." The starting point for all of creation begins with (say your name). For Luther, creation is profoundly personal, because it always begins with what is concretely created (David Loefgren): God created me. If we begin either with the primordial history of creation or with an abstract/general conception of nature, the person, the individual, the "me" is lost. Luther could not abide this. It is important to start with being concretely created, because being created IS a personal connection to the Creator and a personal (i.e., life-giving, creative) relationship with the Creator. Without this, life is separated from the Creator, thus without meaning. The individual, for Luther, is not engulfed within a general creation, but personally stands before God, is personally addressed by God, and must personally answer to God at the last. For Luther, a "general cosmological genesis" was secondary in importance with the creation of the individual, called "me." And this "me" is created within a specific and concrete personal environment (place!)—"the effective sphere

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of divine creativity." (202, LW1.29-30,33) "One must first grasp the personal element of creation before the general aspect of the created world can come into view."⁷

And since the focus of creation is the concretely created individual, the historical aspect of creation always lies in the present, where *God* is present. Just as the general cosmological genesis is of secondary importance for Luther, so, too, is the placing of creation in a distant past. Luther did not see the "primordial biblical history" of creation as an *initium*, that is, a beginning that stays in the past and has no influence on the present. Luther saw the history of creation as a *principium*, that is, a beginning that stays relevant for what is initiated (e.g., the individual), no matter where it's placed in time. Schwanke argues, "We aren't separated from the creative event of primordial history, because it is a still present history, centered in the 'personal and present environment... the effective sphere of divine creativity.'"⁸ It's not the creation of *Adam* that is important, it's that God creates *me* that is important. So, centering creation in present history brings past, present, and future together in each single moment of one's life, centered in God's ever-living and never-ending creative Word. (*verbum efficax*).

The individual does not stand isolated, however. The second phrase in Luther's opening sentence is inseparable from the first: God created me TOGETHER with all creatures. Humans are not the "crown of creation," the "highest animal on the evolutionary ladder." Humans are a single strand of the whole fabric of life in the universe, kept together by the living and creative Word of God. We are bound, in this relation to GOD'S Word, with all other creatures, who were created in the same way we were. And because we are bound to all others—in relationship with God's Word and with each other—we are responsible for all other creatures. We are to maintain and complete our relationships with our sibling creatures. Luther condemned the "false pride" of contending that humans had a special position in creation, in terms of a higher estate. Additionally, for Luther, we pay attention to our "neighbors" because we perceive God only through observing God's action

7. Johannes Schwanke, "Luther's Theology of Creation," in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, eds. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and Lubomír Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 202.

8. Schwanke, 203.

within creation and through other creatures. Luther prioritizes this experience of God's action in our relationship to our parents. In this relationship, we observe God's unconditional giving.

Creation, then, is not determined by fixed laws that were initiated by a deistic God in a distant past. Rather, creation *begins* with God's creative act and is *preserved* through the dialogical nature of the creative act—a dialogue by way of communication between God and creatures in the creative act. Sinful humanity, however, chooses monologue. Whoever refuses to see the other ("sin as blindness" is a particularly Native way of understanding sin) and focuses only on oneself, dies (*incurvatio in se ipsum*). It is alienation from the ever-living present creative act of the Creator. Luther, in his use of *creatio continua*, denies the predominantly American deistic view of God as creator. God did not simply create in a primordial past and then sit back and watch while humans took charge of the business of "managing" creation. Rather, all of creation is forever dependent upon the present and creative act of God in every time and place, in every creature. God is always present. God is continually creating. Even the simplest acts of creation or the seemingly most insignificant creative act is a miracle, according to Luther, since it could not take place without the Creator's presence, nor God's creative Word (power). The miraculous is found in the ordinary, not the extraordinary.

Inadequacies in theological education in today's world

So, if we accept this personal view of the universe as AN EQUAL to the modern Western mechanical, objective universe, the primary challenge in theological education right now is, "How does theological education meet the needs of Christians living in today's world and in North America, specifically? How will it prepare disciples for ministry and witness in a North American context?" How is theological education preparing everyday Christians to deal with suffering, rapid technological change, and the widening abyss in our political, social, and educational institutions, what Stephen Bouman rightly describes as "the ugly Spawn of Ground Zero?" How will theological education go beyond simply "preparing leaders" and instructing all members of the Church in attending to relationships that bring life, hope, and healing to a broken and hurting world? My impression of much of the rhetoric used in the ELCA around "preparing leaders" is really a euphemism for credentialing a very small percentage of the Body of Christ to meet the needs of institutions. I see it differently. The ELCA has about 3.8 million members. If you subtract the number of rostered ministers in the ELCA from that number, what you have left are about—3.8 million members. And yes, I fully acknowledge the reality of what Jonathan Strandjord calls the "retirement tsunami." This is a very real challenge that we face, especially if we insist that our only strategy is to increase the numbers of people who will be credentialled for "professional" ministry, simply to replace those who are retiring.

I do not argue that our church institutions or our models of theological education are themselves inadequate. Instead, I

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argue that the theological education system, upon which we have depended successfully for so long, is becoming increasingly inadequate to the North American context, at a frightening pace. These institutions have developed from Enlightenment ideals of a mechanical, logical universe and were shaped into a particular North American mindset, dominated by Western European abstract models of education and ways of knowing. These seem to be increasingly inadequate for the living of our everyday lives, inadequate to the task of helping people to make sense of their experience, to offering solutions for what confronts us, not simply for American Indians, but everyone. Generally speaking, in our desire to maintain institutions that have served us well for several hundred years (to be objective, professional, and intellectually rigorous) we have chased the Holy Spirit into a corner. Only paying attention to the workings of the Holy Spirit (the creative power and presence of God in the universe) or spiritual disciplines, when we feel we need an occasional "break" from the "normal" or "real" task of theological education. We have prioritized certain subjects of study and ways of learning over others, in order to function in a world and society that no longer exists, or is rapidly declining. In a context that is dominated by Ground Zero, Hurricane Maria, Charlottesville, and Standing Rock, something new is needed. In a population that is radically diverse—race, class, religion, generations, worldviews, and spirituality—the Holy Spirit is pointing us to something new.

Justo González, in his insightful commentary, *The History of Theological Education*, makes two observations that I think are helpful. He, too, argues that theological education, as it has been practiced for the past few centuries, is in crisis. The "traditional" model of theological education, specifically, is in crisis, not theological education in a wider sense. Traditional programs, he argues, are those which focus on granting degrees for professional ministry. Theological education in a wider sense has always been a part of the history of the Church (for 2000 years), it has always been high quality education, and for most of the Church's existence, it has been done "without a single seminary." Studying this history, he

says, will allow us to acknowledge that what we have assumed is necessary, perhaps is not.

Traditional theological education, defined in this way, has most often focused upon preparation for credentialed (and more recently) professional ministry, much in the same way that medical doctors are prepared for the practice of medicine. That is, the preparation for professional ministry is a specialty; it is not for everyone. This mindset has existed for only the past 500 years of the Church's life, González contends. For 1500 years, theological education was about "the whole church and every member, both jointly and individually, express[ing their] love for God...with all [their] minds." He further argues:

When believers study scripture, or theology, or the history of the church, it is not to meet the requirements for 'official' ministry. It is to find the Word of God for our lives, understand how God is at work in our lives, and to pass on stories of our inheritance, like the stories of our families we heard on our grandma's lap.⁹

The logical conclusion of this "recent" professional mindset is that the laity understand AND accept that theological education is for professionals only; something to be left to the experts, rather than seeing it as loving God with all their minds.

Secondly, Dr. González points to the ramifications of our technology—amazing products of our mechanical view of the universe. In Martin Luther's time, a new innovation in technology literally changed education forever and for the better. The moveable type printing press made the number of books available to everyone so much greater than before. The amount of information available to people transformed not only the amount of reading, but the feasibility of an education for every person in society. A new innovation in technology today is having a similar, but even further-reaching impact: the Internet. González points out that "our smartphones make every piece of information ever conceived available at one's fingertips." And more importantly, "...for every solid study and discussion we find on the Internet, we also find baseless and uninformed claims and opinions."¹⁰

The importance of high-quality theological education in a context that daily encounters an indefinite amount of information, both good and bad, is two-fold: 1) We must avoid what González calls the "canonization of ignorance."¹¹ In response to the ever-expanding knowledge of our universe, we can't simply say that the Church will only know "these few things that are our expertise and nothing else" and either discard or dismiss the rest. (When all you have is a hammer, all you see is nails.) "What needs to be taught," González argues, "is not only *what* Christians (including pastors) should know, but also how to employ that knowledge in a dialogue with the rest of human knowledge."¹² We need to pre-

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pare our members to engage with others in uncertain and rapidly changing contexts. It will take more than simply memorizing facts and applying theories; it will take knowledge of ways of being and doing that go beyond the modern Western educational model in which theory precedes practice. And 2), González wisely states, "In short, the overabundance of both true and false information on the Internet requires a theological education that enables students to practice critical judgment on anything that may appear on the Internet and to do this on solid theological foundations."¹³ We need not only the study of theory, but also the practice of moral engagement and ethical discernment within communities. We have an opportunity at LSTC, with our Public Church curriculum, plus an endowed chair and a competency area in spiritual formation to teach not only students, but communities of Christians, the equal importance of practice and theory, of observation and investigation, of wisdom and knowledge, of the power of Spirit and the mechanical power of technology and institutions.

Spiritual formation as theological education

How do we, then, proceed with theological education in these times? Certainly, we must be attuned to the uncertainty of our present times and to the needs of people in our communities, even to the communities themselves. How does the suffering and fear engulfing whole communities shape the content of our curriculum? How does not only the speed and volume of information available to us, but also the increasing diversity of ways of knowing the data, affect how we teach and learn the content of our curriculum? What strategies ought we to employ so that our goal is not only an increase in the number of people involved in theological education at LSTC, but also to break out of the "cultural captivity" ensconced in the structures of our church institutions that defy our attempts to move a vision of deeper inclusion and celebration of diversity forward? The social world(s) we live in are being challenged daily: an assault on our democratic principles by unprincipled greed in our political system is eroding the social safety nets we once thought permanent, demographic realities in this country (where the "minority" is the majority) and the rise of the global South in numbers and agency forces us to rethink our

9. Justo L. González, *The History of Theological Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015), 118.

10. González, 124.

11. González, 110.

12. González, 121.

13. González, 125.

metaphysical assumptions about our ways of knowing and what “church” is, and a rapidly growing disillusionment among the generations with any and all institutions, requiring us to create a teaching and learning community that relies on collaboration and interaction, rather than on experts and the Modern model of “theory precedes practice.”

These are big questions. They likely will require big responses from all of us, together. The transformation of theological education is not simply a transformation of curricula or programs, but rather a transformation of Spirit. It’s not so much *what* we do, as it is *why* we do it and *with whom* we do it. The encouragement I have in seeing the close connection between the American Indian view of the universe as personal and spiritual and Luther’s theology of creation as profoundly personal, is one way forward together. It encourages me to keep moving forward, with all of you, not to an already determined end, but on a journey we are taking together. As I’ve said in other contexts, “It may appear that we are wandering aimlessly. And we are. But, we are wandering aimlessly in the power of the Holy Spirit, who is guiding us to a place to which God will reveal to us once we get there.” As Vine Deloria Jr. expresses hope that at “that meeting ground” of American Indians and European Americans, “lies an opportunity for the two cultures to both teach and learn from each other.”¹⁴ We have reason to be hopeful that theological education at LSTC is a meeting ground where theory and content, practice and formation flourish together, where we are committed to creating learning and teaching communities, which are globally diverse and committed to engaging learning in a variety of public contexts.

Spiritually mute

Allow me to conclude with a story of sorts, an email exchange, between my dear friend and former boss, the Rev. Stephen Bouman, and me. It was this exchange that sowed the seeds for these observations. With his permission, I share our exchange. A little more than sixteen years ago today, Rev. Bouman was the bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod, ELCA. On a bright, sunny morning, September 11, 2001, his life was transformed. Ever since that day, at the anniversary of this national tragedy, he would, in his words, “almost liturgically, howl at the moon.” Actually, he was engaging in a new and meaningful spiritual practice for his life. Here is the exchange.

September 11, sixteen years later

With my heart and concern for friends and loved ones in harm’s way in Florida, Texas, Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico and places, which fall beneath everyone’s radar in the earthquake in Mexico, the long disaster in South Sudan, the hatred in the streets of Charlottesville, which exposed the heart of darkness in our past and present history, the killing fields of Burma, Syria and on and on I have nothing to say this year on the sixteenth anniversary of the tragedy in New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C. which

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broke my heart and changed our world. I’m spiritually mute.

But as the clock moves toward midnight I can’t abandon my practice, almost liturgical, of howling at the moon on the anniversary each year.

But I spent a long week in a series of conference calls with Lutheran Disaster Response as we listened to beleaguered partners in Texas, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Florida and heard stories of courage, resolve, faith, resilience and remembered that sixteen years ago I was on the other end of these Lutheran Disaster Response calls and it was literal life and hope and solidarity for me and all of us paralyzed and spiritually mute in New York. And it haunts me that each of the precious human voices sharing their bravery and resilience will be still haunted sixteen years from now about what they experienced, lost, transcended, testified, risked, lamented. Our public life has the attention span of a gerbil and we forget the long, painful arc of suffering and lamentation and grief.

This year the double tragedy of some of our [siblings] haunts me. The turning away from the Dream Act and other undocumented neighbors among us has doubled down the harsh reality of these disasters. In our calls this week I have heard too many stories like that of a DACA person in Houston who was flooded out of his home and placed into a dwelling half the size and charged twice the rent and was forced to remain in the shadows unable to resist this assault on the dignity and well-being of his family. We saw who was left on the roof in Katrina and I lived the reality of the economic victims of 9-11 who were immigrants, people in poverty, and hatred expressed against Arabs, Muslims, and others who were the most vulnerable. This is the ugly spawn of Ground Zero, a pivot toward fear and a turning away from the neighborly ethic of the hospitality of Jesus.

Right now, I’ve got nothing to say that is new or wise. Just all these memories of a beautiful September day shattered by death and violence in the name of some ungodly god, the specific smells

14. Deloria and Wildcat, v.

and ashes of that day, the terror that nothing matters or will ever cohere again. And the crazy hope that God is near because we touched each other in the abyss.

My response:

Thank you, Stephen, for your Sept. 11 letter.

Once again, you share a powerful witness. And this time, it is a witness to spiritual formation. I am especially enamored with your phrase, “spiritually mute.” To me, it speaks volumes.

Scripture tells us that when we are spiritually mute, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, sighing words too deep for us to comprehend. But, intercede she does. When we are spent, the Holy Spirit enters the shadows and empty places and fills them. Being spiritually mute, then, is a posture of readiness to be filled, not the despair of an ending. Without this posture, we are not running on the power of the Holy Spirit, but on our own power, (not dialogue, but monologue) which always disappoints. This posture takes many forms: prayer, worship, singing, conversation and dialogue, mindfulness, humility, as well as activism, prophetic utterance, and digging in the dirt (an allusion to Jesus’ parable about working manure into the ground in order for trees to flourish).

Both Martin Luther and Carl Jung speak at great length about the power and necessity of suffering and pain. Luther expresses pity for those who never experience suffering, for they will never fully experience the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Carl Jung teaches that the psyche cannot and/or does not change or adapt except through pain and suffering of some kind or in some way. Jung argues that it is the power of the collective unconscious that brings healing and resolution, helping us to grow as persons. I like to think that it is the power of the Holy Spirit. It is in pain

It is in pain and suffering that each of us grows and becomes stronger spiritually, because of the creative presence of the Holy Spirit in our very person. When we become stronger spiritually, this brings strength to our physical, mental, and emotional aspects, too.

and suffering that each of us grows and becomes stronger spiritually, because of the creative presence of the Holy Spirit in our very person. When we become stronger spiritually, this brings strength to our physical, mental, and emotional aspects, too. This is spiritual formation: being shaped by the Spirit through our experience of pain and suffering—and especially when we are spiritually mute. Of course, I am not advocating for a view that people who suffer have it “better” than those who don’t, nor that there is anything glorious or morally superior in suffering. Absolutely not. But, as Luther reminds us, it is in those times and places when all of our self-made monologues and supports have been knocked out from under us, that we truly see the Crucified One and experience the grace of God in a way too deep for words.