
“A MAN FROM PHRYGIA¹, ON PENTECOST” (1987) BY MADELEINE L’ENGLÉ

L’Engle, Madeleine. *The Ordering of Love* (Writers' Palette Book), p. 343. Originally published in her *A Cry Like a Bell* (1987). The Crown Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Lord, I did not choose to be **comforted**.
I am not ready to bear the many things
you have yet to say: you said it yourself.

John 16 – ¹²“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. ¹³* But when he comes, the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth.^h He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears, and will declare to you the things that are coming.²”

But you have sent me (against my will) your **comforter**
and what is **comfort** but an iron **command**?

Isaiah 40 –

¹ The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* – “**Phrygia** (See Asia minor, Classical) was the large and ill-defined geographical region which stretched across much of west central Anatolia. The settlement and culture of Phrygia during the early 1st millennium BCE is known principally through the excavations at Gordium, and the legends associated with its legendary king, Midas. During the Roman period the region extended north to Bithynia, west to the upper valley of the Hermus and to Lydia, south to Pisidia and to Lycaonia, and east as far as the Salt Lake.... Alongside those of Zeus and various mother goddesses, the most widespread cults were for the Anatolian god Mên, **and for deities associated with righteousness, vengeance, and justice**, including the abstract couple ‘Holy and Just’ (see angels). They enjoined a strict moral code of behaviour, and it is no coincidence that Jewish and early Christian communities flourished on Phrygian soil in the 2nd and 3rd cents. CE.”

* *Declare to you the things that are coming*: not a reference to new predictions about the future, but interpretation of what has already occurred or been said.

^h 14:17, 26; 15:26; Ps 25:5; 143:10; 1 Jn 2:27; Rev 7:17.

² [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Jn 16:12–13.

¹* Comfort, give comfort to my people,
says your God.
² Speak to the heart of Jerusalem, and proclaim to her
that her service* has ended,
that her guilt is expiated,
That she has received from the hand of the LORD
double for all her sins. ³

I don't want to obey. I won't. Yes: I will.
Why must I interrupt my self-indulgent weakness
to respond to the austerity of your demand?
I must set my face sternly towards truth
as you turned toward Jerusalem, that all
obedience should be shown us and accomplished.
Your way to truth is hard, is dark, is pain.
You have shown me the way, O Lord, but I
am not prepared to bear your **comfort**.
And yet, unwilling, unready, recalcitrant,
I receive the flaming thrust that you have sent,
and voices speaking as in my own tongue,
and nothing will ever be the same again.

SOME NAMES OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Dove
Comforter
Intercessor
Paraclete

* The "voices" of vv. 3, 6 are members of the heavenly court addressing the prophet; then v. 1 can be understood as the Lord addressing them. It is also possible to translate, with the Vulgate, "Comfort, give comfort, O my people" (i.e., the exiles are called to comfort Jerusalem). The juxtaposition of "my people" and "your God" recalls the covenant formulary.

* *Service*: servitude (cf. Jb 7:1) and exile.

³ [*New American Bible*](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Is 40:1–2.

Advocate
Presence of God
Spirit of Truth

SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, fear of the Lord, and delight (JOY).

Isaiah 11 –

¹ But a shoot shall sprout from the stump* of Jesse,
and from his roots a bud shall blossom.^a
²*The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him:^b
a spirit of **wisdom** and of **understanding**,
A spirit of **counsel** and of **strength**,
a spirit of **knowledge** and of **fear of the LORD**,
³ and his **delight** shall be the fear of the LORD. ⁴

ABOUT “COMFORT”

These comments below are taken from a piece of work that I did when giving a Retreat during Holy Week 2009 on the Spiritual Works of Mercy.

I can imagine that the disciples feel like the woman in labor (see John 16:20-22). Though from

* *Shoot ... stump*: the imagery suggests the bankruptcy of the monarchy as embodied in the historical kings, along with the need for a new beginning, to spring from the very origin from which David and his dynasty arose. *Jesse*: David’s father (cf. 1 Sm 16:1–13).

^a Is 4:2; 53:2; Jer 23:5–6; 33:14–16; Zec 3:8; 6:12; Rev 22:16.

* The source of the traditional names of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Septuagint and the Vulgate read “piety” for “fear of the Lord” in its first occurrence, thus listing seven gifts.

^b Is 42:1; 1 Sm 16:13; Mt 3:16; Mk 1:10; Jn 1:32.

⁴ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Is 11:1–3.

the outside, one might judge them miserable and in pain. But from within their perspective, one might perceive their love, expectation, and deep willingness *through* the process of struggle to let the grace of Christ happen in them.

What does this say about our comforting of the sorrowful? **It means that we must search for the place within the other where he or she trusts what is happening in him or her, the deeper place within them that remains centered and sure, knowing the way.** In other words, we must not violate what is happening by trying to take it away: non-interference, non-meddling (as Plato was particularly keen to dislike).

TO COMFORT – THE VERB

com- is intensive; *fortis, fortis, forte* corresponds to the Greek adjective ἀνδρείος, εἰά, εἶον⁵. The Latin adjective means *strong, powerful* (physically); *strong, vigorous, steadfast, courageous, brave* (mentally, spiritually). In English the word means *to soothe in distress or sorrow; ease the misery or grief of; bring consolation or hope to*.

ἀνδρείως (Aristoph., Pax 498; 1 Macc 9:10 v.l.; 2 Macc 6:27; Philo, Mos. 2, 184; Jos., Ant. 12, 302) adv. fr. ἀνδρείος in a *manly i.e. brave way* ἂ. ἀναστρέφεισθαι *conduct oneself bravely* (w.

⁵William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 76.

AristophAristoph , V–IV B.C.—List 5

v.l.v.l. = varia lectio (variant reading)

PhiloPhilo = P. of Alexandria, I B.C.–I A.D.—List 5

Jos.Jos. = Josephus. This abbr. used when follow by title; I A.D.—Lists 5

adv.adv. = adverb, adverbially

fr.fr. = from

i.e.i.e. = id est (that is)

I.-E. Indo-European

ἰσχυρῶς) Hs 5, 6, 6. ἀ. ἐστηκέναι *stand firm*, of young women Hs 9, 2, 5. (On courage of women s. Plut., Mor. 242e–63c.)⁶

fortitudo, fortitudinis, f.: Rarely means physical strength, but rather a firmness of character, a capacity to endure in a difficult task; resolution, bravery.

Thus, if one would attempt to *strengthen* someone, he/she would do well to understand what *true strength* is.

One of the meanings of the verb “to comfort” is “to confirm or to corroborate.” **This gets at the idea that the Comforter is one who confirms something happening in the other, something being born there in pain and sorrow, rather than a Comforter as one who is trying to get the person away from something, to help him or her avoid the pain.** In this regard we may think of Peter in Mark’s gospel, when Jesus has just announced that he will suffer and die, and Peter begins to remonstrate with Jesus, trying to get him to get away from this disaster. Peter does not “confirm or corroborate” what Jesus knows and, finally, wants to happen in or because of him.

COMFORT AS “PAYING ATTENTION”

A clue: my experience at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, where I recognized the huge illusion of the outside world as compared to the sheer reality within the Center. The suffering brought people out of illusion and into the most important, and most basic truths of living.

Suffering is the most powerful means against illusion in this world. This is proven by the fact that those who seek to avoid it end up projecting it onto others; they create (thus serve) the illusion.

***Comfort* must serve *being real*, for in the real lies the source of strength: God's living presence. He lives only in the *real*, because that is what He is!**

HsHs = Similitudes

PlutPlut , I–II A.D.—List 5

⁶William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 76.

Comfort means *paying attention* to the one suffering. Something is being born and, at some place, the suffering person takes strength and trusts. This place is where our presence should be. See John 16: 20-22 here:

²⁰ Amen, amen, I say to you, you will weep and mourn, while the world rejoices; you will grieve, but your grief will become joy.^j ²¹ When a woman is in labor, she is in anguish because her hour has arrived; but when she has given birth to a child, she no longer remembers the pain because of her joy that a child has been born into the world.^k ²² So you also are now in anguish. But I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy away from you.^l

Paying attention means a capacity for *empathy*. One of the most difficult temptations for the comforter is to end up projecting his/her own reactions into the other's suffering. In other words, the comforter ends up processing his/her own suffering. Such "comforters" are the hardest to endure.

To be an *empathic* person, one must: (1) have a learned ability to stay with his/her own suffering, searching through it for clues to the light; (2) have a firm memory of how suffering has been, upon reflection afterwards, a means of blessing for him/her; (3) have a practiced ability to *receive* another's experience and reverence it; (4) have a learned capacity to trust *silence*: we need to shut up and listen!

Note: What about suffering the other brings on him/herself? In other words, suffering that is *deserved* (e.g., Jonah)? Here, the comforter's task is the same: to pay attention!

A good contemporary example of a *comforter* in the sense that I am speaking of it here is the character of Captain Jean-Luc Picard on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. One of the outstanding qualities of that character is how fully he himself embodies the Prime Directive - *non-interference* - in his dealings with others. He can make that crucial distinction between *giving comfort* (in the negative sense of *taking care* of someone when they hurt) and *standing with* someone. In the latter case, one *feels for* the suffering of another yet does not presume to *fix* it.

^j Ps 126:6.

^k Is 26:17-18; Jer 31:13; Mi 4:9.

^l 14:19; 15:11; 20:20.

⁷ [New American Bible](#), Revised Edition. (Washington, DC: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011), Jn 16:20-22.