

At the heart of the destructive suffering in the world, suffering we can do nothing to resolve or remove for good, there is an indestructible energy making for love. If we have grasped what Jesus is about, we can trust that this is what lies at the foundation of everything.
Rowan Williams

Would, then, that my words were written,
 that they were transcribed in a book,
with an iron pen and lead
 to be hewn in rock forever.
But *I know* my redeemer lives,
 and in the end he will stand up on earth,
and after they flay my skin,
 from my flesh I shall behold God.

Given the destructive suffering Job knew—loss of his family, his health, his fortune—how does he have confidence the indestructible energy which lies at the foundation of everything is making for love? How can Job still believe God is on his side?

One common escape hatch is to say God's ways are inscrutable, mysterious, beyond our ability to understand. It is true we never get to know God as God knows God, and our human words will always fall immeasurably short of God's reality. Yet, do we have sufficient reason to read the inscrutable as being on our side?

How can we trust what Jesus tells us about God, when our experience of the world is more like Job's? The Bible has no arguments for the existence of God. Don't imagine the Bible is full of comfortable and reassuring things about the life of belief and trust; it isn't. It is often about the appalling cost of faith. What we get is not an argument but lives lived in trust.

Job and Paul and Jesus don't sit down to work out whether God exists; they are already caught up in a reality they can't deny or ignore. At one level, you have to see that the very angst and struggle they bring to their relation with God is itself a kind of argument for God: if they take God that seriously, at least this isn't some cosy made-up way of making yourself feel better.

This is actually a quite serious point about where belief in God starts for a lot of people. It starts from the sense that we "believe in," we trust some kinds of people. We have confidence in the way they live; perhaps we can imagine ourselves living the way they live in our better or more mature moments.

Faith has a lot to do with the simple fact that we can see in some believing people a world we'd like to live in. This puts quite a responsibility on believing people. It would be much nicer for all of us if we could just rely on arguments, not on the uncertainties of human lives.

This notion of taking responsibility for making God credible in the world comes from one of the most striking believers of the twentieth century. Etty Hillesum was a young Jewish woman in her twenties when the Germans occupied Holland — not a pious or conventional person at all, not someone with an explicit religious commitment.

Her published diaries and letters from 1941-1943 show how, during this terrible period in the history of her country and her people, she became more and more conscious of God's hand on her life, at a time when most would have been likely to feel more deeply skeptical about God.

Imprisoned in the transit camp at Westerbork, before being shipped off to Auschwitz where she was to die in the gas chambers in November 1943, at the age of twenty-nine, she wrote, “. . .there must be someone to live through it all and bear witness to the fact that God lived, even in these times. And why should I not be that witness?”

She described her life as having become an uninterrupted dialogue with God. She sensed her vocation in the camp as being not simply to proclaim or commend God to the heart of others. “One must clear the path toward God in them,” she wrote.

She decided to occupy a certain place in the world, a place where others could somehow connect with God through her—and this not in any self-congratulatory spirit or with any sense of being exceptionally holy or virtuous, but simply because she had agreed to take responsibility for God's believability.

Many believers, I suspect, who may be uncertain, still racked by doubt and inner anguish, who may be unable to give any very satisfactory account intellectually of what they believe, can attribute whatever trust they have to the witness of another who may themselves be almost as anguished and struggling as they are, but who are citizens of a world they wish to inhabit, a world where an indestructible energy is working for love.