

## **Death is Gain. No Three**

Where is God when it hurts? Where is atheism when it hurts? How do we react to suffering? Why suffering?

This question can reflect a very personal struggle with constant pain. It can also be a reaction to the awful atrocities inflicted by human beings on others. In their massive book of 672 pages, *By Their Blood. Christian Martyrs of the Twentieth Century*, James and Marti Hefley record the horrendous suffering of millions of Christians for the sake of their faith. Why were they hunted down like animals? There are no pat answers for many terrible and contradictory happenings in our broken world. And God does not owe us an explanation. We cannot fathom the ways of the Almighty. He is the Creator and we are the creatures (Rom.11: 34f). Atheists scrutinize the Christian faith and demand an explanation for all the suffering in the world. But why not ask the atheists how they cope with suffering without God? The theologian Hans Kung once remarked in an interview: "The atheist says: 'because there is so much suffering, God cannot exist.' But I reason from the opposite point of view: 'Because God exists, I can bear so much suffering.'" Atheists live in a closed universe. They have no future hope. They have no word of comfort for the dying. Because Christians have a heavenly destiny, suffering takes on another sense. In the reflected light of eternal life, there is a transformation of values. Death is not seen then as the end of life. It is the beginning of a new life, an entrance into the glorious presence of the King of Kings. A Christian is not stoic in the midst of pain. He reminds himself of the suffering His Saviour endured for his salvation. He suffers in the shadow of the cross and in the light of the resurrection. The Christian dimension of suffering is so different from the world's. For in the words of the apostle Paul, "We ...rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us"(Rom.5: 3-5).

Someone wrote: "Faith gives us title to heaven: death gives the possession." For the Christian death is the ultimate healing as he then sees God. When we stand at the graveside of a Christian, we can draw hope and comfort from the fact that he is now at home with his Lord. His death is his gain and our loss. He left this wilderness to enter paradise. The only hope that makes sense is the hope that comes from God, the hope for this life and the life to come. Where there is no answer for death, there is no hope.