Introduction

Woodbine Willie: The Man and His Message

It's easy to despair when one looks at the state the world is in. Climate change, partly (perhaps largely) the consequence of human irresponsibility, threatens the stability of the earth's ecosystem. Poverty, disease, and illiteracy still burden a frighteningly large percentage of the globe's population. Worldwide, national military budgets are on the increase, the production and peddling of weapons are flourishing, "terrorism" has become one of the most common words in the English language, and wars and rumors of wars abound. Add to these systemic evils the personal miseries endured by all humans—the grave illness of a child, the breakup of a relationship, the bondage of addiction, and so on—and the world can seem a pretty bleak place.

For the Christian, all this sooner or later provokes—or at least *ought* to provoke—uncomfortable questions about God and God's intentions. Why must humans suffer in the horrible ways we do? If God is loving and all-powerful, why does God allow evil to flourish? How can we continue to trust in a God seemingly indifferent to our fate?

These sorts of questions, born of the existential burden of being human, demand to be asked. They can't be adequately answered with religious platitudes that provide immediate comfort but little genuine satisfaction, much less with abstract theological defenses that try to take God off the hook. Sophisticated theodicies are as little use here as popular pietisms. Nor is despair an option. When confronted with suffering that calls our faith into question, what we need above all else is honesty: a forthright facing of the problem that refuses to retreat into sophistry, feel-good denial, or bleak despair, an honest response to the problem

that takes full notice of the world's evil without allowing it the final say. Anything less than this sells short both human suffering and God.

One of the modern period's most honest and insightful Christian attempts to wrestle with the problem of evil comes from an Anglican priest, poet, and prophet named Geoffrey Anketell Studdert Kennedy. Studdert Kennedy was a World War I frontline padre, nicknamed "Woodbine Willie" by the troops to whom he ministered, whose battlefield experiences forced him to confront depths of evil and human suffering that few of us ever see. He went into the war with a relatively comfortable religious faith and a safely bookish understanding of evil. By war's end, he knew with the certainty born of the trenches that evil, especially the evil of war, is palpably real, and that its reality forever gives the lie to comfortable Christianity and abstract theologizing. His challenge was to find a way around and beyond despair.

Studdert Kennedy survived the war by a mere decade. But during his final ten years, he became one of the best-known Christian pacifists and social reformers of the day. A tireless author and lecturer, Studdert Kennedy traveled the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, as well as a fair amount of the U.S., proclaiming that faith in God is, indeed, possible after war, but only if the faith is a sober one which recognizes that our usual pious ways of conceiving God's power, majesty, purpose, and love need to be re-examined. What also needs re-thinking, Studdert Kennedy insisted, is human responsibility in light of the values taught and modeled by Jesus Christ. Translated into more concrete terms, fidelity today to Christ's message means advocacy of disarmament, pacifism, economic justice, and political freedom. Christ, as Studdert Kennedy was fond of saying, is so dangerous that most Christians want to keep Him safely bottled up in church. Let loose upon the world, His message is transformative.

Most of Studdert Kennedy's books are out of print, and his voice has been largely forgotten in the eight decades since his death.[1] This is a shame. William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury during World War II, accurately said that there were two core questions around which all of Studdert Kennedy's thought revolves: "How to believe in and love God in

1. Although, a wide variety of theologians, including Desmond Tutu, Jürgen Moltmann, Eugene Peterson, John Stott, Alan Jones, and Samuel T. Lloyd, still cite him admiringly.

spite of evil; and how to get rid of it. He saw that these two questions are at root the same. For if it cannot be got rid of, that argues some fatal defect in the Creator. But if it can, then the process of getting rid of it will be the means of revealing the perfected glory of God."[2] Studdert Kennedy's struggle to arrive at honest answers has a great deal to offer those of us today who also find ourselves wishing to make the world a better place and wondering if we can hang onto our faith in the process.

The Man

Early Years

Judged by his day's standards, Studdert Kennedy was born on the wrong side of the tracks. In the first place, he had an almost unseemly number of siblings. Geoffrey, born on June 27, 1883, was one of nine children belonging to the Rev. William Studdert Kennedy and his wife Joan. When added to the children from William's first marriage, the Studdert Kennedy household bulged at the seams with fourteen youngsters.

In the second place, William and Joan were Irish-born, and their kids grew up speaking with an Irish brogue sugared with a West Yorkshire burr. Geoffrey never lost his, nor his fondness of the Irish "Paddy" stories he sprinkled throughout his sermons.

Finally, the family was poor. Although himself the son of a prominent churchman, William Studdert Kennedy shepherded one of the poorest parishes in Leeds. His church, St. Mary's at Quarry Hill, shared a sooty and squalid part of the city with a workhouse, a quarry, a tavern, and rows of tenement houses. Quarry Hill was notorious for being one of the worst slums in northern England.

From a very early age, Geoffrey displayed two characteristics that remained with him all his life: ill health and a talent for intense concentration. He suffered his first asthma attack when he was six or seven years old; growing up in polluted Quarry Hill most likely damaged his underdeveloped lungs even more. Many children "grow out of" asthma. Geoffrey never did. Exacerbated by exposure to mustard gas in the trenches during World War I and copious numbers of cigarettes, his asthmatic lungs frequently laid him up in his adult years, and they eventually killed him.

2. Temple, "Studdert Kennedy," 219.

Geoffrey learned to read while still quite young, and soon amazed his family by his prodigious consumption of books, while also amusing and sometimes irritating them by his growing absent-mindedness. Maurice Studdert Kennedy remembered his brother's "capacity for becoming entirely lost and absorbed in any and every sort of book or other written matter . . . , and emerging from it with a far-away look in his eyes . . . . He read *literally* everything that was put before him."[3] Moreover, he remembered whatever he read and was more than eager, to the occasional groans of his siblings, to lecture anyone he could corner on his latest bookish discovery. Even as a youngster, Geoffrey was a talker who delighted in sharing his ideas with others.

As Geoffrey's bookishness grew, so did his absent-mindedness. When caught out, his usual response was "I must've been thinking of something entirely different." This refrain soon became so familiar in the Studdert Kennedy household that it earned the status of a family joke, and was shouted out gustily by Geoffrey's siblings at appropriate moments. One of these, for example, was Geoffrey's returning home from the grocers with two stones of strawberries and one pound of potatoes, when he'd been sent for two pounds of strawberries and one stone of potatoes.[4]

His dreaminess also contributed to a certain insouciance when it came to his personal appearance. He frequently appeared in mismatched clothing, and was notorious for borrowing apparel from his brothers—a tie from this one, a jacket from that one—none of which really fit or suited him. "On one famous occasion," recalls a sibling, "he appeared before us almost faultlessly attired, and the one solitary article of attire he had on that belonged to him was a pair of old brown shoes, and these were so utterly down at heel that they spoilt the whole thing."[5]

In later life, Studdert Kennedy's absent-mindedness would occasion dozens of stories fondly passed around by friends and family. He frequently missed train stops and connections because he was absorbed in a book. As a young curate, on his way to a graveside committal following a funeral, he got into a conversation with a passer-by and completely forgot about the service. During the war, he regularly lost his toilet kit

3. Quoted in Mozley, "Home Life," 33.
4. Purcell, *Woodbine Willie*, 28.
5. Mozley, "Home Life," 36.

and assorted bits of uniform. After the war, when he'd been appointed Chaplain to the King, he showed up to conduct services for the royal family wearing rugby shorts under his cassock because he'd forgotten to change into long pants. Once, dashing from hotel room to taxi to make a speaking engagement, he forgot his false teeth, and had to send someone back to the hotel for them.

Two other characteristics of Geoffrey's childhood that stayed with him as an adult are worth mentioning. He developed a loud, braying laugh that always startled anyone hearing it for the first time. Combined with his homely face, over-sized ears, and large, puppy eyes, his extraordinary laugh was unforgettable and in later years delighted the huge audiences that came to hear him preach. More significantly, Geoffrey also developed at an early age the passion for social justice and the personal selflessness that everyone who knew him as a man associated with him. "One thing that impressed itself constantly upon one," writes his brother Maurice, " . . . was his gentle, forgiving, loving nature. He would blaze with fierce indignation at anything nasty, mean, unmanly, treacherous or unkind—any wrong or injustice done to another; but always took with a good-natured smile—or with a patient sad forgiveness—any unkindness or injustice to himself."[6]

Geoffrey's formal education was unusual. After attending a private school for a few years, he enrolled at Leeds Grammar School when he was fourteen. At the same time, he was admitted to Dublin's Trinity College. Although too young actually to attend Trinity, he remained a matriculated student *in absentia* and was allowed to take examinations at the end of each term. So until he was eighteen, Geoffrey was a student at both Leeds and Trinity, acquiring college credits even as he completed his formal secondary education. After graduating from Leeds, he moved to Trinity as a full-time student and in 1904 took a First in Classics and Divinity, winning a silver medal for academic achievement.

Slum Priest

The beginning of 1905 saw Studdert Kennedy at Caldey Grange Grammar School in Lancashire, where he taught a variety of subjects for the next two and a half years. During that time he continued his voracious read-

6. Quoted in Mozley, "Home Life," 36–37.

ing, diving especially into Freud and Havelock Ellis. He also read a great deal of Tolstoy. All this came to fruition in future years, when Studdert Kennedy became one of the few clergymen of his day to write frankly about sexual morality *and* embrace pacifism.[7]

Although he enjoyed teaching, Studdert Kennedy eventually felt called, like his father and grandfather before him, to the ministry. In October 1907 he left Caldey Grange to prepare for ordination at Ripon Clergy College. He was ordained deacon in June 1908 (clerical preparation was more fast-paced in those days!), and eventually priested in 1910.

Studdert Kennedy's first curacy was at Rugby Parish Church. Rugby was home to the posh public school made famous in *Tom Brown's School Days*, but it was also host to a growing number of industrial factories and their attendant slums. Studdert Kennedy soon became a familiar figure to Rugby's slum dwellers. He eventually convinced his rector, A. V. Ballie, to buy an abandoned nonconformist chapel in the middle of the slums as a center for his work with the poor. Dressed in a cassock that more often than not showed signs of wear and tear, he made it his habit to wander in and out of local pubs to chat with—*not* preach at—the men gathered there. His generosity was indiscriminate and sometimes irritating to people who knew him. Baillie remembered that whatever his young curate "had in his pocket he gave away, until his landlady took charge of his money and rationed him with it. It was the same with his clothes. He gave them all away and walked about almost in rags, wearing a cassock to conceal the fact."[8] The same landlady mentioned by Baillie, pitying her threadbare tenant, once bought Studdert Kennedy an overcoat, which he promptly—to her intense annoyance—gave away.

While at Rugby parish, Studdert Kennedy developed the oratorical skills that in just a few years' time would make him one of the best-known and -loved British preachers of his day. His easy eloquence in the pulpit didn't always please all his parishioners, however. As one of them told him soon after he arrived, "I want to thank you for your sermon; of

7. Two of Studdert Kennedy's books, *The Woman, the Warrior, and the Christ* (1928) and *I Pronounce Them* (1927), his only novel, deal with sexual matters, focusing on issues of birth control, desire, and fidelity. Neither of them is a particularly good book, but each is noteworthy for its willingness to publicly take on issues usually avoided by clergymen of Studdert Kennedy's generation.

8. Purcell, *Woodbine Willie,* 58.

course most people thought it very bad, but it was a great help to me."[9] In one sermon, for example, he startled some in his congregation by declaring that he found the Epistle of Jude the most repulsive document in the entire New Testament. On another occasion, he offended others by insisting that sometimes he wished he could smash the church's stained glass windows and celebrate the Eucharist outside with a cup and platter.[10] Even Baillie, who recognized and nurtured Studdert Kennedy's genius, sometimes found his sermons over the top. "In his earlier days," Baillie recalled,

> he preached a sermon in the heat of the moment in which I felt he had gone more than a little too far. After church I took him for a walk in the Rectory garden and, with apparent gravity, I said 'You know, I think you exaggerated when you said there had been no one between yourself and St. Paul who had understood the Gospel.' At once he burst into a shout of uproarious laughter. He had learnt his lesson. I always told him he must not come to me with more than one heresy a week, as after that it became a bore.[11]

Studdert Kennedy found the Rugby years fulfilling. But in 1912 he returned to Leeds. His father, still vicar of St. Mary's, was eighty-seven years old, frail, widowed, and badly in need of help. Studdert Kennedy got himself reassigned to St. Mary's, where he assisted until his father died two years later. The poverty and squalor of the Quarry Hill parish was even worse than when he had lived there as a lad, and once again he threw himself into service to his congregation.

His father's passing in early 1914 marked a new chapter in Studdert Kennedy's life. He married Emily Catlow in April of that year, and the next month accepted a call to St. Paul's Parish in Worcester. He'd had offers from two other parishes. True to form, though, he leaned toward the least impressive of them. "St. Paul's has the smallest income and the poorest people," he told his new wife. "Go and look at the house, and if you think you can manage it I will accept the offer." She thought she could manage, and the couple moved to Worcester. Studdert Kennedy's new

9. Mozley, "Home Life," 59. Studdert Kennedy loved to tell this anecdote.

10. Purcell, *Woodbine Willie,* 62

11. Ibid., 57–58.

parish was home to nearly 4,000 souls, and his salary something less than a pound a day.

St. Paul's was Anglo-Catholic in its liturgy, and this perfectly fitted the new rector's own preference for ornate services. But although his liturgical tastes ran towards High Church, Studdert Kennedy was evangelical in his willingness to go to the everyday world of his parishioners instead of demanding that they come to his. He continued his habit of visiting local pubs. He spoke to people there and wherever else he saw an opportunity—in organized outdoor services or extemporaneously in the streets. He tirelessly visited homes and he was just as generous—some would say, profligate—with funds and possessions in Worcester as he'd been in Rugby and Leeds. One famous story of his generosity is told by one of his friends, W. Moore Ede, Dean of Worcester Cathedral:

> [F]inding an aged invalid lying on a comfortless couch he brought a pillow from the vicarage, then a pair of sheets, and when his wife came home she found he had taken a whole bedstead, the several parts of which he had carried to the sick man's house himself. She herself helped him to take the mattress which he had left behind.[12]

Ede is silent about Emily Studdert Kennedy's response to all this.[13]

Studdert Kennedy's first three months at St. Paul's strengthened his conviction, already formed in Rugby and Leeds, that economic poverty was both morally unjust and contrary to Christianity. The grinding penury endured by many of his parishioners, who for the most part worked twelve-hour shifts in Worcester's Fownes glove factory or Hardy and Padmore's foundry for weekly wages of twenty shillings, broke his heart. He exhausted himself organizing soup kitchens, boot and clothing drives, and children's clubs (something like today's after-school childcare centers), and became persuaded that charity wasn't enough to battle the chronic evil of economic injustice. What was needed was an overhauling of the entire economic system to put it more in line with Gospel values of love, servanthood, compassion, and reconciliation. Geoffrey would de-

12. Ede, "Studdert Kennedy," 92.

13. It's worth mentioning that Emily was devoted to Studdert Kennedy, and remained so after his death. When she died in 1964, her last words were "Geoffrey is here! Geoffrey is here!" (Grundy, *A Fiery Glow*, 86).

vote his last years to just such an overhauling. But for now it had to wait, because there was a more immediate battle to fight. The First World War erupted in August 1914. It changed his life forever.

Frontline Padre

It's astounding that the Anglican priest who would become famous as the foremost Christian pacifist of his day was initially a patriotic defender of Britain's participation in the Great War. One month after its outbreak, Studdert Kennedy admonished the men of his parish: "I cannot say too strongly that I believe every able-bodied man ought to volunteer for service anywhere. There ought to be no shirking of that duty. Those who cannot volunteer for military service can pray." He followed his own urging by immediately applying for a commission as a wartime chaplain. But he discovered that things were more complicated than he'd imagined. Priests seeking to enlist had first to receive their bishops' release, arrange for someone to take over their parish duties for the duration of their military service, and pass an interview with officials in the Royal Army Chaplain's Department, which meant at least one visit to London.

While wading through these bureaucratic waters, Studdert Kennedy began preaching to the recruits gathering in Worcester, designated an Army training center by the War Department. On Sunday mornings, more than 2000 men marched to Worcester Cathedral to hear him. According to Dean Ede, whenever Studdert Kennedy preached to the troops, he held them "spellbound—not a cough, no shuffling of feet. What he said became the main topic of conversation during the ensuing week."[14] There are no records of what Studdert Kennedy's sermon topics were, but it's safe to assume they conveyed an enthusiastic for-God-and-country message.

Studdert Kennedy sat on the sidelines for the first fifteen months of the war. But in November 1915 his paperwork was finally in order. He was appointed Temporary Chaplain to the Forces on December 21, and with dizzying speed found himself four days later conducting a field Christmas service during a freezing downpour in France. "There were not many [communicants]," he wrote in a letter to his family and parishioners, "but they meant it. No lights, no ritual, nothing to help but the

14. Ede, "Studdert Kennedy," 100.

rain and the far-off roll of guns, and Christ was born in a cattle-shed on Christmas Day."[15]

By New Year's Day he was in Rouen, a staging post on the way to the Front. Day and night, a steady flow of soldiers in route to the front line detrained at the post for a quick cup of tea at the makeshift canteen. Studdert Kennedy would be waiting with a few encouraging words, an offer to write letters home for them, and perhaps a song or two. As the men loaded back on the trains, he would pace up and down the platform handing out New Testaments and packets of cigarettes—Woodbines. It was only a matter of time before the grateful troops affectionately christened him "Woodbine Willie," and the nickname stuck for the rest of his life. During his funeral procession fifteen years later, veterans of the Great War tossed packets of Woodbines on his coffin as it passed by.

Studdert Kennedy remained at Rouen through Lent of 1916. His main duty was at the railroad station, but he was also ordered to give a series of inspirational talks to British troops during the season of Lent. Reworked, these lectures became the basis of his first prose book, *Rough Talks of a Padre* (1918). In later years, the book's jingoistic support of the war embarrassed Studdert Kennedy. One of the book's most painful (but not unrepresentative) claims was that the Tommy was morally superior to the Hun because of the British "sporting tradition [which], at its best, is the highest form of the Christian spirit attainable by men at our present stage of development." Germany's "crime" is the "denial of this sporting spirit and its universal application." In fairness to Studdert Kennedy, though, his "sporting tradition" howler was a stab at answering the question that, even at this early stage of his war experience, was starting to haunt him: "How can I reconcile the spirit of those who live to kill, with the Spirit of Him who died to save?"[16]

This question took on even more urgency when Studdert Kennedy was posted for his first frontline duty in June 1916, just in time for the Somme Offensive. It was at this time that he was gassed—"I have been up the line again," he wrote his wife. "We got deluged with gas shells and had a very terrible time. I got a bit of gas, which makes me feel very miserable"[17]—and his chronic asthma grew even worse. Before war's end, he

15. Quoted in Purcell, *Woodbine Willie,* 98.
16. Kennedy, *Rough Talks by a Padre,* 26–28.
17. Quoted in Purcell, *Woodbine Willie,* 121.

would serve two more tours of frontline duty: in 1917 during the attack on Messines Ridge, and in 1918 during the final advance. At Messines Ridge, Studdert Kennedy tended to the wounded under such heavy shelling that he was awarded a ten-day leave and the Military Cross, the third highest medal for courage under fire awarded by Britain. The official record cited Studdert Kennedy "for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He showed the greatest courage and disregard for his own safety in attending to the wounded under heavy fire. He searched shell holes for our own, and enemy wounded, assisting them to the Dressing Station."[18] Studdert Kennedy more modestly insisted that he rushed out of the bunker during the shelling because he "had the wind up"—that is, panicked—fearing it would collapse under the bombardment.

A number of ailments—the ever-present asthma, trench fever, exhaustion, and general debility—laid Studdert Kennedy up for weeks at a time during his war service, and even when he was relatively well he was often unsuited for frontline service. So much of his time was spent in the rear. He served as chaplain to three different infantry schools, where his eccentricities—absent-mindedness, unmilitary bearing (at one point he showed up wearing oversized and upside-down spurs on his boots; no one ever quite figured out how he got his hands on them)—as well as his talent for speaking to soldiers on their colloquial level, earned him the love of his uniformed flocks. He was also attached at one point to a School for Physical and Bayonet Training, an extraordinary, almost surreal morale-boosting outfit that included a couple of boxers and a sergeant whose claim to fame was eighteen kills with the bayonet. The school had many of the elements of a traveling circus. Studdert Kennedy warmed up troops before preaching by asthmatically sparring with one of the boxers. It was embarrassing and it was crude. But it was also a way of reaching the troops, and Studdert Kennedy wasn't too proud to take it.

In 1916, Studdert Kennedy became part of a less clownish effort to reach the troops: the newly-launched National Mission for Repentance and Hope. Initially he resisted the posting, wanting to remain at the front. But when he protested to the Deputy Chaplain General, he was told that his "gift of the gab" was from the Almighty, and that he could do more good with the NMRH than at the front.[19]

18. *London Gazette*, 16 August 1917 quoted in Carey, "Studdert Kennedy," 143.
19. Carey, "Studdert Kennedy," 130.

Sponsored by the Church of England, the NMRH aimed to revitalize the flagging religious sensibilities of troops by pressing home what the Church of England saw as the larger context of the war: that the current conflict was symbolic of the battle to enthrone Christ in the hearts of all persons, and that British soldiers, when they returned to civilian life after the war, should be prepared to make of Britain a New Jerusalem—a just, fair land where poverty, privilege, and oppression have been banished. The campaign itself wasn't terribly successful—just staying alive left little energy for dreaming about the New Jerusalem—but Studdert Kennedy's preaching was. In fact, it was a hit.

There were a number of reasons for its popularity. When Studdert Kennedy preached, he used the vernacular without lapsing into condescension. He cracked jokes, laughed at them, sat on the ledge of the speaking platform with his legs dangling, and used salty language. (A typical opening line that always brought laughter and applause was: "I know what you're thinking: here comes the bloody parson!" Words like "bloody" are considered tame enough today. But in Studdert Kennedy's time, they weren't used in polite company, and certainly not by gentlemen-priests in sermons.) After his first few months of war experience, he never tried to romanticize or glamorize the brutal, mucky, day-to-day task of soldiering. He was honest without being cynical, sympathetic without being sentimental.

Above all, Studdert Kennedy's preaching reflected his utter devotion to the men in his spiritual charge. That devotion was captured in a piece of advice he gave a new chaplain:

> Live with the men, go where they go; make up your mind that you will share all their risks, and more, if you can do any good. You can take it that the best place for a padre (provided that he does not interfere with military operations) is where there is most danger of death. Our first job is to go beyond the men in self-sacrifice and reckless devotion. Don't be bamboozled into believing that your proper place is behind the line; it isn't. If you stay behind you might as well come down: you won't do a ha'p'orth of good. Your place is in front. The line is the key to the whole business; work in the very front, and they will listen to you when they come out to rest, but if you only preach and teach behind you are wasting time: the men won't pay the slightest attention to you. The men

> will forgive you anything but lack of courage and devotion—without that you are useless.[20]

As preacher to thousands of troops, many of whom were asking battlefield-prompted questions about God's existence, the nature of good and evil, and the role of organized religion, Studdert Kennedy constantly searched for a way to explain theological complexities in ordinary language. He didn't try to provide the usual canned responses expected of clergy. His own battlefield experiences by this time had convinced him that those responses were totally inadequate. But he did legitimize the asking of questions by taking them seriously and acknowledging that they were worth asking. One way in which he tried to do this was by "having a go at the poetry stunt" and writing a series of dialect poems. The poems were reminiscent of Kipling's barracks ballads. The speakers in them were soldiers, grieving mothers, or wives of invalided veterans. Through their voices, Studdert Kennedy tried to do justice to the fears, doubts, anger, and questions about God and life he heard from the troops whom he served. They make for touching, sometimes haunting, and only occasionally mawkish reading even today. First collected in *Rough Rhymes* (1918), the poems went through numerous editions, were widely anthologized, and are still occasionally quoted in sermons and lectures. They made "Woodbine Willie" a household name in Britain. Characteristically, Studdert Kennedy donated all the royalties from the book to St. Dunstan's, a charity for the blind.

The same year that Studdert Kennedy published his first collection of poems also saw the appearance of his second prose book. *The Hardest Part* (1918), unlike his earlier *Rough Talks of a Padre,* was a sober, nonjingoistic examination of the question that had become uppermost in Studdert Kennedy's mind: given the insanity and brutality of war, what must the God who allows it be like? Through a series of autobiographical and theological reflections, Studdert Kennedy eventually comes to an answer he'll continue refining for the rest of his life: God isn't sadistic or indifferent, neither is God "almighty" enough to prevent humans from harming one another. But what God can and does do is to suffer along

20. Quoted in ibid., 139–40. The advice was given to Theodore Hardy, the most decorated chaplain of the war. Hardy was already over fifty years old when he joined up in late 1916. His battlefield service in France earned him a Military Cross, the Distinguished Service Order, and the Victoria Cross. Hardy was killed in October 1918.

with humanity, because God is love, and to love necessarily means entering into the sorrows of the beloved.[21] Moreover, neither the suffering of humans nor God is futile, because both are birthing pains that herald renewal, rebirth, resurrection.

Studdert Kennedy returned to civilian life and the parish of St. Paul's in March 1919. In some respects, he was the same man who left Worchester for the front three years earlier. He was still absent-minded, careless in appearance, boisterous in laughter, tirelessly compassionate, and lovingly generous. In other respects, though, he was deeply changed. His time in uniform had undermined his fragile physical health. God only knows what it did to his emotional well-being; such things were rarely spoken of in those days. His frontline experiences as well as his ministry to wounded and dying soldiers behind the lines destroyed once and for all any complacency about faith or any naïve confidence that God's in heaven and all's right with the world he might've once had. As he told a fellow chaplain, "You know, this business has made me less cocksure of much of which I was cocksure before. On two points I am certain: Christ and His Sacrament; apart from those I am not sure I am certain of anything."[22]

But Studdert Kennedy sold himself short, because the business of war had convinced him of three, not two, points. He came out of the war trusting in Christ, the efficacy of the Eucharist, *and* the absolute moral stupidity of war. "When I went to the war," he wrote, "I believed that the war would end to the benefit of mankind. I believed that a better order was coming for the ordinary man, and, God help me, I believe it still. But it is not through war that this order will be brought about. There are no fruits of victory, no such thing as victory in modern war. War is a universal disaster, and as far as I am concerned I'm through."[23]

21. The book's title, in fact, was taken from one of Studdert Kennedy's own dialect poems, "The Sorrows of God," which focuses on the necessary relationship between love and suffering. The stanza from which the title comes is this:

> The sorrows of God must be 'ard to bear
> If 'e really 'as love in 'is 'eart.
> And the 'ardest part i' the world to play
> Must surely be God's part.

22. Carey, "Studdert Kennedy," 154.

23. Quoted in Ede, "Studdert Kennedy," 107.

When Studdert Kennedy returned to Worcester, the single most important question for him, as well as for tens of thousands of other demobilized veterans, was how faith in a loving, wise, and almighty God was possible after the hell of war. Why would a good God have allowed the misery of the past four years? Come to think of it, why would a good God have allowed the pre-war miseries of poverty, ignorance, and squalor? Doesn't God care about justice? Hasn't God compassion? Wouldn't it simply be better to throw over the idea of God and go it alone? What sort of a universe should an honest person believe in?

These weren't theoretical questions for Studdert Kennedy and his fellows. They carried colossal existential weight. The response to them determined not only whether he and they could pick up the pieces of their personal lives in a post-war world, but also whether they could muster the spiritual energy to believe in the possibility, much less help build, the New Jerusalem. After war, what did the future hold: bitterness, disillusionment, and cynicism or resolve, faith, and hope?

The Prophetic Years

The first post-war years were hard ones for Studdert Kennedy, as they were for thousands of demobilized vets who returned to civilian life only to be repulsed by what they perceived as its hypocrisy and dry-rot. The Church seemed indifferent to the gospel of justice and peace proclaimed by Jesus and afraid to confront the very real crisis of faith caused by the war. The government seemed reluctant to tackle very real problems such as class privilege and poverty. Businessmen who had profited from the war grew richer, and disabled veterans and war orphans and widows grew poorer. It was the same old world. Nothing had changed, even though the rhetoric of "fresh beginnings" and "war to end all wars" was thrown about everywhere. "We trusted that God would bring us out into a wealthy place, into a new world," Studdert Kennedy wrote,

> But it is no new world that we find ourselves in, but an old world grown older, a world of selfishness grown more selfish, of greed that has grown more greedy, and of folly that knows no limit to its foolishness. There has come upon us a great disillusionment. We thought that the great Peace Conference was travailing to the birth of Peace, and it has brought forth an abortive pandemo-

> nium. Millions who gave up their all in a frenzy of self-sacrifice during the war are asking themselves bitterly what they gave it for. What's the good? and who's to gain? We are fed up.[24]

The situation maddened Studdert Kennedy. "This post-war world is black with lies," he wrote, "biting and buzzing round everything . . . There's a bad smell about—a very bad smell; it is like the smell of the Dead—it is the smell of dead souls."[25]

A lesser man might've shut down. But Studdert Kennedy embarked on a program to help the people of his generation come to terms with the roots of their malaise. He had emerged from the war a celebrity—Woodbine Willie. Unlike the tens of thousands of anonymous Tommies with whom he'd served, he had a national name and commanded national attention. He was an author, a holder of the Military Cross, and a red-cassocked King's Chaplain (appointed right after the Armistice). He felt that it was his duty to turn his fame to good end.

As far as Studdert Kennedy was concerned, the moral and political problems of his day were at bottom spiritual ones born of the existential vacuum created by the war: "the uselessness of life, the fatuous futility of our sufferings and pains, the boredom of energy expended to no purpose and with no clear end in view, the pure silliness of modern warfare."[26] Help people discover genuine purpose in life, help them to live their faith rather than indifferently mouth platitudinous caricatures of it, and the New Jerusalem Studdert Kennedy had preached during his tour of duty with the NMRH would come a little closer.

The first task was to diagnose with honesty and compassion. So for the first three years after the war, Studdert Kennedy spent many evenings and late nights after a full day of parish work writing a couple of books—*Lies!* (1919) and *Food for the Fed Up* (1921)—that examined the soul-rotting nihilism bred by the war. *Food for the Fed Up* is one of his best books. Ostensibly an examination of the Apostles Creed, it's actually an attempt to persuade readers that the phenomenon of war need not destroy religious faith. It contains in germ the ideas he would develop over the next decade about the suffering God, evolution and community, Christ, the role of the Church, pacifism, and the just society. *Lies!* is an

24. Studdert Kennedy, *Food for the Fed Up*, 7.
25. Studdert Kennedy, *Lies!*, ix.
26. Studdert Kennedy, *Food for the Fed Up*, 2.

exploration of the essential principles of Christ (as opposed, sometimes, to the dogma of the Church) and how they ought to be applied to social and economic problems. The writing of these two books helped Studdert Kennedy sort through his own thoughts, and they most likely also helped lay to rest some of the ghosts he brought back from the war.

For the next ten years, Studdert Kennedy produced a stream of books, pamphlets, articles, and poems, becoming one of Britain's most prolific religious authors. (Eventually, as a timesaver, he started dictating his books, pacing back and forth with great strides, his face screwed up in concentration, smoking nonstop.) But easy as the written word was for him, he was first and foremost a preacher. In 1922, Studdert Kennedy gave up his living at St. Paul's to become the chief missioner or "Messenger" of the recently formed Industrial Christian Fellowship. He stumped up and down the country, in all kinds of weather, visiting cities, towns, and villages to speak at ICF crusades in factories, cathedrals, street corners, town halls, theaters and chapels, until his death. Indeed, death would finally catch up with him while he was embarked on ICF business.

The Industrial Christian Fellowship was formed in 1919 through the merger of two separate agencies, the Christian Social Union and the Navvy's Mission.[27] The Christian Social Union, founded in 1889, took as its primary purpose the application of Christian moral principles to social and economic problems. The Navvy's Mission, founded in 1877, was an advocate for navvys, or casual laborers who drifted from town to town following work. The Mission aimed to promote the spiritual well-being of navvys, but also to make the Church mindful of the wretchedness of their living and working conditions. After the two older organizations incorporated to form the ICF, the new organization's mission was to proclaim Christ's supremacy to both employers and employees in the hope of encouraging just wages, hours, and working conditions. ICF missioners worked with priests and bishops around the country to offer crusades. Traditional evangelical crusades or revivals focused almost exclusively on emotional soul-searching and personal salvation. But ICF crusades, while not dismissing the importance of personal salvation, aimed primarily at encouraging listeners to understand their Christian faith as an alternative to materialistic socialism on the one hand and ruthlessly

27. Gerald Studdert Kennedy, Geoffrey's nephew, writes about the ICF's origins and history, as well as his uncle's role, in "'Woodbine Willie,'" and *Dog-Collar Democracy.*

competitive capitalism on the other when it came to healing social ills. Crusading missioners met working people on their own ground—factories and shops—spoke their plain language instead of lofty Churchspeak, and avoided condescension and feel-good-piety.

An ICF handbook drawn up for missioners—one that Studdert Kennedy doubtlessly consulted many times—clearly explains the purpose of the crusade:

> It is an endeavor to present the Christian religion to the people of a town or district as the solution of the problem of modern social life as they see and experience it . . . The appeal to the individual is made to him as a member of society. A Crusade endeavors to give this message to those whom the Church does not otherwise reach . . . It does not aim directly at getting people into the Church, though that has sometimes happened to a considerable extent; but it offers a magnificent opportunity for the removal of deep-seated misconceptions, and for putting truer ways of thinking before people who have hitherto left organized religion altogether out of account.[28]

His talent for preaching made Studdert Kennedy exactly the right person to serve as the ICF's chief missioner. He toned down the (mild by today's standards) swearing that he'd used in speaking to soldiers during the war, but he retained and improved on his ability to speak to large crowds in their own idiom. To his auditors, his sermons seemed spontaneous, their delivery fresh and inspired. In fact, Studdert Kennedy wrote out each of his sermons, carefully working and reworking them until he was satisfied. Then he memorized them, word-for-word. Literally tens of hours went into the making of each sermon.

Studdert Kennedy's stumping across the country for the ICF didn't interfere with his writing; in fact, his sermons frequently served as raw material for his books. In 1921, he published his most explicitly political book, *Democracy and the Dog Collar.* The only one of his books that hasn't aged well, *Democracy and the Dog Collar,* written as a rather stilted dialogue, explores the relationship between "organized labor" and "organized religions." *The Wicket Gate,* perhaps his single best book and cer-

28. ICF Handbook *Christ the Lord of All Life,* quoted in Purcell, *Woodbine Willie,* 203.

tainly most read one, appeared in 1923. It's a kind of catechism that takes readers through the fundamentals of Christian faith, using the Lord's Prayer as a vehicle. *The Word and the Work* (1925), a series of Lenten meditations based on the Prologue to John's Gospel, and two works on human sexuality, sublimation, and society, *I Pronounce Them* (1927) and *The Warrior, the Woman, and the Church* (1928), appeared in quick order. He also continued to write poetry, gradually moving away from the dialect verse he'd written during the war to more lyrical poems. A new edition of his poetry appeared in 1924 under the title *The Sorrows of God,* and he continued revising subsequent editions of it until his death. A few unfinished writings, anthologized as *The New Man in Christ* (1932), were published posthumously.

When Studdert Kennedy left St. Paul's, he was offered the parish of St. Edmund's in the City of London, the financial district. The living was given him to provide a steady income for his growing family (his third and last son was born in 1926) as well as some relief from his hectic schedule. Since St. Edmund's was in a section of London practically deserted on weekends, it was thought that there would be little pastoral work connected with it for Studdert Kennedy to perform. But his fame as a preacher and priest was so great that St. Edmund's soon attracted large crowds, and eventually Studdert Kennedy found himself preaching there at least two Sundays a month. He was also in great demand throughout Britain as a retreat leader. In fact, most of his posthumous *The New Man in Christ* are retreat outlines, sermons, and notes.

Although his pastoral duties added to his work load, Studdert Kennedy wouldn't have preferred things otherwise. He took his clerical role seriously. A candidate for ordination once asked him for his thoughts on the priesthood. Studdert Kennedy's reply was that a priest should be prophet, pastor, and priest: proclaiming the social gospel to the world, caring for the souls in his charge, dispensing the sacraments, and "bearing upon himself the burden of the sins and sorrows of his people."[29] This last conviction, expressing as it does his ever-present compassion and fellow-feeling, is one of the reasons so many people sought him out as a spiritual counselor and confessor. A characteristic story comes from one of his parishioners at St. Edmund's:

29. Quoted in Kirk, "Studdert Kennedy," 185.

> The Rector would never press confession on anyone. I never heard him mention it in his sermons; but he would always hear confessions when asked. I want to mention a little incident in this connection which is very precious to me, and which shows the wonderful understanding he had. I went to the Rector for my first confession, and amongst all the sins I had to confess there was one which literally made me squirm with shame to have to mention. It was by no means so serious as some of the others, but somehow to admit it before a human being was frightfully hard. But it had to be done, of course. He saw how I felt, and as I finished, he said with infinite tenderness, "Yes, my dear, that's my great temptation, too!" Just imagine how that helped me![30]

Studdert Kennedy's travels for the ICF often separated him from his family, as did his duties at St. Edmund's (his family continued to live in Worcester). It was a lonely and exhausting life. Frequently he arrived at his next speaking engagement tired out and gasping for breath from an asthma attack. After mustering up enough energy to preach in his usual spellbinding style, he'd collapse later, on occasion sobbing out apologies to his hosts because he feared he'd "made a mess of it." He was burning the candle at both ends, and he knew it. "Worn out," he reassured concerned friends, "but not worked out!"[31]

It wasn't surprising that the end came when he was away from home and family. In March 1929, Studdert Kennedy left his home in Worchester to travel to Liverpool to give a series of Lenten addresses. His wife and children were down with the flu, and he was reluctant to leave them. But duty called, and he took a train to Liverpool. Shortly after his arrival, he too began to show symptoms of flu. His old enemy asthma set in, and his heart began to fail. A hasty telegram was sent to Worcester to summon his wife. Studdert Kennedy was in coma by the time she arrived, and died shortly afterward on March 8, 1929.

The next day, P. T. R. Kirk, head of the Industrial Christian Fellowship, proposed to the Dean of Westminster that Studdert Kennedy be buried in the Abbey. "What!" the Dean replied. "Studdert Kennedy? He was a socialist!" So Woodbine Willie was buried in Worcester, with

30. Ibid., 182.

31. Purcell, *Woodbine Willie,* 213.

a funeral service, attended by over 2,000 mourners, at his old parish, St. Paul's. Thousands of people lined the streets of Worcester during the funeral procession. Wreaths came from all over the country, including one from the King and Queen. Other wreaths carried notes saying "A token of respect on behalf of the Worcester unemployed," "from one of Worcester's poorest widows," "from a disabled Irishman," "from the little cripples of Newtown Hospital," and "from just an ordinary working girl from Liverpool."[32] A memorial plaque erected in Worcester Cathedral said it all:

GEOFFREY ANKETELL

STUDDERT KENNEDY

A POET: A PROPHET: A PASSIONATE SEEKER AFTER

TRUTH: AN ARDENT ADVOCATE OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

The Message

The Problem of Evil

"How to believe in and love God in spite of evil; and how to get rid of it": so William Temple characterized the heart of Studdert Kennedy's message. Temple was quite correct in his appraisal. There's no good substitute for Studdert Kennedy's own words, but a brief overview of how he wrestled with the problem of evil will provide the reader with a roadmap for the selections from his writing assembled in this volume.

Given his parish experiences of brutal poverty at Rugby, Leeds, and Worcester, it's possible that Studdert Kennedy would've found his way to the problem of evil even if World War I hadn't occurred. But there's no doubt that his participation in The Great War hurtled him with dynamite-force straight into it. For Studdert Kennedy, war *was* the problem of evil in "acute form,"[33] the test case for determining if Christianity can cope with evil. There are, he wrote, "no words foul and filthy enough" to describe war. It's so hideous that a theist—and especially a Christian—is faced with what looks like a bleak but necessary disjunction: "God is

32. Grundy, *A Fiery Glow,* 82.

33. Studdert Kennedy, "The Religious Difficulties of the Private Soldier," 380.

helpless to prevent war, or else He wills it and approves of it. There is your alternative. You pay your money and you take your alternatives."[34]

For the most part, Christians in the past have taken the second alternative, the thought of a less-than-omnipotent God seemingly more offensive to them the apparent inconsistency of an all-loving God who nonetheless wills and approves of war. But for Studdert Kennedy the pacifist, this conclusion is deadly. "If it is true, I go morally mad. Good and evil cease to have any meaning. If anything is evil, war is."[35] How, then, could God possibly will it? Yet wars obviously plague humanity. Why doesn't God prevent them?

In trying to address these questions, Studdert Kennedy takes as fundamental the claim that the primary attribute of God is love, and that God's power must be understood in terms of love rather than force. The belief that divine omnipotence means that God can do anything causes a great deal of mischief, not the least of which is human resentment and bewilderment when God apparently allows innocent suffering to take place. As a corrective, Studdert Kennedy insists that God's power must be thought of as capable of overcoming "humanly incomprehensible difficulties," but not of doing absolutely *anything*.[36] God's only real power is noncoercive love.

The primary function of love is to unite. In creating the natural order God "had to submit to limitations, due to the necessary nature of matter itself."[37] For example, God was constrained to create the natural order so that its constituents are united through intricate patterns of causal interdependence. But a necessary condition for love is freedom to choose love. So God also created humans who are both causally interdependent and capable of free choice. The combination of interdependence and freedom is obviously risky, but it's a risk a loving God had to take. Interdependence and freedom mean that humans can voluntarily cooperate with one another to make for themselves a good, just, and rewarding community. But it also necessarily means that they can choose to savage one another in a struggle for resources, space, and power, destroying themselves and

34. Studdert Kennedy, *The Hardest Part*, 34.

35. Ibid., 35. In *Lies!* (p. 6), Studdert Kennedy is even more emphatic: "If God wills War, then I am an atheist, an anti-theist. I am against God. I hate Him."

36. Studdert Kennedy, "The Religious Difficulties of the Private Soldier," 382.

37. Studdert Kennedy, *Lies!,* 153.

despoiling the environment. If they choose this second course, God cannot intervene without stepping on both causal interdependence and free will. God can't do anything. God is self-limiting.

But if God won't intervene to prevent war and other kinds of harm to innocents set in motion by human freedom and interdependence, what's the point of it all? How can humans bear the sheer weight of existence?

Studdert Kennedy responds by defending an evolution/eschatology in which divine love works itself throughout all creation, prodding the natural order ever forward toward greater cooperation, unity, concord, and reconciliation. This movement follows from his axiomatic claim that God is love: the loving Creator stamps the creation with His likeness. God has already laid down the necessary condition for the possibility of cooperation in the natural order by making all things interdependent. The "law of love," as Studdert Kennedy came to call it, quickens this interdependence and embeds within the entire evolutionary process an eschatological drive toward the emergence of the beloved community, that culmination of history in which God's vision of concord reaches fruition and war, injustice, and suffering are no more. Studdert Kennedy's beloved community is the New Jerusalem he preached while working for the wartime National Mission for Repentance and Hope.

It follows for Studdert Kennedy that neither nature nor history ought to be judged according to their frequently bloody past but instead according to the highest point they achieve, for the nature of something is revealed not in how it began but in what it becomes. The high point of all creation is the Christ, the embodiment of the law of love, the harbinger of the beloved community. Evolution is "not a descent but an ascension, not a mechanical and determined ascension, but a moral and spiritual progress which can only take place as men are in Christ, living their life in His Spirit, and basing their thought on His law—the law of Love."[38]

Human beings have the potential to grow ever more Christ-like in their love for God, one another, and all of creation. This is part of what it means to be made in God's likeness. But until they consciously embrace this potential and strive to actualize it in their lives, force rather than love will remain the dominant expression of power in society. Force is an uncreative, unimaginative power. It may strong-arm a certain degree of uniformity, but is forever incapable of achieving genuine unity. Under its

38. Studdert Kennedy, *Food for the Fed Up*, 289.

dominions, wars and the rumors of war will continue. So will economic and social systems that exploit the many for the sake of the few.

That's the bad news. God's omnipotence simply can't eliminate the evil of innocent suffering by "imposing" love, because not even God can perform such a contradictory act. Love must be freely given and accepted, not forced. But the good news is that the universe is an "unfinished movement" in which the underlying melody is love, and that all of creation is moving toward ever greater concord that will culminate in the beloved community.[39]

In the meantime, as we humans painfully and haltingly wean ourselves of the illusion that force rather than love is the universe's fuel, we suffer. We continue to assail one another, both systemically, with wars and unjust social and economic institutions, and personally, with hateful and uncompassionate behavior. And, insists Studdert Kennedy, God suffers along with us. Humanity is God's martyrdom.[40] To love is to take on the beloved's suffering for the sake of love. This God willingly does. For Studdert Kennedy, the classical claim that God is impassable, incapable of experiencing pain, is contrary to both human experience of the Divine and the testimony of Scripture. God isn't an aloof, untouched observer. God suffers along with us, groans and travails with the creation, and longs, as do we, for the coming of the beloved community.

But as affirmed by the Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Christ, God's suffering—and, Studdert Kennedy claims, humanity's as well—isn't the final word. The good news of Christianity isn't just that Christ was crucified, but that he is not dead. Loveless power, the violence of war, exploitation, the agents of suffering and death: these are all forms of sin which God takes upon himself in order to lead the world to love. As Studdert Kennedy wrote, speaking specifically of war,

> War is just sin in a million forms, in a million of God's gifts misused. God cannot deal with war in any other way than that by which He deals with sin. He cannot save us from war except by saving us from sin. How does God deal with sin? By what way does He conquer it? By the way of the Cross, the way of love. He suffers for it; He takes it upon Himself, and He calls on us

39. Ibid., 195.
40. Ibid., 187.

> to share His burden, to partake of His suffering . . . , that by [His and our] suffering the power of evil may be broken and the world redeemed.[41]

In part because of his eschatological faith that love is the driving force in creation, in part because of his own compassionate temperament, Studdert Kennedy placed more emphasis in both his writings and pastoral work on explaining and alleviating suffering than condemning those who inflicted it or bemoaning the world's cruelty. In spite of the chaos of the war and the blight of poverty, Studdert Kennedy had no patience for dour, world-hating Christianity, and thought it stupid and cruel of the Church to preach that God's creation is fallen.[42] He was also wary of those who saw humanity as hopelessly depraved. Most sin, he asserted, isn't outright willful rebellion so much as ignorance.[43] Even Christ suggested as much when he pled with the Father to "forgive them, for they know not what they do." Humans, made in God's likeness, are no more irretrievably fallen than creation is. But they live in a culture that encourages moral stupidity. Teach them the truth about power and the suffering God; inspire them with the promise of the beloved community; instruct them in alternatives to war; offer them, in short, the countercultural vision preached and practiced by Christ, and the likeness of God which they carry within them will respond with gratitude and enthusiasm. Like speaks to like.

Getting Rid of Evil

Humans are called to collaborate actively in the eschatological/evolutionary movement from force to love. But in order to do this, they must become quite clear about their religious convictions, because the kind of God one worships—one's "master passion"—in turn determines how one looks at self, others, and the world.[44] It's the Church's business to help people honestly explore the basis of their faith and come to an appreciation of how its fundamental principles can and should influence

41. Studdert Kennedy, *The Hardest Part,* 114–15.
42. Studdert Kennedy, *Food for the Fed Up*, 177.
43. Ibid., 201.
44. Studdert Kennedy, *Lies!,* 111.

both private and social life. "A divorce between the secular and the sacred means the death of real religion."[45]

For Studdert Kennedy, getting clear about God, as we've seen, is recognizing that God is Love and that God suffers along with creation when the law of love is thwarted or violated. Four certainties, referred to by Studdert Kennedy as the "plain bread of religion," follow from this understanding of God. They're crucial for faithful obedience to Christ and cooperation with him in building the beloved community.

The first certainty is about self: as a child of God destined to grow into my Parent's likeness, my fundamental nature is love rather than aggression or competition. Violence and egoism are unnatural to me. When I behave violent or selfishly, I'm acting less than fully human. The second certainty is about others: since all persons share a common Parent and a common inherited nature, the fundamental identity of my fellow humans is loving as well. And since love is always a movement toward unity and concord, it follows that my well-being is bound up with the flourishing of all. "We do not live, unless we live in and through the beloved community."[46] The third certainty is about the natural world. As the creation of a loving God, it necessarily bears its Creator signature. Nature is orderly, reliable, sacramental, and sacrificial, shot through with divine beauty, truth, and goodness. The Creator has not thrust his beloved children into a hostile or indifferent physical environment. The universe is benign. The fourth certainty is about death. Death is inevitable, but is never the end. Things fall only to rise again. The Death and Resurrection of Christ is both prototype and guarantee of this cosmic parabola.

Studdert Kennedy's four certainties serve both to reassure and to exhort. They reassure us by arguing that the nature of God is such that those "facts" of existence which awaken in us our most primal fears and too often determine our behavior in the world—the aggression and rage we at times recognize in ourselves, the danger to our safety we think others pose, the hostility of the natural world's army of germs, viruses, earthquakes, and now global warming, and the final and insurmountable assault, death—aren't necessary facts at all. In part they're illusions that, because we confuse them for reality, become self-fulfilling. But mainly they're the consequences of our refusal, sometimes motivated by rebel-

45. Studdert Kennedy, "Salvation," 146.

46. Studdert Kennedy, *The Wicket Gate*, 42.

lion but more often by ignorance, to embrace the love from which we're fashioned and to which we're destined. And this, of course, points to the exhortatory function of the four certainties: if our interpretation of self, others, the natural world and death are illusions on which our fears have bestowed a pseudo-reality, our duty is to clarify our understanding of the world and its Creator so that the power of love supplants the power of force.[47]

Practically speaking, one of the ways all this translates is by redirecting religious and moral analyses to emphasize the social rather than primarily the personal or private aspect. If love is the principle characteristic of both Creator and creation, and if the purpose of love is to unify, it only stands to reason that the basic unit of reality should be thought of as relationship or community rather than as isolated individual. Certainly the early Church thought so, thinking of both sin and virtue as primarily corporate rather than personal. The humanism of the Renaissance and Enlightenment shifted the focus from the corporate to the personal in the modern era, and the Church followed the trend. But Studdert Kennedy is clear in his disagreement with it. "Indeed," he writes, the whole notion of an individual who exists and grows by communion with God apart from communion with man is, from a Christian point of view, nonsense."[48] One properly speaks of the "body," not the "individual," when referring to Christian morality and soteriology. It's not enough to focus on personal virtue or salvation. So as a member of the Body of Christ, the individual must also confess complicity in social evil and accept his or her role in the greater corporate responsibility to fix it.

As a visible sign of the unifying love that empowers creation, the Church must be united to the world and serve as a catalyst for the movement toward ever greater concord and community. The Church must embrace its identity as a sin-bearing community, acknowledging that the

47. It's interesting to note that Studdert Kennedy's insistence that our primal fears about self, others, nature, and death are illusory and born from the worship of unworthy gods is similar to Sigmund Freud's thesis in *The Future of an Illusion* that religious faith is the cultural artefact that helps humans cope with their primal fears of others, nature, and death. The difference of course is that Studdert Kennedy thinks the fears are for the most part unfounded because of the existence of a loving God, while Freud thinks that the fears point to quite real dangers and the religious faith that insulates us against them is illusory. Freud's book was published three years after Studdert Kennedy's treatment of the four certainties in *The Wicket Gate*.

48. Studdert Kennedy, *The Wicket Gate*, 181–82.

guilt of the world is also its guilt, shouldering the sins of all out of love for all.[49] Love bears the sins of others, and if the Church is to be authentic, it must so love the world that it bears the world's burdens instead of retreating into an isolated and other-worldly churchiness. This is the perennial temptation of the Church: to disassociate from the world, to rationalize the suffering in it as part of some grand and inscrutable plan, and to repress its nobler instincts to assuage suffering.[50] Had the Church accepted its responsibility to the world by denouncing the sins of militarism and nationalism, the First World War's slaughter of Europe's finest might have been avoided. Had the Church accepted its complicity in the sins of imperialism and greed, the slums of Leeds, Rugby, and Worcester—not to mention those of Delhi, Jakarta, and Nairobi—might never have blighted countless lives.

Once responsibility is confessed, genuine collaboration with God in the building of the beloved community can begin. The poverty that afflicts the majority of the world's inhabitants is a perverse sacrament, a diabolical inversion of God's plans, an "outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual disgrace."[51] Christians should no more tolerate its continuation than they should tolerate more dramatic evils such as murder or rape. Poverty, no more than murder or rape, is either inevitable or natural. It violates the fundamental law of love. It is a perversion of the natural order.

But alleviating poverty isn't simply a matter of redistributing wealth (although some of this might be necessary), much less of simple charity (although in times of crisis charity is essential). The human ability—the human *opportunity*—to work is important. Society owes the poor meaningful, creative, and rewarding labor. Moreover, the rich should resist the urge to sit idly on their fortunes. Their wealth is a responsibility, not an entitlement. Contrary to the claims of Marxist interpretations on the one hand and capitalist ones on the other, work is best understood not in terms of class struggle or competition, but as a catalyst for the love that percolates through human history. "God's plan and purpose for the world are being wrought out through work."[52] Work encourages cooperation

49. Ibid., 183.
50. Studdert Kennedy, "Salvation," 142–46.
51. Ibid., 147.
52. Studdert Kennedy, "Bread, Work, and Love," 265.

and collaboration between people. It's one of the ways in which evolution progresses and eschatology unfolds, and the just society honors it as such. The Church's business, through preaching from the pulpit, hands-on service, and social agitation such as embodied by ICF crusades, is to remind society of this truth. Christians should emulate the Good Samaritan in tending to the immediate and urgent needs of those who suffer. But this isn't enough. Christians must also confront the unjust social structures that cause the suffering in the first place.

> You and I are part owners at any rate of these roads to Jericho that are infested by sharks and thieves, and it doesn't do for us to think that our duty ends in helping us to supply endless charitable funds, and financing innumerable societies to save the underdog. We cannot stop short of an earnest endeavor to clear out the thieves, and so to strengthen the travelers on the road that they may be able to defend themselves against those we cannot clear out.[53]

Studdert Kennedy insisted time after time that he was no theologian or intellectual. Although well-read in theology, he came to distrust its authenticity, seeing it as a continuously changing way of glossing over hard realities—such as the problem of evil—that seem incompatible with the Christian story. Echoing the fourth-century Hilary of Poitiers, Studdert Kennedy worried that theologians too often labored under an "irreligious solicitude for God" and tried to protect God's good name by contriving all sorts of face-saving but artificial abstractions.[54] But God has no need of our theological solicitude. The simple religion embraced by the working poor, the simple laborer, the self-sacrificing mother and wife, father and husband, are better tributes. Its essentials are few: God loves us enough to bear our burdens and suffer along with us; the destruction of war and the grinding poison of poverty will not have the final word, because Christ's example promises us resurrection from death; the beloved community, that spiritual state of affairs in which the law of love finally comes into its own, is the terminus point toward which hall history is directed; and that the beloved community's appearance, while inevitable, is hastened by our earnest steps to wean ourselves of force and embrace the power of love.

53. Studdert Kennedy, *The New Man in Christ*, 234.
54. Studdert Kennedy, "The Religious Difficulties of the Private Soldier," 285.

This is the heart of Studdert Kennedy's message. For him, it was the core of Christ's good news.

A Note on the Text

The writings collected here, prose as well as poetry, are organized into four thematic sections.

Part I, "Broken Dreams," offers some of Studdert Kennedy's rawest descriptions of the horror of war. Most of them are autobiographical. All of them chillingly express the despair, cynicism, and general feeling of being "fed up" Studdert Kennedy and thousands of other demobilized veterans carried with them from the war.

Part II, "A Suffering and Triumphant God," focuses on Studdert Kennedy's struggle to come to terms with the problem of evil as he explores the nature of divine power, the evolutionary/eschatological drive of love, and the fellow-suffering voluntarily shouldered by God. In many ways, the writings collected in this section are the heart of Studdert Kennedy's message.

Part III, "The Plain Bread of Religion," offers writings that explore Studdert Kennedy's assertion that our way of thinking about reality and treating our fellow humans follows from the sort of God we choose to worship. The community-centered nature of his understanding of Christianity is the central theme throughout them.

Part IV, "Getting Christ Out of the Churches," focuses on Studdert Kennedy's thoughts on specific ways to apply Christ's gospel to the world's problems, and especially his understanding of work as a prime facilitator of the law of love.

In a collection of this kind, a bit of repetition is unavoidable, especially since Studdert Kennedy tended to return to the same basic themes throughout most of his writing and public speaking. But when he *does* return to them, he almost always approaches them from angles different from earlier ones. The result is a variety of fresh perspectives on constant themes. I hope that whatever repetition the reader encounters in the texts anthologized here follow the same pattern.

I've changed nothing in the texts except Studdert Kennedy's British spelling. His use of upper case letters is a bit eccentric, and probably reflects his sensitive ear for the rhythm of the spoken word. Fearing that

imposing an editorial uniformity on them would step on the intonations and inflections Studdert Kennedy wanted to get across, I've left them alone. Original publication dates are indicated at the end of each selection.

All footnotes and ellipses in the selections are mine. The former are explanatory or bibliographical, the latter signal an editorial omission on my part of words or passages in the original texts.