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Suffering in the Trinitarian Pattern of Redemption

Abstract

The present study aims to approach the problem of suffering in a manner in which the perception and weight of the suffering might be transformed into glory, and man should be seen not only as the bearer of the suffering of which he will get rid in the Kingdom of God, but as a bearer of the suffering found in the Holy Trinity. Taking into account four theses: 1. The suffering from the Holy Trinity is the response of the Divinity, with divine love, to the love of human beings; 2. The suffering from the Holy Trinity is the culmination of the divine joy experienced for the redemption of creation; 3. Suffering, at the level of human being is the human response with divine love to the love of God and 4. Suffering, as Trinitarian pattern, is doxological and it is found only in the life of God.) We will show that this topic deserves attention in a different comple-



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mentary approach from the classical ones.

Keywords

Suffering, Holy Trinity, redemption, testimony, image

Introduction

When we talk about suffering, we talk about everyday problems of people. From a philosophical point of view the situation does not change much, and from the theological point of view suffering sometimes receives unexpected values. Tomas Spidlik talks about “painful joy”¹ as about some festive moments of spiritual life. Thus, the approaches of suffering may be very different and therefore the conclusions very different, even contradictory. The idea of suffering is the subject of philosophical, theological, psychological, medical study and responses, and no less folkloric, because the most suffering is present in our cotidian life. Therefore, when speaking of suffering, we can refer to the relationship with ourselves, the relationship with others, the relation with what happens to us, the relationship with the questions about life and death, which do not have an answer, or suffering from the point of view of the relationship between man and sin and between God and man.

We could say that the history of suffering begins with the expulsion from paradise, but in this case we would neglect the decision of redemption that God has taken long before the

¹ T. Spidlik, *Spirituality of the Christian East: A Systematic Handbook (Spiritualitatea răsăritului creștin – IV. Omul și destinul său în filozofia religioasă rusă*, trans. into Romanian by Maria Cornelia Ica jr., Sibiu: Deisis Publishing, 2002), p. 240.

event occur: “having made known to us the secret of His will, according to His good pleasure, that He purposed in Himself: in regard to the dispensation of the fullness of the times, to bring into one the whole in the Christ, both the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth – in him; in whom also we did obtain an inheritance, being foreordained according to the purpose of Him who the all things is working according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1, 9-11). We could say that this decision of redemption in which exists the real dimension of suffering is, in fact, the saving grace, ie the first and complete meaning of uncreated energies; Saint Gregory Palamas will briefly call them “divinity”, “uncreated light” or “grace”². In these circumstances the suffering itself becomes the meaning of redemption although conventional references to it can be considered as punishment.

Due to the fact that the initiative of redemption is linked to the Self of God and His nature, I want to propose a study on suffering as divine reality with divine purpose³. Based on the dialectics of St. Maximus the Confessor who believes that: “sorrow of soul is the result of the pleasure of senses [...] and the sorrow of body is the result of the pleasure of soul, for the joy of soul is done through the sorrow of body”⁴, we could say that the coming of God into history, through the Incarnation and the Cross of Christ, might be understood as the external toil and suffering of the divinity, which produces a great joy in His Immanent Being, which He wants to be reflected within the believers who are carriers of this cross. “For what renown is it,

² V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church (Teologia mistică a Bisericii de Răsărit*, trans. into Romanian by Fr. Vasile Răducă, Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing), p. 102.

³ We will avoid the conventional meaning of suffering and follow instead the attentions that God grants it in His Own existence, an existence full of love for His creation.

⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Philokalia, (Filocalia sfintelor nevoițe ale desăvârșirii*, trans. into Romanian by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, 12 volumes, 3rd vol., Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing, 1999), p. 278.

if sinning and being buffeted, ye do endure it? but if, doing good and suffering [for it], ye do endure, this is gracious with God, for to this ye were called, because Christ also did suffer for you, leaving to you an example, that ye may follow his steps” (1 Pet. 2, 20-21).

If our suffering produces inner and spiritual joy for us “when we look for God crying”⁵, it follows necessarily that this joy exists also in the Trinitarian communion because love involves intrinsically the idea of suffering. In terms of feelings and state of love, love itself may be a nuance of suffering.

Due to those mentioned above, we can say that suffering, in the light of redemption and within it, intends to express sublimely God’s love. Expulsion from Paradise is usually seen as a divine payment, as a punishment between God and the man who has sinned, but in reality, if we think in that moment the man should have died and end a sad chapter in the universe, we can say that the expulsion from Paradise is another prolongation of God’s love for he or she who bears His image. Nevertheless, suffering is the reality that in a dilemmatic way we want or run away from, in it we have sometimes the fear or the quietness, in it we think that sometimes was done right or wrong.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer sees this reality by asking the following questions: “Who can say when we run from suffering out of fear or look for it out of foolishness? Who shows us the hidden boundaries between these?”⁶ Through these questions we understand once more how anachronistic can suffering combine our feelings and our spiritual attitudes.

If we were to refer only to the New Testament, we have two terms about suffering, *παθημα* and *πασχω* expressing “passion,

⁵ T. Spidlik, *Spirituality of the Christian East: A Systematic Handbook (Spiritualitatea răsăritului creștin – IV. Omul și destinul său în filozofia religioasă rusă*, trans. into Romanian by Maria Cornelia Ică jr., Sibiu: Deisis Publishing, 2002), p. 240.

⁶ D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship, (Costul uceniciei*, trans. into Romanian by Ligia Taloș, Cluj-Napoca: Peregrinul Publishing, 2009), p. 192.

physical or moral pain. In the New Testament these terms relate to both the sufferings of Christ and the apostles' and Christians"⁷, but always it's about the sufferings that enjoy the spiritual interiority for salvation.

This biblical textual paradigm led me to propose a research on suffering through the perspective of the Holy Trinity, specifically: Suffering in the Trinitarian pattern of redemption. This pattern keeps mostly to the love generated by the consubstantiality and communion of the Holy Trinity, i.e. the existence of Existential mode from the beginnings: "in the beginning there was love"; this is also the title of one of the most famous books of Dumitru Staniloae.

In this study we will call into question the response of the redeemed human nature which will accept, through its suffering, to be transformed by the divine redemptive love. It is the love that transforms us and makes us receptive to the wisdom of God: "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet. 4, 19). One of the principal ideas of this study is based on the assumption that the trinitarian love is salvific, creative, ready to suffer for humanity. According to the orthodox soteriology, salvation involves an embodiment of the same trinitarian love that is ready for suffering.

1 Suffering within the Holy Trinity. Some Aspect of the Trinitarian Love

Apparently, it is quite unusual to talk about suffering with reference to God. He Who is the fullness of existence and eternity and happiness, "the blessed God" (1 Tim. 1, 11), as St. Paul says, how could He have suffering inner experience?

⁷ I. Mircea, *Dictionary of the New Testament (Dicționar al Noului Testament)*, Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 1995), p. 501.

However, if we consider the relational analogy between father, wife and children, on the one hand, and the Persons of the Trinity and the created man, on the other hand, talking about suffering in the Holy Trinity is not so impossible; such as a father suffers for his child, in the same way – in the inexplicable depths of deity – God suffers for the lost man. “He Who never knew sin became a curse for us, so that we release ourselves from the old curse. Because it was enough for God, Who is above all, to suffer for everyone, so that through the death of His body, to obtain redemption of all.”⁸ What an optimistic shade and full of victory gives St. Cyril of Alexandria to Christ’s suffering and thus to the suffering within the Trinity. Thus, the first thesis of this research is the following:

1.1 Suffering in Holy Trinity is God’s response with divine love to the love of human beings

This thesis is supported by the Cross of Christ, event and suffering, which states, in a continuous manner, that the Holy Trinity co-participates in the inner soteriological joy that is caused by the suffering generated by God’s inner love. Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania said the following: “Through Jesus was revealed that, in addition to the suffering born from sin exists also the suffering born from love, whose ultimate expression was to be the sacrifice of the Cross.”⁹ This is the suffering within the Trinity, suffering conceived by the love between Father, Son and Holy Spirit, a love through which can be recovered the image and likeness in the human being.

⁸ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Writings Part Four – Commentary on the Gospel of St. John (Scrieri partea a patra – Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, trans. into Romanian by Fr. Dumitru Stăniloae, Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 2000), p. 1118.

⁹ B. V. Anania, *Poetry of the Old Testament, (Poezia Vechiului Testament*, Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 2000), p. 18.

God's answer with love, as an act of divine suffering, is reflected most clearly in what the Holy Scripture tells us about the work of Jesus Christ and of the Holy Spirit. In the sacred text, God is not interested to respond clearly to questions about suffering, but He writes about how He suffers because, through these images of love, we can see and want the images of suffering which give us the spiritual nobleness. "Surely our diseases He did bear, and our pains He carried; whereas we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded because of our transgressions; He was crushed because of our iniquities: the chastisement of our welfare was upon Him, and with His stripes we were healed" (Isa. 53, 4-5). "Jesus endured all the temptations that rule over people. He united the divine with the humanity; a divine spirit lived in a temple of flesh. He was united to this temple."¹⁰ This union must express the gracious extension of the body of Christ in us, and it comes with the Christic bliss that is caused also by suffering.

It is inappropriate to declare that God wants to torture the human being to save it, and also it is inappropriate to think that the union of the divine and human natures, for the deification of the second, excludes suffering as living and as state of inner well being. God Christ was united with the human nature in order to, within it, bring on its face and to its own good the fullness of wearing God's image. "Man has to grow within him, which is his the true growth."¹¹ The inner well being, resulting from suffering according to the will of God, is the one that confirms that man was put in a state that is accredited by God and lived by Christ.

This kenotic approach, with all the realities involved, including suffering, is found in the Incarnation of Christ, in the moment

¹⁰ E. G. White, *Bible Commentary (Comentarii biblice ale Vechiului Testament, no translator mentioned, 2nd ed., Făgăraș: Păzitorul Adevărului Publishing), p. 237.*

¹¹ D. Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ or Man's Restoration, (Iisus Hristos sau restaurarea omului, Craiova: Omniscope Publishing, 1993), p. 105.*

He assumes the human body. “If He had not been incarnated – says St. Gregory Palamas – and if He had not suffered in body and had not risen, and had not returned for us in heaven, we wouldn’t have known the wholeness of God’s love for us.”¹² We notice, in the above mentioned quotes, how clear is the statement of the fact that God’s response with divine love to the love of the human beings has suffering within its fundamental paradigm.

When we talk about suffering within the Trinity we must take into account, fundamentally, the Person of the Holy Spirit. Christ promises that He will ask the Father and He will give us “another Comforter, the Spirit of Truth” (Jn. 14, 16-17). In the complexity of His work lie, in an emblematic way, suffering and sighing as means through which it is satisfied the Trinitarian love and, at the same time, as means of restoring the communion between God and us.

“And, in like manner also, the Spirit doth help our weaknesses; for, what we may pray for, as it behooved [us], we have not known, but the Spirit himself doth make intercession for us with groanings unutterable, and He who is searching the hearts hath known what [is] the mind of the Spirit, because according to God he doth intercede for saints” (Rom. 8, 26-27). This way of intercession, this divine intervention filled with sighs, is the will of God the Father. “Meaning that, says John Stott, the intercession of the Holy Spirit is accompanied by them and expressed through them (...) That is why, the Holy Spirit is identified with our sighs, with the pain of the world and of the Church and takes part in their longing after their salvation. We and Him sigh together.”¹³

¹² St. Gregory Palamas, *Homilies (Omilii)*, trans. into Romanian by Constantin Daniel, Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing, 2000), pp. 235-236.

¹³ J. R. Stott, *The Message to Romans (Epistola lui Pavel către Romani)*, trans. into Romanian by I. Ciobanu, Cluj-Napoca: Logos Publishing, 2000), pp. 272-273.

Holy Spirit's sigh should not be confused with the idea of regret. Holy Spirit's sigh, as suffering, which is a petition and a guarantee for us, is exactly the segment of divine love through which the sacrificial passion of Christ is put near the sinner eager of salvation. Therefore, putting together the Sacrifice of the Cross with the Holy Spirit's sighing, through which are mediated the merits of Christ in the human life, gives unquestionable identity to a love that responds with divine love to the love of people and in which is seen the appreciative and servant reciprocity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

"The Son – says Paul Evdokimov – asks the Father to give the Holy Spirit and in response to this earnest prayer, the Father sends the Holy Spirit, ushering the Pentecost. This full view of *oikonomia* does not diminish the central role of the mysterious Resurrection and Sacrifice of the Lamb, but specifies the progressive order of works and shows the Son and the Spirit, each in His own glory and dimension, each serving the other and converging together towards the Kingdom of the Father."¹⁴ This first thesis of the present research – the suffering within the Trinity is God's response with divine love to the love of the human beings – must be understood in the complexity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, from the perspective of the inner joy and love of the divinity, love and joy caused by the coming to sacrifice and suffering of Christ the Savior and the Holy Spirit's sigh, attitudes external to the Immanent Being, through which man is called and is allowed to return *to* and *in* the God of communion.

The second thesis of this research is:

¹⁴ P. Evdokimov, *L'Esprit-Saint dans la Tradition orthodoxe (Prezența Duhului Sfânt în tradiția ortodoxă)*, trans. into Romanian by Fr. Vasile Răducă, Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing, 1995), p. 109.

1.2 Suffering of the Trinity is the Culmination of Divine Joy lived for the Redemption of Creation

God's experience in relation to suffering is foreign to our experience in relation to it. Because of the sin man can not delineate God's thesis about suffering and Satan's thesis on suffering. We can understand this phenomenon, in part, if we follow the relationship between parents and children. Joy and suffering is a unit supplying ecstasy of the parental happiness. We are glad that our children grow and we suffer because we no longer have them as children; we are happy that they get married and we suffer because they are not with us and that they leave us and we leave them, etc. "Parents call it pedagogical or guiding abandonment and distinguish it from the denying abandonment. It includes not only external troubles, but some inner discouragement."¹⁵ So, the apogee of human joy is accomplished in our lives only if we know how to properly manage the existence of suffering. Otherwise, our daily living degenerates into pathological¹⁶ and the normality is compromised.

In relation to the salvation of creation, the divine joy captures also the dimension of suffering through which the divine is confirmed as perfect. Here's how the Scriptures records this: "And Him who was made some little less than messengers we see – Jesus – because of the suffering of the death, with glory and honor having been crowned, that by the grace of God for every one he might taste of death. For it was becoming to Him, because of whom [are] the all things, and through whom [are] the all things, many sons to glory bringing, the author of their

¹⁵ D. Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality – Ascetics and Mystics (Spiritualitatea ortodoxă – Ascetica și mistica)*, (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 1992), p. 136.

¹⁶ I.e. we become ill (for eg: children who do not get married and live with their parents until an old age). Often, we consider these illnesses as curses, but in reality they are the result of our choice for not knowing how necessary is suffering for our joy and happiness.

salvation through sufferings to make perfect, for both he who is sanctifying and those sanctified [are] all of one, for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren," (Heb. 2, 9-11) brothers of suffering.

"The cross should have been a mistake, the sufferings, a tragic accident; instead, they were, in God's hands, the way of bringing Messiah Himself towards His coronation with glory and honor: because of the suffering of death, He is now crowned with glory and honor."¹⁷ In the passage above we see that suffering, as existential expression of God, is something quite different from our conventional language and our conventional experience. Death suffered by Christ is not one which disposes Him of glory and honor, but one that crowns Him with glory and honor. The suffering and the crucifixion ordeal is not something which diminishes His royal majesty, His unique character as Captain of Salvation, but a reality that completes this quality. In other words, we must find within the Trinity, through faith and prayer, another meaning for suffering, and suffering, which does not provide those mentioned above, should be very carefully considered in order not to create a precedent of sin and anger towards God.

In conclusion:

1.3 The talk about suffering within the Trinity does not mean to anthropologise God

Such a thing would be severely wrong. When we talk about suffering within Trinity we talk about a state towards which the spiritual man tends to and about one of the divine ways through which man is raised to God. Thus we consider a human attitude that needs to be corrected. Dumitru Stăniloae talks

¹⁷ D. Gooding, *An Unshakeable Kingdom*, (*Epistola către Evrei – o împărăție ce nu poate fi clătinată*, trans. into Romanian by A. Pastor, (Cluj-Napoca: Logos Publishing, 2006), p. 88.

about our propensity of wanting sinful pleasure and avoiding pain. He states that this form of behavior needs to be changed, we should avoid pleasure and wait for pain. “For – emphasizes Dumitru Stăniloae – the passions which crave and receive pleasure and those rejecting pain are the manifestation of weakness of the flesh. Jesus reinforced His human nature, and the human nature in general, both by rejecting pleasure and by receiving pain.”¹⁸ In these circumstances suffering within the Trinity should be seen as an expression of love that God has towards his creation.

The two thesis that we developed above – Suffering within the Holy Trinity is God’s response with divine love to the love of the human beings and Suffering within the Holy Trinity is the culmination of divine joy lived for the redemption of creation – find their truth in what is God as supreme being that, through love, i.e. love and pain towards creation, approaches man to Himself and deifies him.

2 Suffering in the Human Family

As mentioned above, suffering at the level of human nature can be determined by many things. In what concerns us, we talk about suffering caused by intentions and inner beliefs related to our way to please God. This turmoil, resulting from researching the Holy Spirit and human thirst for immortality, responds in notes of suffering to God’s call and gives meaning to the toil that the penance claims for deification.

Thus, the thesis number 3 of this research is the following:

¹⁸ D. Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality – Ascetics and Mystics, (Spiritualitatea ortodoxă – Ascetica și mistica*, (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 1992), p. 138.

2.1 Human Suffering is the Human Response with divine love to the Love of God

Commenting on the idea of suffering in the book of Job, Bartolomeu Valeriu Anania notes the following: “His suffering (Job’s) is not only physical but also moral; ultimately, he does not complain about suffering, but because he does not understand it, that it is consumed into the absurd, in the omnipotence of God, Who can only be rational.”¹⁹ We see, therefore, that pain more profound when the explanation is missing, because through understanding of the situation the tension gains values of virtue and man becomes more united with his own suffering. Crying is an expression of both pain and joy. Also, joy is an expression of both pain and joy.

But there is a reality in these spontaneous events, which we rarely thought about: If someone cries with joy, he/she reaches the superlative of the fulfillment of the state of bliss, but if someone rejoices in pain or distress is an important sign of impending madness. This is why the saints were considered crazy. “We are fools for Christ’s sake” (1 Cor. 4, 10), says Saint Apostle Paul.

When the human being is filled with love of God and when man responds to this inner divine love to the love of God, shown in the Sacrifice of the Cross on the Golgotha, man “goes crazy” for God. Troubles of a moment bring to the soul the eternal joys of eternity. “And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worked patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Rom. 5, 3-4). This suffering is awaited by those who profess Christ, it is the suffering of Martyrs, it is the suffering that characterized over the centuries all Christians who confessed sincerely the Gospel of Christ.

Suffering at the level of human nature can be the path of perfection. St. Cyril of Alexandria said: “I suppose we can not in

¹⁹ B. V. Anania, *Poetry of the Old Testament, (Poezia Vechiului Testament,* (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 2000), p. 16.

any other way get the perfect goodness and union with God, if we do not put love for Him above the earthly life”²⁰. According to this statement, putting the love of God above all else on earth assumes to have a response through which to unite the path of our sanctification with the pain path of Christ. “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3, 10-11). This Pauline hope, this longing of identifying with Christ’s path, can not be expressed by the person who has not appropriated the divine love. We can love God only with His love, and the joy from suffering for salvation expresses this in the superlative.

The manifestation of Christian spiritual love does not cultivate resignation. We are those clay pots in which God has placed His light and love. For this reason, the suffering of the human family, who is struggling to keep the road to heaven, is an expression of divine love, that answers to divine love. When man accepts to be filled with divine love, in him it is the power to rise above “the earth” from which he is made of and with which is connected. He is crossed by the Spirit of God and his pneumatic being finds in suffering God’s love, through which, answering to God’s love, he is ennobled for the eternal kingdom.

Although it seems quite unfair, God owes us no explanation. There are times when He gives them, but there are situations when things remain hidden to us (Deut. 29, 29). So was the situation of Job and his friends: “But Job will die without knowing – neither him or his friends – that his misfortunes episode, absurd as it may appear, is not originated in any sin that he would have committed, or in blind chance, or in what

²⁰ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Writings Part Four – Commentary on the Gospel of St. John (Scrieri partea a patra – Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, trans. into Romanian by D. Stăniloae, (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 2000), p. 1118.

the ancients called fate, but in some *oikonomia* of God. The episode started not on earth, but in heaven, i.e. during a conversation between God and the Satan.”²¹ What is even more strange is that this case, although it might be more clear for us and we have it more complete, however, constitutes for most of us, almost the same conundrum as for the people there.

The idea of success so well promoted by the contemporary society, which is actually a state of pseudo-joy of mind, managed to compromise in the hearts of many Christians the accurate picture of the being and its joys.

Referring to this John Stott makes a very radical statement, almost offensive: “Our sighs express both the current pain and desire for what we have in the future. But some Christians grin too much (seeming to have no place in their theology for pain) and sigh too little.”²² Yes, in the secularised theology there is no room for sighing, pain. There is no room for the God of the Holy Scriptures Who puts His believers to test.

“When we hear about tests we think about something hard to bear²³”, and this bothers us and we can not recognize a God Who behaves this way. However, the true spiritual progress ignores the pseudo competition of the demonic good and sees, in God’s *oikonomia*, the meaning and beauty of suffering. “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Pet. 4, 19). “Because in suffering the

²¹ B. V. Anania, *Poetry of the Old Testament*, (*Poezia Vechiului Testament*, (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 2000), p. 16.

²² J. R. Stott, *The Message to Romans (Epistola lui Pavel către Romani*, trans. into Romanian by I. Ciobanu, (Cluj-Napoca: Logos Publishing, 2000), p. 269.

²³ D. Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality – Ascetics and Mystics*, (*Spiritualitatea ortodoxă – Ascetica și mistica*, (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 1992), p. 136.

disciples remain with the Word, and the Word will remain with them.”²⁴

The response of human love with divine love to God’s love is nothing but repentance. Here’s how Isaiah the Solitary sees this: “So if someone reached and saw the glory of God, he knew before the enemy’s wickedness. If anyone has seen the kingdom, he knew the hell. If anyone has experienced love, he knew hate. If anyone has known the fierce desire of the kingdom, that has known the hatred of the world.”²⁵ Suffering in the redeemed human family should be seen as a manifestation of repentance, in which man responds with divine love to a divine love.

When man suffers for what is eternal he really enjoys the eternal things. The worldly man can not understand this. For this reason “the sinner must be first brought to repentance and forgiven; the rebellious must be reconciled to God; the mere human creature must be born again and become a child of God. And for the person concerned to have an plentiful access into the eternal kingdom and there to wear ‘an eternal weight of glory’, it is vital to undergo a process, be it long or short, of training, of education and perfection; and suffering will be an inevitable part of this process.”²⁶ We speak thus about what God does, not what we do and what happens to us, or what happens to God.

The question of repentance should not be: What happens to God if I have come to suffer?, but what happens to me? but what happens to me that God needs my suffering to raise me towards the righteousness which brings me the eternal welfare.

²⁴ D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (*Costul uceniciei*, trans. into Romanian by L. Taloş, Cluj-Napoca: Peregrinul Publishing, 2009), p. 193.

²⁵ Isaiah the Solitary, *Philokalia (Filocalia sfintelor nevoițe ale desăvârșirii*, trans. into Romanian by D. Stăniloae, 12 volumes, 12th vol., (Bucharest: Harisma Publishing, 1991), pp. 151-152.

²⁶ D. Gooding, *An Unshakeable Kingdom*, (*Epistola către Evrei – o împărăție ce nu poate fi clătinată*, trans. into Romanian by A. Pastor, (Cluj-Napoca: Logos Publishing, 2006), pp. 89-90.

Knowing how to perceive this reality in terms of God, means knowing what one wants. Under these conditions the man is no longer servant of doubt, but companion of certainty, blood brother of the Cross hidden along with Christ in God the Father. If we were to go back to the problem of Job's suffering, to the divine treaty about suffering, we need to know with dissatisfaction that God does not care to tell us what is suffering and why it occurs. "Through the book of Job it is approached, from a different perspective, the relationship of man with God. Somehow, it's completed the traditional Jewish doctrine, according to which the divine retribution is exclusively based on merit. Despite long debate between the four persons – respectively five – the problem of human suffering is not solved by the author."²⁷ We are under the impression that the man suffers just because God wants him to suffer. But even in such circumstances, seemed to be brought to absurd, for the believers to suffer just because God wants them to suffer is an argument more than enough to remain faithful to God, it is also a virtue. But suffering is not a mystery.

Suffering is sometimes the result of our own mistakes, sometimes it is a matter of grace. In some cases it is a pedagogical step from God, sometimes it is the result of our fellows' actions. In these conditions not the answer to the question *why?* heads us to the gracious gifts that God gives to us, but *how* we behave in such situations.

Referring to this problem Dumitru Stăniloae notes the following:

"The most beautiful sentences about the meaning of sorrows were given to us by saints Mark the Ascetic and Isaac the Syrian; they are a true theology of sorrows. First, through sorrows God draws us from sin. Secondly, sorrows often follow sins, even if we have confessed

²⁷ P. Semen, *Waiting for Salvation (Așteptând mântuirea)*, (Iași: The Publishing House of Metropolitan of Moldova and Bucovina, 2000), p. 335.

them. Through them is restored the leaning nature and strengthened again.

There is a regular compensation between sin received willingly and sorrow come unwillingly. Thirdly, troubles are sent for testing, to reinforce flesh and help abstinence from future mistakes. Fourthly, they may even come when we did not sin: they come for the sins of others. And the fifth thing to note is that their endurance is a sign of strength and wisdom and endows us with power and wisdom.”²⁸

In this situation suffering should be seen above dialectics, it is the working grace of God, it gives transparency to love and purifies love. He who suffers according to the will of God is filled with divine love, love from which the corners and shadows of selfishness and worldly interests are missing. For this reason the suffering of the human family saved or on the way to salvation should be seen as a positive response which man brings with divine love to the divine love. This response gives deep and gracious joy to the spiritual man and expresses “spiritual madness”, an attitude which is capable of only the one for whom suffering is a matter of divine grace, of divine love and divine oikonomia.

In conclusion, the thesis:

2.2 The Suffering in the human family

The suffering in the human family – or the response of human love with divine love to God’s love, should be seen as an experience through which those directly affected perfect both their faith and body of Christ on earth, i.e. His Church. “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you (says St. Apostle Pavel),

²⁸ D. Stăniloae, *Orthodox Spirituality – Ascetics and Mystics, (Spiritualitatea ortodoxă – Ascetica și mistica*, (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 1992), p. 141.

and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church" (Col. 1, 24). In other words, we are dealing with a work of God's uncreated energies, through which Christ perfects the Church to present it to the Father as "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5, 27)

People as sanctuaries redeemed by Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, bear, through suffering, the divine love, with which respond to God's love, a love that surpasses our initiatives and surpasses all creation. Suffering is, in these circumstances, an exhausting walk with divine love within us towards God's love shown to us through the Cross.

3 Suffering, Trinitarian Pattern of Redeemed Life – or the Life of God's Lonelies

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12, 2). Christ went out through the cross, i.e. through suffering, externally, for Holy Trinity's inner joy, joy that was set before Him. In these circumstances, the Cross of Christ is not only the means of our salvation and not only the means through which Christ atoned our sins, but, under these conditions, the Cross of Christ, i.e. His suffering, is the cause of the Holy Trinity's joy, is the praise of God through which His love puts into a state of spiritual understanding the divine way of superlative existence regarding immortality and bliss.

This kind of communion and communal identification of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit becomes a pattern for the life of the redeemed and a pattern in which is found the redeemed life or the being of those who are God's. The man who refuses to identify with this kind of love and suffering remains estranged from God. For this reason, when we talk about suffering we do

it in a certain way about the spiritual method through which those who labor in those of their salvation accept suffering in themselves as a reality that is found only within the Trinity. The suffering of saints is not in the people foreign of God.

Based on this argument that the suffering, as a Trinitarian pattern, is found only in the life of God's lonelies, we will develop in what follows few nuances of the life of faith arising from this thesis.

3.1 Suffering, Testimony of Redeemed Life

For most people, pain is generally an acknowledgment of error, a confirmation of the fact that, following some wrong actions, man drew upon him curse and punishment. For this reason it is more complicated to regard suffering as being superior to the law of retaliation. An argument for this understanding is the whole biblical history, where we see that man, after disobedience and wrong choices, always had to suffer.

Nevertheless, in the Gospel of John, and beyond, there are also other situations. Thus, in the Gospel of John, God speaks about a case that forces us to regard suffering from another perspective. "And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him" (Jn. 9, 1-3).

The question is clear: who caused this suffering? The answer is unexpected. Under these conditions we see that there is suffering that is not the result of sin, there are situations where suffering is found which is not due for payment for a particular error. Christ states that it is a reality where are shown the gracious works of God, that consider the one in question or others. "Do not say that the one freed from passions can not have tribulation – notes Mark the Hermit. For if not for him, he

still owes having trouble for his neighbor.”²⁹ Salvation, the Gospel, is done between people and in people and through suffering. From this perspective we must affirm that suffering confirms a redeemed life, and this is a testimony and an attraction for those who are still far from Christ.

We are dealing with a suffering in which God is seen in His splendor. It’s about the way God comes, through the uncreated energies, towards the human being saving it. We could talk, in this case, about an uncreated suffering or of a suffering that is not the result of something that happened, but a suffering that is found in God’s love, a suffering specific to God’s love, a suffering that exists in God and exists before all ages. When we talk about suffering in the Holy Trinity, we can talk about a touch of grace. In other words, in this case, suffering is the uncreated grace through which God reaches the created being and returns it to Himself with salvific purpose. On the deification way, the believer gets both shades of suffering, but suffering, about which we talk conventionally, decreases in favor of the other until it disappears. The moment in which we remain with suffering as grace is the moment of confirmation of the redeemed life.

Apostles’ life was not different from what we say. Their encounter with Jesus Christ was the start of a road along which they found suffering as a result of election³⁰ and suffering as grace. “The suffering path leads the disciples before governors and kings, ‘for My sake, to serve as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles’. The message will be carried on through

²⁹ Mark the Ascetic, *Philokalia (Filocalia sfintelor nevoițe ale desăvârșirii*, trans. into Romanian by D. Stăniloae, 12 volumes, 1st vol, (Bucharest: Harisma Publishing, 1992), p. 305.

³⁰ I.e. they suffered because they chose Christ. They were ridiculed, expelled and even killed. “And brother shall deliver up brother to death, and father child, and children shall rise up against parents, and shall put them to death, and ye shall be hated by all because of my name, but he who hath endured to the end, he shall be saved” (Mt. 10, 21-22).

suffering.”³¹ However, as their deification advanced, the suffering caused by choice was left behind, and suffering as grace filled their being, so that at a given moment, this suffering finally confessed that their life is redeemed and were able to find a great privilege to die for Christ. For this reason we can say that people chose Christianity not because of the suffering as choice, because it frightens us. There are many who are not Christians exactly because they do not want to suffer. However, there are many who have made themselves Christians precisely to suffer, because suffering, as grace, gives life. “Jesus knew that the world would hate His witnesses and that they would turn against them with merciless violence. However, He expects them to face this hatred with love and the violence with joyful acceptance, following His example through their suffering and death for the lost world.”³²

3.2 Suffering, Praise to God of the Redeemed Life

We need to consider one of the most sensitive situations when we talk about suffering. The whole Christian life, with exactly all its righteous forms, needs to be a living doxology. Or, if suffering is a way to praise God, few will be those who will want to praise God. We live and die so that through our lives the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are praised. If suffering is not doxological or not on the way to doxology then it is the hellish suffering. Only the suffering from hell does not glorify God. This is why when we talk about suffering, as a Trinitarian pattern of redeemed life, we talk implicitly about the doxological praise, and this is a matter of grace.

³¹ D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (*Costul uceniciei*, trans. into Romanian by L. Taloş, (Cluj-Napoca: Peregrinul Publishing, 2009), p. 193.

³² I. Ţon, *Suffering, Martyrdom and Reward in Heaven (Suferinţă, martiraj și răsplătire în cer*, (Oradea: Cartea Creştină Publishing, 2002), p. 487.

Suffering, as grace, is the supreme doxological manifestation in which can be placed he/she who is in Christ and through whom Christ brags, praising Him, he/she glorifies his/her belief in Christ, glorifying Him. "But God forbid that I should glory – notes Saint Apostle Paul – save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world!" (Gal. 6, 14). The suffering of Jesus Christ is the first evidence to God the Father and the first praise towards This on what the redeemed life is; accepting it is putting us in a position to prove and praise our redemption and his love in front of God. Jesus "sacrificed so that we learn and love His light manifested in His sacrifice for us."³³ For this reason one must take the suffering of the Saviour as deifying grace through which redeemed life becomes doxological.

Only those who bestow to God can live suffering as an act of victory, in which is found praise and "pride" offered to God for His graces. "For Christ's passion turned into a means to overcome death, and death of the Lord was made the beginning of humanity renewal for incorruption and new life."³⁴ The kenosis of Lord Jesus reiterates that, both methodologically and in terms of purpose. The second chapter from Philippians shows suffering as a method and as finality:

"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"

³³ D. Stăniloae, *Jesus Christ Light of the World and Deifier of Man (Iisus Hristos lumina lumii și îndumnezeitorul omului*, (Bucharest: Anastasia Publishing, 1993), p. 95.

³⁴ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Writings Part Four – Commentary on the Gospel of St. John (Scrieri partea a patra – Comentariu la Evanghelia Sfântului Ioan*, trans. into Romanian by D. Stăniloae, (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 2000), pp. 1117-1118.

(Phil. 2, 8-11). The method of suffering as grace is salvation, and the end of suffering as grace is praise.

In conclusion, the redeemed life is not a life without suffering, it is the life on the road of deification, a way in which suffering, as choice, is reduced and suffering, as grace, take its place. In this way the life of the faithful becomes more complete and more complex a doxological life.

3.3 Suffering, Image of God Restored in the Redeemed Man

Last but not least, when we talk about suffering, as a Trinitarian pattern of redeemed life, we talk about restoration of the image of God in the human being. It is unbiblical to talk about salvation outside the restoration of God's image in the human being. Saint Apostle Paul, referring to this, makes the following declaration: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you!" (Gal. 4, 19) Suffering, as grace, is thus not only the exercise of our faith in Christ on us, but also the exercise of this belief toward others. I feel pain, I feel suffering, until it's something going on inside the others, or so that something to happen inside the others, i.e. Christ to take form in them. In these circumstances we see suffering as manner and as power. It is the manner through which we build ourselves and we are build spiritually to create a personal existential reality, reality in which God to use its power to find Himself through His Face in us.

From the point of view of the theological and philosophical study we got used to seek the meanings of suffering and its purposes, neglecting thus ontology. The ontology of suffering does not answer our questions, but it answers the concerns of God and speaks to us about God in His beauty. Concerned about suffering in terms of meaning and purpose, Job does not receive any response and through him we do not get one either. "The key question of the book: Why must the innocent man suffer? remains unanswered. Jahveh is revealed to the hero as God who

overwhelms by power and majesty, but He keeps silence over his scream.”³⁵ Suffering is thus love and regret, love and persistence, love and compassion, love and public declaration of love for God, love and representation between people of the image of God. Prophet Ezekiel writes the words of God which list those stated above, in the following way: “And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof” (Ezek. 9, 4).

It’s about people who suffer and are sealed as the image of God. In their attitude are reflected in the superlative the paradigms mentioned above. Here’s how the suffering as grace is not only a question of restoration, but a reality through which God confirms the restoration of His own image. “Jesus’ messengers receive no other consolation more than ensuring that, through the suffering endured, are like their Lord. As the teacher, so the disciple, as the master, so the servant.”³⁶

When our soul has the fullness of suffering as grace, from our interiority comes out on our face the radiance of the image of God. In these circumstances we consider suffering as a Trinitarian pattern of redeemed life. It’s about completing the image of God in us, image compromised through sin.

Suffering, image of God restored in the redeemed man, is a matter of filling with the Holy Spirit. The man who evades from being filled with the Holy Spirit can not suffer, as choice of Christ, for without the Holy Spirit he/she can not choose Christ, and can not be part of suffering as grace, because he/she does not have Christ. “The indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us brings

³⁵ B. V. Anania, *Poetry of the Old Testament*, (*Poetry of the Old Testament*, (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 2000), p. 18.

³⁶ D. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, (*Costul uceniciei*, trans. into Romanian by L. Talos, (Cluj-Napoca: Peregrinul Publishing, 2009), p. 194.

joy and the future glory gives us hope, but the interim period of waiting causes us pain.”³⁷

Through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us we choose and by the Holy Spirit dwelling us we have the suffering that gives us the joy of future glory. In these circumstances suffering is not evil, but is good, is not the way to forget God, but the way we remember Him. “If you want to remember God unceasingly, notes Mark the Hermit, do not reject troubles as unjust but endure them as ones that come for justice.”³⁸

Conclusions

The most important thing we need to remember within the context of the present research is that suffering should not be seen as outside the Holy Trinity. If things were this way God would be stigmatized as one Who uses torture as a form of forcing people to choose Him. Such understanding is totally foreign to Scriptures. For this reason suffering must be viewed from the perspective of interiority of the Trinity. In these circumstances it can be understood as mystery, we could talk about the Mystery of Suffering, which is nothing but the Mystery of Love.

“So behind all unexplained suffering and which, apparently, falls under the absurd, lies the hidden reason of God, Who always knows what He does.”³⁹ Meaning that He makes love by loving and He is love by loving, He devises salvation by saving and He is salvation by saving. This Trinitarian interiority,

³⁷ J. R. Stott, *The Message to Romans (Epistola lui Pavel către Romani*, trans. into Romanian by I. Ciobanu, (Cluj-Napoca: Logos Publishing, 2000), p. 269.

³⁸ Mark the Ascetic, *Philokalia (Filocalia sfintelor nevoițe ale desăvârșirii*, trans. into Romanian by D. Stăniloae, 12 volumes, 1st vol., (Bucharest: Harisma Publishing, 1992), p. 305.

³⁹ B. V. Anania, *Poetry of the Old Testament, (Poetry of the Old Testament*, (Bucharest: IBMBOR Publishing, 2000), p. 18.

which, in our study, is called suffering should be a pattern for the believer's life on earth, a pattern to be found in the spiritual way of existence.

The inner life of the Trinity and the Trinity inner suffering should be reflected in the human replica towards deification of every man who serves Christ. In this case, the suffering remains a confirmation of the gracious work performed by God, work through which He is presented as a model for the human lives seeking for salvation. What is in God, sooner or later, should be reflected also in the redeemed people, and a reality that should be included is suffering as grace.

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