
CHRISTOLOGICAL FOUNDATION OF SUFFERING A THEOLOGICAL AND MISSIONARY APPROACH

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(Received 20 May 2012, revised 1 June 2012)

Abstract

In Eastern Christianity, suffering is not treated as a special topic. A special theology of suffering is not well-defined, although the theme is present in important aspects of Orthodox doctrine: anthropology, providence, soteriology, sanctification and eschatology. As a consequence of Adam's sin, suffering overwhelms the entire human being: body and soul. The ontological restoration of all of humanity is achieved in the divine-human person of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, in His quality as Son of God Incarnate. Once Christ entered the world, human suffering acquired a soteriological meaning: from individual despair it became a saving cross, a sacrifice expiating sin, an opportunity for man to obtain the power of grace in his battle with sin and its aftermath. Suffering, as estrangement from God's grace, does not elude the irrational created nature either. Called to protect and sanctify nature, man becomes its serving priest, an intercessor of God's grace, capable of restoring it from corruption.

Keywords: asceticism, theosis, martyrdom, creation, salvation

1. Introduction

Human suffering, a characteristic of all people in the world, irrespective of sex, race, belief or social orientation was not instilled in humanity's structure by its Creator. The purpose of creation had a double aspect: the happiness of creatures and worship of the Creator. Suffering became part of our nature only after original sin, together with other major consequences: disease, sin and death.

God did not wish suffering to estrange man from the structure of Supreme Love. He did not accept the ontological state of sadness, penetrated in nature corrupted by sin to be forever part of it. Instead, He defeated it through His Son, Who became Man, through His Holy Passion and Death on the Cross, through a complete assumption, under the reiterative aspect and having a plenary effect on the whole of created nature.

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Becoming man, God used the reality of suffering in order to defeat it, thereby changing its role: from punishment for sin into an instrument of salvation.

2. The suffering of the *image* awaiting *resemblance*

Orthodox anthropology exists in the missionary space of the Church through a paradox: God created and saved man through a kenosis of love, but beholding his suffering in the fallen state, He descended, taking upon our nature, so that man may rise by grace from sorrow to joy, from the suffering of death to the happiness of eternal life.

Good in His Being, God created the world good, but free. Human persons could not be fully satisfied by an imposed good but by one acquired through a life of communion with the Creator. The two prerogatives of human existence, personhood and freedom, are nothing else but those of the Three Person Godhead: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Created by God, man remains forever His eternal image to the extent that, by his own will, he accedes to knowing God; that is, man must accept the transition from *image* to resemblance.

In Orthodox anthropology, suffering refers to failing this transition, this Pascha, because “men, foolish as they were, thought little of the grace they had received and turned away from God. They defiled their own soul so completely that they not only lost their apprehension of God, but invented for themselves other gods of various kinds... Moreover, and much worse, they transferred the honor which is due to God to material objects and also to man.” [1]

Leaving communion with God as a result of the fall, human nature became devoid of its consistence in grace and became a slave of a long process of suffering, corruption and death. Selfish estrangement from the Creator, and from fellow creatures, caused the fall into this abyss of suffering. In this ontological state, suffering can only be cured by a readiness towards communion with other human beings, and by way of a free and complete opening to a life of communion with the Trinity. Where there is no such readiness, suffering amplifies itself, and nature perceives it as something contrary to itself. Properly speaking, *God's image* in us consists in this potency of our rational nature to open itself to a continuous dialogue with God; the human person must remain a permanent dialogue partner with the three-hypostatic Godhead. The One who initiates and maintains this dialogic relationship between man and God is His Word Himself, Who was incarnated in order to make this dialogue even more intimate through the assumption of human nature interiorised in an enipostatic way, allowing man to acquire the divine resemblance. From Adam until Christ, *God's image* in fallen man was overwhelmed by deep ontological suffering, by the maximal tension of the tormented expectation, which resulted from original sin and its consequences.

For the contemporary secularised man this suffering of the *image* [2], in acquiring *resemblance*, is expressed by a daily psychosomatic disorder, a stressful and constant anxiety, which very often leads to the decay of the human being, who no longer lives the divine rationality but the irrationality of a world corrupted by sin and death, a world which lives without communion in love. “The seal of the divine reason is thus engraved in a double way or completely in humans, as its images, created to advance forever in resembling and relating to it. Knowing a person involves loving that person. Being the image of the personal and infinite Divine Word, called to know Him and love Him more and more, that is, being thus the rational and loving being as a person, who incessantly advances in knowing and loving the divine personal Reason, man is created as an immortal being.” [3]

The beginning of our *resemblance* to God is, in fact, our adoption through and in Jesus Christ. As persons, we were created after the icon of the divine being regarded as a whole, after its real image, because there is nothing abstract in God, otherwise God would be a mere impersonal principle. The Holy Trinity, as real Persons united in an eternal communion of love, constitutes the foundation of the icon in rational human nature. Through Christ, this icon aims at its Prototype, the *image* potentiates in *resemblance* and man becomes God’s son by grace, an icon of the Holy Trinity and a brother of Christ. Only as sons can we resemble our Parent. This resemblance is maintained our whole life by continuously obeying the evangelical commandments and by sharing the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church of the Son Incarnate, a unique medium for acquiring and endlessly dynamising this resemblance. It is only in the Church, through the Holy Sacraments, that the worldly image of Christians acquires the resemblance of Christ’s image, as our Brother, Who is the Father’s transparent image, through the Incarnation, for the whole mankind.

The rational *image* of human beings may become autonomous by deliberate alienation from the divine. For example, egotist humanism suffers in perpetual agony because of individualistic isolationism. “Only in God-Man, Christ, did human nature find its own meaning and its beginning towards eternity, without which it would have failed either in anarchic relativism or in nihilist humanism.” [4]

Not even by virtue of autonomous nihilism, can man call himself *image* in and by himself, although the tendencies of self deification were part of the European materialistic philosophy [5]. Man is not *image in himself*, but he is created *in God’s image*. Only the Son of God, forever begotten of the Father is the Father’s image in which He sees Himself completely. Therefore, He is of one essence, equal, consubstantial with the Father. “We, the people, are only *in the image*, that is, resembling the Son and not of one essence as Him, only born by the grace received from Him. The grace is through the Son’s Spirit. But if God’s Son had not become a man, we would not have become sons either. Originally we were created *in the image of the Son*, at the beginning by the Spirit’s breath in Adam. Man was attributed great value from the moment of creation, when he was made *in the image of the Son*, thus carrying the Son’s Spirit, too. Although

the image is given to man through the Son's Spirit, the condition for him to receive it is given through creation in his soul." [6]

The fall into sin distorted *God's image* in man, which generated the greatest suffering for the human being as body and soul. Weakness, decay, corruptibility and imprecision interfered with the *image* and its beauty was altered. Henceforth, man fully experienced the suffering of falling from the *heavenly image* to the *earthly image*. From the old Adam to the new Adam the creature underwent permanent suffering. At the Incarnation, the Hypostasis of the Logos became a foundation for human nature in the Virgin's womb. This en-hypostasising brought the great joy which annihilated the suffering of human nature altered by sin. Atheist humanism, in contrast, seeks an explanation for the salvation of fallen nature through personal effort: for example, through a superman ideology specific to communism, fascism or Arian socialism; this is a model that is responsible for many terrorist actions.

Through Christ, the feature of *God's weakened image* in man was restored and suffering converted into joy. Man is restored completely and can fully understand the Father's divine glory through the Son Incarnate, in the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of his adoption. Through the Spirit, *the image* is not a part, a capacity of human nature, but becomes an objective and transcendent reality through grace towards *the resemblance* with His Model: Christ, the God-Man.

The secularised man, separated from the divinity, dwells in a state of *thirst for God* [7]; *the image* exists in a permanent search of his Prototype. Even here, in the thirst for the *Image*, there is a certain virtual presence of the *image*. Man is created in order to be united with God. He suffers when he willingly parts from God. Therefore, he is able to open up to God, which offers him joy and fulfillment. Man longs for communion with God's personal infinity. The restored communion between God and man through Jesus Christ is a life of unselfish holiness, an aspiration towards the infinite and as long as such loving generosity is maintained inside the human being his own face shines with beauty. It is the beauty of God's holiness. The restored communion between God and human beings, through Jesus Christ, is a life of unselfish holiness, an aspiration towards infinity, and as long as man preserves the image's loving generosity his face has beauty in it. It is the beauty of the moral character, a beauty of holiness [6, p. 234].

3. Christ the Saviour – the divine human model of assuming unjust suffering

The suffering of created nature, outside of divine communion, could be removed only by a Person perfectly interceding between the Holy Trinity and fallen nature. "Who was necessary in order to bring back this grace if not God's Word, Who created everything at the beginning... seeing mankind lost and death governing upon them through corruption, seeing the destruction threat as a result of disobedience governing us...., seeing that there was no reason in losing everything that He Himself had created, also seeing the unimaginable

wickedness of people, which had slowly turned against themselves..., commiserated with mankind and its weakness” [1, p. 98-99].

The goal of assuming this unjust suffering [8] is recapitulatory and ontological at the same time. As He was sinless, it would be absurd to believe that Christ deserved such suffering. Out of love, He burdened himself with all human suffering caused by our corrupted nature, of sin and death (Isaiah 53.4-5). It was natural that the fruit of his victory should be shared with all people from Adam to the end of time. In the proper sense of the word, due to all these marvelous deeds and to natural passions, Christ is the Humanist par excellence. No man, irrespective of how many good deeds he does on Earth, can exceed Him “and this means that Christ, as union of God’s Son with humanity is, at a certain point in history, imprinted as virtuality in our very nature. The fact that only by assuming humanity in His hypostasis does the Son of God become close to us and fully communicable, means that humanity is the most appropriate medium through which God ‘communicates’ himself to us, or that God created humanity as His most communicable image and organ towards people, since they all have Christ inside themselves virtually. This also means that humanity itself follows the prototype of Christ, or He is inscribed in it in a prefigurative way.” [3, p. 26]

For modern man, unjust suffering is a true monstrosity, pure sacrifice is an absurdity, and giving one’s life for a holy cause is an aberration [9]. But the model of the authentic Christian life remains Christ with His pure sufferings dedicated to every person. Christ’s mystery, His unjust suffering, has a paradoxical ontology: He sacrifices Himself for us, sinners, without being a sinner Himself. He assumes the philanthropy of charity by divine compassion. “For he healed our illnesses only by miracles and assuming weaknesses by suffering and paying by death, as a debtor for our debts, he set us free from our numerous and frightening sins, and teaching us in many ways, he advised us to be like Him by loving our fellows and by showing complete love towards one another” [10].

Following the kenosis of the Son Incarnated, but especially the suffering through philanthropic compassion, the contemporary Christian can accomplish the mission and the power of a conversion through love full of humbleness in a world of suffering. He can descend to a brother who suffers in sin and raise him up towards the hypostatic dignity of the Son of God. It is an experience of salvation in complete freedom. It is the communion of the saints prolonged through hypostatic substitution that characterises the philanthropic mission of the Church starting from Christ its Head. Much like the movement of lowering down one’s head towards the humble limbs, Christ-the Head lowers Himself to help the poorest limbs, to alleviate human suffering. This is continued through the Church’s philanthropic mission. Because human nature is one in its essence, any unhealed individual suffering risks altering it entirely. The philanthropic kenosis of suffering reveals the divine work of mercifulness. There is no salvation without mercy or theosis without filial adoption characterised by mercifulness. Should we systematically oppose redemption to theosis or to

subordinate the former to the later? Isn't the philanthropic mystery just one? Does the deification not consist of the great freedom of God's sons, who were redeemed through salvation, obedience and suffering, through the death and resurrection of the Son of God become human? The Holy Fathers in general, and especially Saint Maximus the Confessor did not oppose this perspective, "since we all had to assimilate the others' hardships for an equal praise of being, we do not have to disregard God's kindness unless we want to show ourselves as imitating something else as example of our unity of being" [10, p. 63].

According to Saint Maximus the Confessor, the virtue of charity, through faith, is the basis and source of theosis, as the philanthropic kenosis of the Christian passes from loving one's enemies to martyrdom, as the final and definitive expression of the assumption of unjust suffering. Human nature can only be accomplished in the tri-hypostatic plan of the Trinitarian philanthropy. The Son of God, One in the Trinity, Who suffered bodily – as the Scythian monks asserted – became human, suffered and saved the entirety of mankind. Similarly, the Christian, who assumes especially unjust suffering for his fellow, will achieve the salvation of both, because the human nature common to all people adapts itself; it is put into practice by the powerful will to defend itself against all the threats that endanger its survival, especially in the common suffering of all Christians for the entire mankind. In Christ this suffering is expressed by filial adoption, in human beings by philanthropic fraternity. "One's suffering for another - Father Stăniloae said - is often shown by the human relationships which also indicate the possibility assuming our fellow's sin together with suffering for him. A mother suffers because of her son's bad deeds as if she had done them and is willing to undertake any punishment for them. The greater the loving proximity between two people is the fuller is the capacity of undertaking the other one's sin." [11] The inter-human solidarity is always superincumbent, especially when it stops the suffering or wants to do well.

According to Cabasilas's *Life in Christ* [12], in order for man to save himself he has to overcome three obstacles: corrupted nature, sin and death. From an objective point of view, descending out of compassion to the suffering of human nature with its three obstacles, the Son of God becomes a man, assuming the corruption of nature through the natural passions, dies on the Cross to defeat death, and then rises from the dead *trampling death by death in* order to give back created nature the incorruptibility of resurrection. This is what we the Orthodox name *redemption*. All the barriers of human suffering were broken, the gates of hell defeated, and the sadness of suffering converted into the joy of resurrection. At a subjective or personal level, human suffering can only be defeated if the Christian follows the *life in Christ*, through the Church. This is what we the Orthodox name *reformation*. Properly speaking, salvation means escaping the slavery of sin and death and acquiring eternal life, patiently enduring the new genesis of the Kingdom. In this sense, soteriological suffering (Galatians 4.19) is directed towards God, towards human nature and the created world, permanently expressed through an act freely consented by a free will (Luke 9.23).

As the intercessor between God and the world, human nature approaches either one or the other. If man sees himself as the only end, the two extremes separate themselves, being considered equal in a way, eventually leading neither to God nor towards the world. But when man, according to the intimate disposition of his free will, willingly chooses one of the two extremes, converting himself, he changes into the *common man* when he chooses the world or into the *spiritual man* when he chooses God (I Corinthians. 2.14-15). Both situations involve assuming suffering: justified suffering for the common man, who becomes the slave of the irrational and impersonal forces of the created given, or unjust suffering for those following Christ's model, which brings partaking of personal and suprarational energies of the Holy Spirit, the only warranties of eternal life. The work and mark of the common man is to do only evil, hence the suffering since he cannot do as much harm as he wants. The work and mark of the spiritual man is to do only good things, accepting voluntary suffering for virtue up to death, if the situation demands it, hence the permanent suffering that he cannot do as much good as he wants.

Thus, the missionary's conversion has a simple imperative: if you want to be led by God's Spirit, get rid of the world and corruptible nature and be part of the community of those who always accept the assumption of unjust suffering, because this is the only way we can bear the world's wickedness, insolences and offences; only this enables us to do good to those that do us evil and to forgive everything they did wrong to us (I Corinthians. 4.11-13).

4. The martyrs – the human embodiment of unjust suffering

In a comfortable and secularised society, the issue of suffering is marginalised or mocked, although, paradoxically enough, society is full of all kinds of suffering: material crises, spiritual crises, incurable diseases, accidents, suicides, and etc.

The perfect model of assuming suffering up to death for the sake of the Incarnated Truth is represented by the saint martyrs. This assumption begins at Baptism, when we die and are resurrected with Christ, and lasts our entire life until death. Since Baptism, suffering and death are no longer seen as wages for sins, but as means of fighting it and defeating it. "For the one that was baptised and receives Baptism, strengthening it through the commandments no longer pays death as a duty for his sin, but receives the use of death as punishment of sin which can mysteriously transfer him to the divine and eternal life. For the saints who lived their earthly life bravely undergoing many pains for truth and justice, freed their nature from death as punishment for sin and used the weapon of death whose role was to destroy nature in order to destroy sin, following the example of the Head of their salvation, Jesus." [13]

The model of the authentic confession, of Christian martyrdom, remains Christ, the Son of God Incarnate. In comparison with this Christic attitude, *contemporary man perceives loving the one that causes him any suffering as a rational impossibility because he has not received the grace of knowledge.* He

forgets about the stages of conversion and of missionary testimony, which are logical and immutable, going from *isolation to communion in love* [14], from *doubt to faith* through knowledge in grace, from *faith to confession*, and then to martyrdom. As one that fully knows and lives the Truth, the martyr loves all people, even his enemies, and suffers when they are wronged. For him, loving his enemies is the very goal of the Trinitarian philanthropy, the unique aim and principle of our theosis, which, paradoxically enough, is not just a theological tendency of human nature, but a hypostatic assimilation into the Holy Spirit of the One who has given Himself *for the life of the world*. Here is what Saint Maximus the Confessor says with regard to all this: “With creeping things indeed and beasts that are motivated by instinct, it really is impossible that they should not ward off, as much as they can, whatever molests them. But for those that are created after the image of God and are motivated by reason, that are thought worthy of the knowledge of God and receive their law from Him, it is possible not to repulse those that cause grief and to love those that hate them...The Lord Himself makes it clear and has shown it to us by His very works; and so too all His disciples, who strove till death for love of their neighbour and prayed fervently for those that killed them. But since we are lovers of material things and of pleasure, preferring them above the commandment, we are then not able to love them that hate us; rather we often, because of these things, repulse them that love us, being worse disposed than beasts and creeping things. And that is what why, not being able to follow in the steps of God, we are likewise unable to know His purpose, so that we might receive strength” [15] for martyrdom.

Christ convinced us, through His own earthly life, to endure for Him and for one another, as He was the first who gave an example of the capacity of suffering for us. In suffering, all saints endured the sin till the end, undemonstrative of present life, they suffered multiple forms of death (Hebrews 11.35-40), resembling their Teacher in the way they left this world, iterating in themselves the scattered myriads of human nature subject to corruption. The Saviour “convinced us ..., for this (for love) all saints have always fought against sin, not cherishing this life, enduring the many aspects of death so as to collect into themselves and into God from the world and to remove the tearings of nature inside themselves” [10, p. 36].

Even if the present secularised society regards martyrdom in a distorted way, because of the lack of assuming the unjust suffering, this is regarded in our Orthodox spirituality as a spiritual factor, a generator of authentic spirituality that has accompanied the history of the Church [16], constructively influencing the development of Christian identity. The presence of martyrs in Christian communities ever since the first centuries encouraged the spiritual side of believers; the saint martyr represented the perfect fighter as well as the winner in the fight against the world’s sin. The martyr is not the man of compromise, nor is he tolerant towards lies, social, political or cultural injustice. He embodies the truth which he sets forward in a life of interpersonal communion and especially theandric, despite a continually hesitating individualism in front of life’s

sufferings and hardships. "It is not about ideological fanaticism or the belief in the ideas which concern the improvement of common life. It is about the concrete materialisation of a type of existence situated at the opposite end of individual survival and whose historic Model is Christ's Cross." [17]

The motivation for assuming unjust suffering for a martyr is always Christological, it does not take into account the social factors for instance, because the martyr is not a political leader, or the juridical aspects, in which case his sacrifice would be in exchange for some human or divine satisfaction. It only has an ascetic, mystical and liturgical character.

In today's society there is no need for bloody martyrdom, the community of believers could not even suffer it, but for martyrdom without blood: the universal call for all believers to confess to the world with all their deeds and words the plenary Truth of the Church. This martyrdom is the life rule of Christ's Church in His Holy Spirit. It is the red borderline between the grace of the Church and the world's sins; actually, it is the natural way of life of the believers in the Church exposed to the world as a healing gift. "All believers face the common and continual eventuality of *martyrdom* which subjects life to the ultimate and hardest confirmation of the truth of salvation. Martyrdom is the rule of the Church's life par excellence, the actual confession and the manifestation of *the way of existence* which is different from *the life of the world, the new creation* of Christians." [17, p. 186-187]

As a missionary, the believer is asked daily to confirm the soteriological truth with his own life, mirrored in good deeds. It is a call, a confirmation and a continuous effort to convert incessantly and radically to a purely human attitude for the sake of *imitatio Christi*, for the sake of sacrificing the sinful life through an ascetic authentic life lived in communion with the Trinitarian God and which reveals the entire value of Truth, thus engaging the whole being in a risk [18], or homage absolutely given to the value of the eternal truth.

5. The suffering of the Cosmos because of the Adamic sin and the joy of resting in Christ

The reconstruction of the Cosmos is achieved through the Incarnation of the Son of God. The suffering because of the Adamic sin, which penetrated even the most delicate structure of the matter, is helpless when confronted with the christomorphisation of the God-Person. The man wished to be God in heaven and he decomposed all belonging to Him, but through Christ the world offers itself as a gift, *His own of His own* towards a unity of grace in purity.

Before Christ the people's faith could be seen by watching and contemplating the creation full of sin and suffering. Man was thirsty for knowledge of God and sometimes this faith exclaimed through the things made by the Creator. Before the sin there was no suffering in the irrational world; natural revelation was genuine and man could have an absolute dialogue with God only by means of the sophianised world, not needing a supranatural revelation of the Holy Scriptures. "We should not have needed the help of the

Holy Scriptures, we should have had such a pure life that God's grace could have supplied the Scriptures in our souls" [19].

Through the Incarnation, the God-Man defeats suffering and mystically unites the uncreated to creation, brings light, order and inner peace to all creatures, scandalised by sin. He is the Light of this created world and if light is beautiful, more beautiful is its creator, the Sun of justice. Through His light, the creatures start to rest, escaping the suffering anxiety and the consequences of corruption, they ascend above their own entities pursuing further the goal for which they were brought into existence. The idols of antiquity, their makers saw themselves as perfect through their own suffering immanence, believing material pleasure to be the very goal of the created world. But, it was a cyclic vision which ended pleasure with suffering and suffering with pleasure. Christ came unto His own (John 1. 11) and defeated the cycle of pain and pleasure, freed the material nature from suffering and adorned it with irradiant grace.

The substitution of suffering with the joy of creation, of the sinful torment with everybody's resting in Christ, is marked by the symbolism of the Cross, as a central landmark for the whole Universe. Through it, our Saviour filled the entire world with rest and peace. Through it, the world received the source of new laws of grace by raising creation above the irrational forces of a nature enslaved by sin, above implacable and purely immanent laws. Suffering in creation also appears when sinful forces are in contradiction, when they are fed by the fury of the sins aimed at the self-deification of created matter. Nevertheless, the *Evil did not exist from the very beginning*, although it subjected the rational and irrational world: "all those created were made in such a way that man knows and understands them. All things have rationality, or there are incorporated meanings for man to know and understand them, the one made after the image of the divine Logos, who also knows and understands them and who gave them a rationality that can be understood by the human mind. Both their rationality and their human rational subject for whom they are made or in relation to whom they are made, are founded in the transcendent rationality of the divine Logos. In a way man is made to know the creative Word through these and to carry a dialogue with Him." [20] A dialogue of suffering is impossible. Through Christ, even the irrational finds its peace as sabbatical rest on the eighth day.

The rationality of the world imprinted on the creation by the Father's Reason is the palpable evidence of God's benevolent attitude towards the suffering of creation, a chance for healing. Man is a rational being and has, through reason, the power to oppose, refuse and even annihilate any form of human suffering that extends over the irrational nature out of the wish to subjugate and destructively exploit, which leads to the great ecological crisis of our millennium. God, through the Church, attributed to the human rational subject the conviction that the rationality of the world reveals God's rationality as an antidote of the irrationality that generates suffering. Through the reason of created things, God reveals Himself to the world in general and to all people. The power of the rational mind can cross the sky, can settle conflicts and

extinguish the fire of all kinds of sufferings, can reach spiritual matters – people’s souls and heavenly spirits – in the same way in which the senses can reach, order, and sanctify the physical, material world, resting God in them. Whereas, in evil people’s minds the sensitive things parted from the intelligible things and they started to regard themselves separately, as an expression of their selfishness. “Watching themselves and knowing their body and the other sensitive things and letting themselves lured by them, they followed their passions, choosing their own things instead of contemplating God. And living with these and not willing to part from them they closed in the lusts of the body their troubled soul, subject to all passions. Thus they completely forgot about the power given to them by God at the beginning.” [20, p. 32]

The fall due to original sin made man change from contemplating God to contemplating his own created being, which led to the anthropological autonomisation, to a humanism without God, to atheism and in the end, to the substitution of the Creator with the creature, willing to do everything in order to to be totally independent and to be one’s own God. “They have seen themselves naked not as much of clothes, but they were devoid of seeing the divine things and they directed their thinking towards the contrary, which arose in them” [20, p. 33]. The fall from Eden fully intensified man’s preoccupation towards material things, towards the visible components of creation. This craving, as a temptation brought to man in heaven, led to the experience of a shameful nakedness, as the body suffered in relation to the spiritual faculties which God’s grace maintained in perfect harmony before the fall. The things from the exterior world were hence regarded differently and thinking of the material things intensified, thus generating pain, suffering and torment.

The suffering in the material world was caused by man’s separation from the contemplation of the intelligible and rational things and by an inversion of axiological analysis. Sin becomes a *genuine good* and man the eternal sufferer. Man’s thoughts of things that do not exist or that he has not yet obtained, wishing them at any cost, turn his natural and spiritual forces in a furious anxiety, in torment, misusing these gifts received through creation, as well as the freedom subordinated by imagined desires. “It is as if somebody whose mind is weak asked for a lance and used it against all those he met while thinking that his deed was a wise one” [20, p. 34].

The suffering of creation reveals the tendency towards self-deification of irrational nature. Raising man above his peers, aiming at enslaving the irrational nature, is the greatest ontological lie because no matter how much man imposed himself on nature and his fellows, he often does it by force and forgets that he is mortal, and therefore created. *Take my yoke upon you, and learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart and you shall find rest unto your souls.* (Matthew 11.29), says Christ the Saviour. Every refusal to enter, by virtue of meekness, in a dialogue with God, with the fellows and the created nature brings only a feeling of natural and existential independence in an idolatrous way. “Personal specificity wears out within the limits of the nature, since it is nothing more than an individual independence which confronts itself with the other individual

independences that divide this nature. Nature is divided into partial individual desires which express the necessity and the effort that the individual existence makes to survive as natural independence. The existence becomes one with the instinctive, natural necessity of autonomous survival. The natural needs of the individual existence (food, perpetuation of species, preservation instinct) become one's own up personal work, dominate and are eventually converted in *passions*, in causes for suffering, extreme pains and finally in death" [17, p. 25].

The suffering of creation is the continuous falling of irrational nature, a successive and almost unlimited splitting of man from God. The evil ontologically penetrates the universe and pervades it. Man is called, through the Church, to become a priest, to become the one that sanctifies nature and rests it through grace in the work of the Most Holy Trinity. Secularised society focuses mostly on exclusively material ambitions and desires; the soul refuses the sight of the good things and shifting towards the evil ones [20, p. 34]; it also shifts its freedom towards the evil not towards the good.

6. Conclusions

Through Jesus Christ, Son of God, the entire created nature, rational and irrational, overcomes suffering by assuming it and revives a new life through grace.

Regarding missionary testimony, among Christian spiritualities, Orthodox spirituality is the only one that urges contemporary man to assume all unfair sufferings caused by sin and by its consequences with the purpose of overcoming them, being aware that nothing can be defeated if it is not first of all assumed.

Unavoidable, the torments of contemporary society cannot determine the Christian believer to give up the spiritual fight with them. The only way he can defeat them is through and into Jesus Christ, and society, confused by so many difficulties, has to look up to the One that remains the foundation of order and of its healing.

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