



**CATHOLIC SPIRITUALITIES OF SUFFERING AND  
THEIR RELEVANCE TO THAI WOMEN RELIGIOUS:  
AN ANALYTIC AND INTERPRETATIVE STUDY**

**Sr. Sriprai Krathong**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of  
The Requirement for the Master Degree of Arts in  
Religious Studies**

**Graduate School of Philosophy and Religious Studies  
Assumption University  
Bangkok 10240  
1998**

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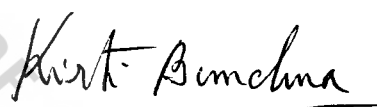
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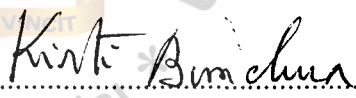
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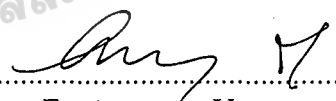
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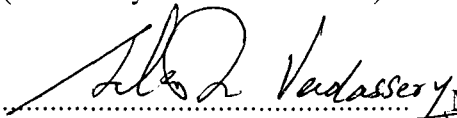
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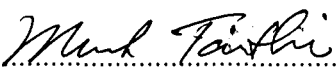
  
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### **ABSTRACT**

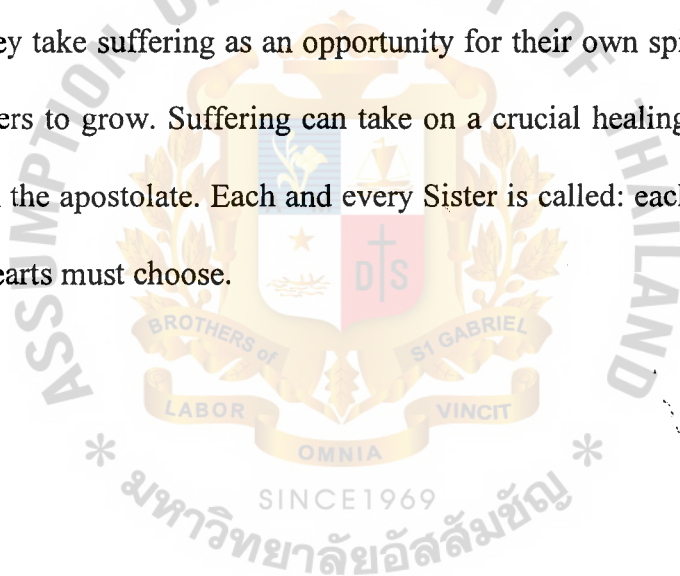
Suffering is real and universal. It is the common lot of all men no matter whether they are rich or poor, good or evil, secular or religious. Every religion provides its own key to understanding suffering according to its own belief..

Catholic Christianity searches for the meaning of suffering in the Judeo-Christian Holy Scriptures, in Church teaching, and in the lives and instructions of the Saints. This thesis is an investigation of the relevance of Catholic appreciations of suffering to Thai women Religious.

The Old Testament gives initial perspectives on suffering as punishment on sin. In the Old Testament, suffering also entails a trial of the faithful, and it can have a redemptive effect for the benefit of others. The New Testament understands suffering in the context of Jesus's life and teaching. Christ died for the salvation of all men. The New Testament emphasizes our participation with Christ in saving the world. Redemption is accomplished through suffering with Jesus.

This thesis examine the lives and teachings of six women spiritual teachers who have played important roles in the development of the Catholic understanding of suffering. Their lives and ways of responding to suffering witness to its real value, and are an inspiration for all.

Thai women Religious have the privilege of a special call to follow the suffering Christ in the context of a Thailand which very much needs them. As Religious they are called within the framework of their vows and apostolate to a realization of God's love and imitation of Him in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ proposes that they take suffering as an opportunity for their own spiritual growth and for enabling others to grow. Suffering can take on a crucial healing value by way of their missions in the apostolate. Each and every Sister is called: each and every Sister in her heart of hearts must choose.



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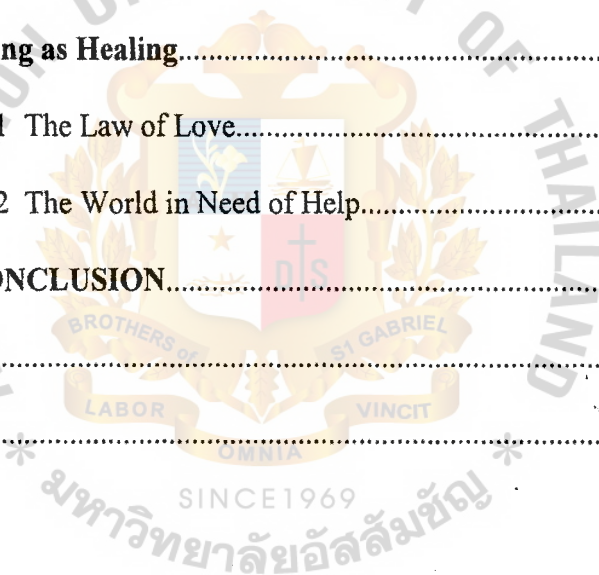
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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and Significance of Study

All humans have come face to face with suffering and with those who suffer so that no one can deny its existence. Humans experience suffering in their everyday lives, both physical and mental illness. They suffer bodily pain from accident, different kinds of pain from sickness, as well as from mental anguish such as depression, frustration, sorrow, grief, anxiety and loss. Suffering moves in and out of our lives. It can last just a short time, months or years. Sometimes, suffering seems to be too much and to let in no hope of light. We are always in the presence of suffering and we all share suffering as long as we are alive.

Thailand is a Buddhist country. Thus, most Thai people affirm the Buddhist belief that the quest for liberation begins with a recognition of Buddhism's "First Noble Truth," namely, "life is suffering". The Buddha directs his teaching towards the answer to the problem of suffering. He is the man who descended deep into the mystery of suffering. He touches the core of human nature. The significant event started when Prince Siddhartha Gotama was shocked by the sights of human suffering he experienced one night while he was outside the palace with his charioteer. He immediately decided to renounce his worldly wealth as a prince, undertaking an ascetic life for six years, searching for the truth. The truth he discovered, known as



"The Four Noble Truths," becomes the core of Buddhism. The First Noble Truth is that suffering exists in the world. We are born in suffering, we live in suffering, we die in suffering. To be conjoined with things we dislike, to be separated from things we like, not to have what we wish we had, all these are sources of suffering. Even the Five Groups of Existence are suffering (Samyutta Nikaya 5.420ff).

The Bible speaks of a human being, born of woman, whose life is short life but full of trouble (Jb. 14,1); and

A hard lot has been created for human beings, a heavy yoke lies on the children of Adam from the day they come out of their mother's womb, till the day they return to the mother of them all..... For all creatures, human and animal.....there is death and blood and strife and the sword, disaster, famine, affliction, plague.....He [the human being] is troubled by the visions of his mind (Si 40:1-9).

In brief, pain and turmoil are experienced by all. This indicates that suffering is real and universal. To various degrees and for various durations, no one is shielded from it. Rich or poor, young or old, weak or strong, all are touched by suffering.

Times of suffering have often brought Christians, even Religious, to question the ways of God. Why me? Why must suffering exist ? Does God want it ? Where is God in relation to human suffering? If life is so evil, how can we believe in a God who is both all-powerful and compassionate to His children ? The questions can go on endlessly. Some people sink to such a state that they lose their faith in God.

God for Christians is He who is the Loving Father, the Creator of all things. He created all good for His children and all truth is in Him. Yet each day in so many places in the world, and in so many ways in our lives, we witness the reality of human suffering. Many questions arise concerning God when one faces suffering. Why doesn't He stop the suffering that so bothers His Children? What is the cause of suffering? What is the meaning and the purpose of suffering? To speak of a God of power and love in the face of suffering is inevitably to speak of a mystery.<sup>1</sup> God necessarily remains a mystery to human beings; if we could understand Him fully, we would have to be equal or superior to Him and then He wouldn't be God ! However, the Bible and the Church supply many clues that help us to understand suffering.

Every religion offers a way to happiness which is also a way of ultimate liberation from suffering. The Buddha taught that suffering appears under the general conditions of human existence in this world. The desires for possessions, for selfish enjoyment and for separate existence are the radical causes of all human suffering. To decrease all desires means the elimination of suffering. The Buddha offers the Noble Eightfold Path, also called the "Middle Path" as the means to eliminate suffering. It consists of Right view, Right intention, Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness and Right concentration (Samyutta Nikaya 5.420ff).

In Islam, Muslims believe that God created all humanity good, to live as His vice-regents on earth (Surah 23). According to Islam, man is the cause of his own suffering. His weakness is that he fails to live according to God's law which is revealed in the Quran. The Quran repeatedly stresses that all who do evil will be

---

<sup>1</sup> Mystery : A technical term in Catholic theology, referring to what transcends the capacity of the human mind to comprehend.

punished for their actions in this world and the next. Suffering serves as punishment and teaching for the unbelievers. Doing good works alleviates punishment (Eliade, 1993, Vol.13, pp.103-4).

Christian understanding of suffering is Jesus Himself. His life and words hold the key for humans to understand suffering. Jesus' theology of suffering is presented in his three predictions of his passion and death found in each of the Synoptics.<sup>2</sup> He announces his own suffering: ".... the Son of man must suffer much and be rejected...." (Mk 9:12). Those who suffer and those who witness suffering know at times that there will be no end to it here on earth. Suffering for Christians is not the final aim or an end in itself. Rather, it is the gateway to resurrection, to rebirth, and to new creation.

In this thesis the writer investigates concepts and spiritualities of suffering. I should begin with the doctrinal foundation of suffering in the Christian Scriptures both Old Testament and New Testament, and the Church teachings derived from Scriptures and Tradition. The lives and works of some women spiritual masters play an important role in this thesis: their spiritualities are witnesses to the valuable meanings of suffering. The purpose for focusing on women in Chapter IV is twofold:

First: As a nun, a member of The Lovers of the Cross of Chanthaburi, the writer's anticipated target readership is in the main Thai women religious, especially all congregations of the Lovers of the Cross in Thailand. They are likely to be most interested in reading about women masters of suffering, since they are women

---

<sup>2</sup> The "Synoptics" are the first three Gospels in the New Testament canon : Matthew, Mark and Luke. They are so called because they can be viewed side by side and compared very easily by means of a synopsis and have a great deal of material in common and an arrangement in the same order (Freedman, 1992, Vol.VI, p.263).

themselves. In the case of the Lovers of the Cross, their special charism is the Cross, and the spiritualities of suffering the Cross represents.

Second: The Church nowadays in Evangelization 2000 is giving special attention to the women's role, since their roles were for so long a time underestimated. Furthermore, the lives and works of these women teachers of spirituality can be helpful for the spiritual growth of all Christians, not only religious.

After the theologies and spiritualities have been examined, the writer will offer proposals about how suffering can be accepted as a part of Christian and Religious life, how suffering can bring us peace, happiness and joy. Suffering offers an invitation to share in the loving creativity of God who called Jesus His beloved Son. Suffering is redemptive, not only for one who suffers, but for the whole kingdom. Consequently, those who realize the beneficial value of suffering will participate in the same joy as Jesus.

## **1.2 Objectives of Research:**

1.2.1 To investigate the meaning of suffering in the Christian Sacred Scriptures and in the Catholic Church teaching.

1.2.2 To study the lives of some women spiritual masters and their writings. To show that the spiritualities these women practiced in their lives and what these women taught about suffering, are both realistic and inspiring.

1.2.3 To interpret the meaning of suffering for the spiritual growth of contemporary Thai Catholics, especially women religious.



### 1.3 Status of Question:

The Biblical teachings on suffering are seldom preached today. The teachings of the Church about suffering have been neglected to become obscure: suffering is not a popular subject for contemporary theologians. The Thai Catholic theologians and preachers seem to overlook the importance of suffering for the Christian spirituality in Thailand. But I think that we should not let it go like that, because people in their actual lives are as aware of suffering as ever. Thai women religious are in particular need to know how to interpret suffering, because the early Thai Church was founded on theologies of suffering. Moreover, suffering plays so an important role in Thai Buddhist explanations of the human condition, and such a reality cannot help bearing an enormous impact on the Thai Catholic way of life and spirituality. With all these interests in mind, I want to know how a contemporary Thai religious like me can interpret suffering in their lives and mission.

### 1.4 Definition of the Terms Used

#### 1.4.1 Spirituality

The word is used to describe attitudes, beliefs and practices which animate people's lives and help them to reach out towards the commitment to religious values and sacred matters (Wakefield, 1983, p.361).

#### 1.4.2 Women Religious

Women religious here means Catholic nuns, commonly called "Sisters", who bound themselves to a religious order or a religious institute. They live a consecrated life according to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. The members of the institutes take public vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and live the common life (Catholic Encyclopedia, 1991 "nuns" p.689, "Perfectae Caritatis"

p.745). There are 7 local and 23 international women religious institutes in Thailand. The total population amount's to about 2000.

### ***1.4.3 Suffering***

The Latin root of the term means undergoing. Suffering is to undergo something painful or unpleasant whether a physical injury, emotional pain, grief or loss. It is particularly the helplessness, the inability to escape from or diminish pain, to change things, that is the essence of suffering, whether it be bodily pain or anguish of mind (Richards, 1990, p.952).

### **1.5 Limitation of Research:**

This study seeks to re-examine the concepts of suffering within the scope of the Bible and the Tradition of the Catholic Church. Both are primary Catholic sources. Since this study is spiritual investigation, exemplary lives and works of spiritual masters are included as models and inspiration. Selected books on the Bible and the literature of the spiritual masters are researched and considered. Included in the last part of this study is the application of spiritualities of suffering to the spiritual practice of contemporary women religious and also lay Catholics in Thailand.

### **1.6 Research Methodology:**

This study will be a descriptive research. The method the writer used is to gather all the data available in Assumption University Library, Seangtham College Library, and Redemptorist Fathers Library, classifying the data, then making an analytical interpretation of them.

## 1.7 Expectations:

1.7.1 That readers may gain a clearer understanding of Catholic concepts of suffering from the biblical texts and the Church teaching.

1.7.2 That readers, particularly Thai women Religious and laity, may be encouraged and inspired by the lives and teaching on suffering of some women spiritual masters, chosen for this particular study.

1.7.3 That through the analysis, an original contemporary interpretation may be creatively presented.



## CHAPTER II

### THEOLOGIES OF SUFFERING IN THE BIBLE

### AND THE CHURCH TEACHING

#### 2.1 Suffering in the Old Testament

The Hebrew words in the Old Testament for "suffering" are numerous; there are distinct Hebrew words for pain, grief, sorrow, mental and physical stress, agony and labor pains (Richards, 1990, p.952). But in the objective sense, suffering can be defined as "an evil" which is both vicious and harmful (Bauer, 1970, Vol.3, p.890). And evils cause suffering (Buttrick, 1962, p.451).

The Old Testament does not contrast physical and mental suffering since for the Hebrews man is a totality (Buttrick, 1962, p.451). The same cause may underlie bodily pain and mental anguish. Any deep suffering affects the entire body and soul (Bauer, 1970, Vol.3, p.890). It is connected with specific parts of the body: with the bones, the liver and gall, the bowels and the heart. The Psalm gives this description:

My strength is tricking away,  
my bones are all disjointed,  
my heart has turned to wax,  
melting inside me.

My mouth is dry as earthenware,  
my tongue sticks to my jaw.



You lay me down in the dust of death (Ps 22:14-15).

Both physical and mental sufferings are vividly described in the book of Sirach:

A hard lot has been created for human beings, a heavy yoke lies on the children of Adam.....What fills them with foreboding and their hearts with fear is dread of the day of death..... all is fury and jealousy, turmoil and unrest,fear of death, rivalry, strife. And even at night.....his sleep only gives a new twist to his worries.....he is troubled with nightmares.....For all creatures.....there is death and blood and strife and the sword, disasters, famine, affliction plague (Si 40:1-11).

The physical suffering mentioned in the Old Testament includes injuries, sicknesses, physical chastisement and birth-pains. Chastisement and birth-pains are considered so painful that they are the chief images used to describe the extreme anguish of mental suffering (Bauer, 1970, p.890). Examples of mental suffering are the danger of death as Hezekiah experienced (Is 38:1-3); and the death of children, especially the death of a first-born child or an only son as Anna, the mother of Tobias, feared (Tb 10:1-7). Other causes of mental suffering are childlessness, as in the trial of Rachel (Gn 30:1); homesickness such as the case of the exiles in Babylon (Ps 137); persecution and hostility such as was suffered by some of the Psalmists or by Jeremiah (Ps 137 and Jer 18:18); mockery and scorn of the one who suffers such as the trial of Job (Jb19-18); loneliness and abandonment (Ps 22:2, Jer 15:17); ingratitude and faithlessness of friends and relations (2 Sam 13:19, Job 16:20); and also the misfortune of friends and acquaintances (Ps 35:13, Jb 2:11) (Bauer, 1970, p. 890).

The Old Testament people do not conceal their pains. They express their suffering tremendously in weeping and pitiful lamentations in the Psalms and the Lamentations. The psalmists feel free to speak in a direct way to God about illness and other forms of suffering:

Have pity on me, Yahweh, for I am fading away.

Heal me, Yahweh, my bones are shaken,

my spirit is shaken to its very depths.

But you, Yahweh..... how long (Ps.6:2-3) ?

Suffering for them has to be avoided as far as possible. At the same time, the devout people in the Old Testament understand how to bear unavoidable suffering, especially when the service of God requires it, with exemplary fortitude (Bauer, 1970, p.891).

There are several places to look for the interpretations of suffering in the Old Testament. Some of the significant aspects are : Suffering as the result of sin, Suffering as the punishment for sin, Suffering as the test for the faithful, and Vicarious suffering.

### ***2.1.1 Suffering as the Result of Sin***

The general biblical view of suffering in the world is, first of all, that it is a consequence of human sin. The existence of evil and death were not God's original plan, but the result of disobedience on the part of human beings. This fact is illustrated in the book of Genesis 1-3. The story of the Fall in the first book of the Old Testament is the explanation of the intention of God and the reality of the world's suffering. It clearly gives a perspective on suffering caused by a wrongdoing. The first

couple of humanity, explained in the Genesis 1, were created in the beginning in the state of innocence and happiness through the loving-kindness of God. The world was intended to be a good place for them and for all humani(Gen1:31). Suffering entered the world because man used his free will to sin and he was condemned by God. Man's own sin opens the door to pain and suffering. The result was a curse, disaster, death and a state of constant suffering. Adam and Eve experienced both physical pains and mental anguish as the result of their decisions to act in spite of God's command :

I shall give you intense pain in childbearing, you will give birth to your children in pain.

To the man he said,

Because you listened to.... and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, Accused be the soil because of you! Painfully will you get your food from it as long as you live (Gn 3:16-17).

As Adam is created as the head and representative of the whole human race, his sin together with its result affected all future generations (Rm 5:12-13). Adam and Eve sinned, so we are all, whether relatively good or bad, subject to pain and death. No one is free from involvement in sin (Rm 3:23). All men are sinners. We are all born into a world of suffering.

Human choice and not divine providence is the cause of evil. We suffer because we sin. The cycle of sin and suffering that began with our first parents is perpetuated from generation to generation. Sins have their consequences. Sins lead to suffering. The same basic conviction is developed in the rest of the symbolic stories of Genesis 4-11 such as the murder of Abel, Noah and the Ark, and the Tower

of Babel. It was not long before that the first story of murder occurred, the story of Cain killing his brother, Abel. He is cursed by God and becomes a wanderer (Gn 4:8). Wrong human choices have led to evil consequences for all of humanity.

The same conviction about the evil consequences of wrong human decision is also found in the Wisdom literature, ".....the wise human choices lead to good consequences".

The world is an ordered place and there is a balance between one's actions and the consequences of those actions. In the Old Testament's book of Proverbs, there is a kind of balance in the world. "If one acts wisely, one will prosper; if one acts foolishly, one will suffer because of one's foolishness". There is an order to the world, and if one violates that order, one will suffer because of that violation. But one thing that should be noted here is that when man suffers, God also allows History to be affected. He is moved to compassion by man's suffering, because He is a God who cares for his creatures and that He forgives and comes to his aid (Eliade, 1987, p. 101). He is so intimately concerned with human destiny that what humans do affects Him directly: "In all their troubles, it was no messenger or angel but his presence that saved them. In his love and pity he himself redeemed them....." (Is 63:9).

God does not abandon humans. He immediately begins the long restoration program. The first announcement of God's solution is what God said to Satan, symbolized by the Snake:

I shall put enmity

between you and the woman,

and between your offspring and hers;



it will bruise your head,  
and you will strike its heel (Gn 3:15).

This is the promise of the Messiah who will destroy the power of evil. The seed of the woman will destroy sin, death and suffering and restore the human nature to the spiritual life and the life of freedom from suffering. God " will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness or pain" (Rv 21:4).

### ***2.1.2 Suffering as Punishment for Sins***

The most significance attitude toward suffering in the Old Testament is that suffering is God's punishment for sin ("suffering," New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, p.775). The Bible makes it clear that suffering is the result of sin, and sin needs to repentance. This concept is found various places in the Leviticus, the Deuteronomy, the Judges and the Psalms.

Through the events in the history of Israel and in personal experience, God is manifested to His chosen people according to the Covenant stipulations: rewarding the just with blessings and punishing the wicked with misfortunes. Suffering together with sickness and death are the punishment that man receives for his sin. In the Garden of Eden before committing sin, man did not know suffering.

The Leviticus clearly gives the Old Testament's explanation of the connection between suffering and sin :

If you live according to my laws.....I shall give you the rain you need at the right time.....you will eat.....and live secure in your land (Le 26:3-5).

But if you will not listen to me and do not put all these commandments into practise,.....I shall subject you to terror, consumption and fever..... I shall heap seven times more plagues for your sins.....I shall destroy your high places and smash your incense-altars....Then indeed the country will rest and observe its Sabbaths (Le 26:14-35).

The Book of Psalms constantly refers to the rewards for the just and punishments for the wicked. The opening verses of Psalm 37 are another classic expression of the meaning-context established by the Old Testament Sinai Covenant.

Do not get heated about the wicked  
or envy those who do wrong.

.....

Put your trust in Yahweh and do right,  
make your home in the land and live secure.

Make Yahweh your joy

and he will give you your heart's desires (Ps 37:1-4).

The Deuteronomy Chapters 27-28 also center around six blessings from observing God's commandment and six curses from disobeying. The series of blessings and curses in the chapters explain vividly the connection between ethical behaviour and what will surely follow. The Mosaic Law must be obeyed or there will be punishment. If the commandments are well observed, there will be prosperity. Times of prosperity were rewards for faithfulness to God. Disaster and chaos were the result of sins committed by the people (Freedman, 1992, Vol.6, p.220).

Meanwhile, both blessings and curses will come upon individuals as well as the entire nation. They were understood in the light of national blessings and prosperity.

The story of Achan and his sin in Joshua 7 is the explanation of one's own sin effecting not only oneself but also the whole community. Achan, son of Carmi of the tribe of Judah, took some goods that were intended for the Lord and hid the things, although before the battle God had forbidden it. When his sin was found out, he and his whole family were excluded from the society. Because of his sin, Israel also was cursed and defeated in the next battle. The sin of one can have ripple effects, bringing suffering to all people (Freedman, 1992, Vol.6, p.220).

### ***2.1.3 Suffering as a Corrective Medicinal***

The stories of the judges in the Book of Judges also are set into a pattern that shows this same belief that suffering is retribution for sin (Freedman, 1992, Vol.6, p. 220). The overall scheme is laid out in Judges 2:6-23. When the people were unfaithful, God would send an enemy to torment them. The punishment will remind the people not to make the same mistakes again. God may use it to teach them and for benefits to his people. God used Joseph's suffering (Gn 50:15-21), for example to save many people from famine.

Consequently, punishment in Israel history, would not seem to be as merely punitive. Suffering also had a medicinal purpose, for God did not want to destroy but to convert His people. "Learn from this that Yahweh your God was training you as a man trains his child (Dt 8:5)".

Suffering is not merely punishment, but a corrective punishment. God as a loving Father tries to correct His children: "For Yahweh reproves those he loves, as a father the child whom he loves" (Pr 3:12).

For the devout, suffering should bring repentance. God's punishment will bring people back to God. It is a means of divine discipline. If they admit their guilts, humble themselves and accept punishment for their guilt, God will remember them, their country and the entire people:

.....Then their uncircumcised hearts will grow humble and then they will accept the punishment for their guilt. I shall remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham; and I shall remember the country too (Le 26:41-42).

You will suffer everything I have said.....but in the final days you will return to Yahweh your God and listen to his voice. For Yahweh your God is a merciful God and will not desert or destroy you or forget the covenant which he made on oath with your ancestors (Dt 4:30-31).

#### ***2.1.4 Suffering as a Test of Faithfulness and Devotion***

Many places in the Old Testament show that sometimes the wicked prospered and the just suffer. This is not always easy to accept. In the face of prosperity of the wicked, the Bible counsels against envy (Pro 3:31, Ps 36(37)). The people of the Psalms, moreover, asked God to punish the wicked (Ps 55, 58, 74, 109). They can not bear the wicked prosper without punishment. There was a brave way of interpreting the suffering of the virtuous men like Abraham and Job. It was the "discipline of the Lord" and not to be disdained, "for whom the Lord loves, he reproves"(Pro 3:11-12).

(New Catholic Encyclopedia,1967, p.971).The Old Testament people were beginning to realize that not all suffering is the punishment for sins, not all suffering is deserved punishment. In searching for less simplistic solutions, the Old Testament people were recognizing that suffering tested man's virtue and his fidelity to God. Suffering purifies devotion and deepens man's union with God (Bauer, 1970, Vol.3, p.891).

You have turned my mourning into dancing,  
 you have stripped off my sackcloth and clothed  
 me with joy. So my heart will sing to you unceasingly,  
 Yahweh, my God, I shall praise you forever (Ps 30:11-12).

According to the Old Testament conception, suffering is intended to compel a man to decide which position he will take up, for or against God, and so to prove the faithfulness and devotion of the man concerned ( Ps 30; Jb 1:11;2:5)(Bauer, 1970, Vol.3, p.891).

Abraham, in whom God promises the nations of the earth will be blessed eternally, was put to the test. He was called to leave all his earthly ties, comfort, security and happiness in his home town, and go into the wilderness, the land of unknowing, into suffering. It is accepted only with difficulty by Abraham. But he obeys. Then comes the worst suffering of all, God's asking him to sacrifice his only one dearly son, Isaac, whom earlier Yahweh had promised as his heir. Abraham still obeyed speechless. His obedience and act of faith were worthy of reward. God blessed him and all nations through him. For Christianity, Abraham became a primary model of faithfulness and obedience to God (Gn 12: 1-9).



Job is another case of Yahweh testing faithfulness. Job (Jb 1-42) is described as blameless and upright and turning away from evil: Job “feared God and avoided evil” (Jb 1.8). In his early life, Job experienced all the blessings promised to those faithful to the Covenant, and God is proud of Job’s fidelity. However, Satan believes that Job’s fidelity is motivated by self-interest rather than by love of God. God denied this and allowed Satan to test Job’s intentions through two trials: first, the loss of wealth and children; and second, the loss of his health. Through all this, Job remains faithful to God. He proclaims,

The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord (Jb 1:21).

Job certainly knows that he didn't do anything against God. From one point of view, his suffering is caused by the vindictiveness of Satan, who seeks to embarrass God by causing Job to curse the Lord. Ultimately, God visits Job, not to explain himself, but simply to reveal to Job the greatness of the gap between himself and human beings. Job immediately grasps the point. All Job can do is to trust and worship him. With the lesson learned, God gives Job twice as much as he had and blesses him all the rest of his long life.

The story of Abraham and Job have correctly asserted that any suffering or misfortune need not necessarily be interpreted as a punishment for infidelity to the Covenant, but for the faithful to prove their devotion and faith to God. Faithfulness and devotion to God demand more than observing God's laws; they also mean trusting God's love and affirming whatever he sent. By faith in the plan of God, suffering becomes a very high test which God reserves for those of whom He is proud in order

to teach them what He is worth and what man can suffer for Him (Dufour, 1984, p. 588).

### *2.1.5 The Suffering Servant: Vicarious Suffering*

There is a more advanced interpretation of suffering introduced but not fully developed in the Old Testament, is that God suffers for human sin (Richards, 1990, p.952). This new theology represents efforts to move beyond suffering as punishment in order to see redeeming value in suffering, either for others or for the sufferer. This concept appears in the passages of Isaiah 53 on the Suffering Servant, who is the great symbol of vicarious suffering. God causes his servant<sup>3</sup> to suffer (Is 53:10). The Servant of God has taken vicariously upon himself the punishment of his nation. The suffering of the servant is a means of atonement. It takes away the guilt of the sinners and of the whole people, and by so doing establishes the right relationship between God and men. It mediates salvation (Bauer, 1970, p.892).

Passages in Isaiah 40-55 speak of someone who was obedient to God and yet suffered for the wrongs other people had committed and the benefit of others (Freedman, 1992, Vol.VI, p.222). Isaiah, the writer of the book, used the phrase "Servant of the Lord" in a specialized meaning or messianic sense. The "Suffering Servant of the Lord" is also used. The servant of the Lord not only would encounter and accept suffering in the course of His work, but He also would realize that His vicarious suffering would become the means by which He would give His life in order to redeem others.

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<sup>3</sup> The term "servant" was given to those whom God has chosen to be His assistants in carrying out His plan for the chosen people and for mankind. For example: Abraham (Gn 26:24, Isaac (Gn 24:14), Jacob (Ezek 28:25) and Moses (Deut 34:5) as well as prophets (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, Vol.13, p.126).

The Servant, in Isaiah, announces the justice of Yahweh that the world awaits; gently, without violence, the Servant must work until his mission is accomplished (Is 42:1-4) in Israel and the whole world. In fulfilling his mission of bringing the Lord's salvation to the world he meets with opposition (Is 49:1-6). This opposition turns into abuse, yet the Servant does not despair or cease his work. He trusts in the Lord's assistance (Is 50:4-9). Salvation comes to the world through the suffering and death that the Servant undergoes for the sins of others. His willing sacrifice atones for the offenses of many; in reward, Yahweh greatly exalts him and gives him life. The vicarious suffering of the Servant, so vividly brought out in the fourth song, is a completely new concept at this point in the history of the Bible; new also in these four oracles is the Servant's mission to non-Jews (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, p.127).

The New Testament and many Christians of all ages find the "Servant" in the oracles fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the Servant of the Lord, who is at once the Messiah, a Prophet greater than all other prophets, the new Israel, the lamb who died for the sin of man, and whom God raised up and made the exalted Lord and King (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, p.126).

It is remarkable that with all their experience of terrible suffering, the Israelites were never moved to take a pessimistic view of life. Since God is Lord, even the author of Ecclesiastes, the gloomiest of the Old Testament writers, counsels his readers to enjoy life (Eccl 1:2-11; 9:7-10; 11:7-10) (Buttrick, 1962, p.452).

## **2.2 Suffering in the New Testament**

Suffering has a much greater significance in the New Testament than in the Old Testament. Almost all the books of the New testament, such as the Synoptics and

the epistles of Paul, speak of suffering in numerous passages. Forty percent of the Gospel according to Mark involves heavy reference to the Passion of Christ (Britannica, Vol 14, p.850). The writings of Paul, Peter and John emphasize the importance of suffering with Christ in order to rise with Him. The primitive Church adopted all the Old Testament views of suffering, but modified them in the light of Jesus' passion and cross (Buttrick, 1962, p.452). The old idea of retribution was still prevalent at the beginning. Because God was regarded as a good and just God, it was believed that evil would be punished and good would be rewarded. If this will not happen within this life, it might be the test for the faithful or an opportunity for the works of God to be made manifest (Freedman, 1992, p.224). But the fact is that in general both Jesus and the New Testament deny that all suffering is retribution (Bauer, 1969, p.894). According to Luke, suffering or misfortune can be seen both as punishment that is deserved and a warning to others (Lk 13:1-16). One passage of Paul's letter to the Corinthians refers to the Jewish idea that sickness can sometimes be the result of sin and so a punishment (1Cor.11:30-32). In the gospel of John, Jesus says that the man born blind was afflicted because of neither his own sin nor that of his parents (Jn 9:11). This is a clear rejection of a doctrine of retribution which connects sin to punishment in individual cases of suffering. One cannot assume that sufferers deserve their fate. In the Beatitudes of Matthew, the ones who are blessed are the mourners, the meek, the hungry, the poor, and those who are persecuted for a righteous cause (Mt 5:3-12). Indeed, suffering may be a sign of a faithful life rather than being the consequence of a sinful one (Freedman, 1992, p.224).

The New Testament writers emphasize the virtue of suffering for others, the vicarious suffering which is necessary for man's redemption. They modified suffering in the light of Jesus' suffering, passion and death, and how to make sense out of His suffering (Freedman, 1992, p.224). Christ died for others. The theme of the suffering and death of Jesus Christ is the most essential component of the Gospel teaching (Hartman, 1963, p.2342). The Synoptic Gospels view Jesus as the Messiah who has been sent into the world to bring about repentance and salvation for mankind.

The Son of man also came not to be served but to serve,  
and to give his life as ransom for many (Mk 10:45).

Jesus Himself had taught that his suffering was a divine necessity which had been laid upon Him, the Son of Man (Mt 16:21, Mk 8:31, Lk 9:22). God loves the world and humanity. God's love is fulfilled through Jesus' suffering. The atoning effect of Jesus' suffering rested upon his willingness as the innocent one who gives His life for sinners (Rm 5:6-8, 1 P 2:24, Mk 10:45). This was a new and original idea found in the New Testament (Buttrick, 1962, p.452).

The word used for suffering in the New Testament is *PASCHEN*, which has a passive meaning. It means to experience something that comes from outside. It is a question of "bearing" or of "enduring" as Jesus "endures" death on the cross (Fink, 1990, p.1234). Jesus's life and words hold absolutely the key to understanding suffering in the New Testament.

### ***2.2.1 Jesus: the Suffering Servant of God.***

Suffering found its full meaning through the life of Jesus Christ. God has not abandoned man to suffer alone. In Jesus Christ, God has come alongside to suffer



with man and for man (Richards,1990, p.953). The fact of His own suffering and what He said about it supplies the theology of suffering for Christians who are His followers. Jesus, in the New Testament, is known as "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (Jn 1:45). He was brought up by His mother, Mary, whose husband, Joseph, is a carpenter by trade (Mk 6:3). At an early age, Jesus may have taken Joseph's place as the family breadwinner. He begins His preaching at the age of 30. And three years after that, He experiences suffering in manifold forms: homelessness, fatigue, the resistance of the people in His own town, betrayal by His own disciples, misunderstanding even from those who are close to Him, and bitter hostility from the Jewish leaders. The result is almost total failure and, finally, He is persecuted all the way to death on the cross (Bauer,1967, p.894).

Jesus says of His suffering that it was a divine necessity which has been laid upon the Son of Man and for man:

For this is how God loved the world;  
he gave his only Son, so that everyone who  
believes in Him may not perish  
but may have eternal life.

For God sent His Son into the world  
not to judge the world, but so that through  
him the world might be saved (Jn.3:16-17).

According to the eternal plan of the Father, Jesus Christ was sent into the world (Ac 3:18). His task as the Messiah consists in His suffering and death in accomplishment of the divine will. The clearest places where Jesus' theology of

suffering is presented is in His three predictions of His own passion and death (Mk 8:32, 9:34, 10:33-34). He stresses that it "must be" in order to fulfill His God-given task. His role as Messiah is to suffer, die and rise from the dead. Jesus Christ submits to it obediently and lovingly (Heb 3:7-8, Jn 14:30) even though He knows well what will happen to him. He also is moved and troubled in His heart at the thought of His passion (Jn 12:27). He prays that it might pass away: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Lk 22:42).

He tells His disciples of His grievous suffering, rejection by the elders, chief priests and the teachers of the law, and being put to death, and after three days rising again (Mk 8:31). But His disciples cannot grasp His predictions. He warns them that as His followers, they too must accept the role of servants on behalf of others (Mk 9:35-36).

It is clear that Jesus did not deserve to suffer and to die. The Old Testament, the Servant Songs, predicted such a Messiah (Is 40-50). "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering (Is 53:3). And "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,....."(Is 53:10). The suffering and death of Jesus thus came to be viewed as part of God's design for the salvation of the human race. Christ died for others. His suffering is vicarious suffering. The New Testament sees in the mystery of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, the fulfillment of the Servant of the Lord oracles. Among the earliest texts of the New Testament are found several references to Jesus Christ as the Servant of the Lord. In Ac 3:12-18, Peter speaks to the Jews of God's "Servant" Jesus, the "Just One", whom they "delivered up". Peter presents the work of Jesus as the accomplishment of what

the Prophets had foretold about the sufferings that Christ should endure (New Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, p.129).

After Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter declared to the crowd in Jerusalem that Jesus died innocent and that His death was for others.

Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by  
 God by the miracles and portents and signs that God  
 worked through him when he was among you, as you  
 know. This man, who was put into your power by the  
 deliberate intention and foreknowledge of God, you  
 took and had crucified and killed by men outside the  
 Law.....(Ac 2:22-23).

Jesus is the Suffering Servant of God, who lay down His life vicariously as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45). It is through suffering that He must enter into His glory and fulfil his Messianic task (Lk 24:26). Moreover, Christ goes toward His Passion and Death with full awareness of the mission that He must fulfil precisely in this way. He fully takes the suffering of all people upon Himself. By means of his Cross or suffering, he accomplished the work of salvation which is the plan of eternal Love, the Salvific Love. By this way the Scriptures have to be fulfilled, particularly the Fourth Song of the Suffering Servant which presents the image of the sufferings of the Servant (Is 53:2-6). According to Peter, Christ, by His vicarious suffering, not only effected man's salvation but also left an example (1 P 2:21-25).

### 2.2.2 *Jesus' Teachings*

Apart from His own suffering, Jesus gives the complete meaning of suffering by his teaching of the Good News. The preaching encourages His followers in their time of suffering: "I have told you all this so that you may find peace in me. In the world you will have hardship, but be courageous; I have conquered the world " (Jn 16:33).

One of the Synoptic messages revolves around the proclamation of the kingdom of God. (Matura,1984, p.167) Jesus' mission begins by preaching the nearness of the Kingdom of God. The time has come, those who want to receive it must be converted, radically change one's life and believe in the good news (Mk 1:14-15). In the kingdom of God, the way to honor is the way of service. In this respect, Jesus set a worthy example, choosing to give service instead of receiving it.

#### 2.2.2.1 *"Deny oneself and take up one's cross"*.

There are two necessary conditions to becoming a disciple of Jesus: First, "to deny oneself"; second, "to take up one's cross". These phrases appear in all the three Gospels.

According to Mark 8:31, after Jesus' declaration about the cross (the first prediction of the passion), He speaks to the disciples and the crowd :

If any one would come after me, he must deny  
himself and take up his cross and follow me. For  
whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but  
whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel  
will save it ( Mk 8:34-35).

And the two parallel sayings are in Matthew 10:38 and Luke 14:27. The demands for acceptance of suffering and death found in the Synoptic Gospels are for those who want to follow Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Mark describes Jesus' personal call for following Him to Peter and Andrew, to James and John in 1:16-20 and to Levi in 2:13-14.

The expressions "to come after", "to come behind", and "to follow" are equivalent. They indicate the unique character of those who want to become Jesus' disciples, sharing his life and mission. To follow Jesus' footsteps requires leaving of family, and of all possessions and professions. To deny oneself is render of little or no account the desire of self-affirmation and life (Matura, 1984, p.46)

To take up one's cross means to be ready to share Jesus's fate, even accepting a most shameful death like his own. One encounters opposition, slander, hatred, persecution and even death as the consequences of "following after" Jesus. And for this reason discipleship demands self-abnegation to the point of laying down one's life. Only he who loses his life for Jesus' sake will save it (Mk 8:35).

The teaching of the Beatitudes, the high-point of Jesus' moral preaching, indicates how those who are his disciples should behave. The disciples will surely suffer for dedicating himself to the principles for which Jesus stands (Mt5:10). The ones who are blessed are the poor, the needy, the gentle, the mourners, the hungry and the thirsty, the merciful, the pure, the peacemakers and especially those who are rejected and scorned by society (Mt 5:3-12). These principles show how the children of the kingdom ought to live. His disciples should be happy when insulted and persecuted for following him, and they will find a place in God's kingdom. But



" Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven....." (Mt 5:12).

### 2.2.2.2 "No servant is greater than his master" (Jn 13:16).

When Jesus calls his disciples to follow Him, He means that He wants His disciples "to be with him" (Mk 3:14), to share His life, His mission and His fate (Matura, 1984, p.171). Throughout the New Testament, Jesus is presented as the One who left us an example, that we should follow in his footsteps. To His disciples He declared,

I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you  
(Jn 13:15).

The second epistle of Peter communicates the same idea:

For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you,  
leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps  
(1P 2:21-22).

Peter makes it clear to the Early Christians that anyone who makes the commitment to Jesus Christ and His teaching will find himself in opposition to the world and its standards. Being Jesus' disciples, they must expect that suffering will take place before they can share in God's glory. Just as suffering belongs to Jesus' own fate, so too it belongs to the life of his disciples (Mk 13:10-13).

The suffering of the followers of Jesus is unavoidable, because the Saviour's work runs counter to the aspirations of the world and its powers. Therefore these powers hate his disciples even as they hated the master. A servant is not greater than his master. "All men will hate you because of me....." (Mk 13:13).

During their mission as witnesses, the disciples can expect violent opposition from the hands of the religious and civil authorities of their time and even more, their own family members will rise up against them (Mk 13:9-12). Thus, the disciples were forewarned as to what they could expect from their discipleship. For, "Disciple is not superior to teacher, nor slave to master. If they have called the master of the house 'Beelzebul', how much more the members of his household" (Mt 10:24-25)?

This fate belongs to those who want to be His disciples. But ".....anyone who stands firm to the end will be saved" (Mk 13:13).

The gospel writers also describe Jesus' attitude toward those who suffer. The texts tell us that he is moved and upset, and they describe his compassion and even his tears for the sufferers (Mt 9:36;14:14;15:32)(Fink, 1990, p.1234). The Gospels narrate how "He went about doing good"(Ac 10:38). He healed the sick, consoled the afflicted, fed the hungry, freed people from deafness, from blindness, from leprosy, from the devil and from various physical disabilities and restored the dead to life. He was sensitive to every human suffering. He wept over the grave of Lazarus. Jesus is alongside with the sufferers.

### **2.2.3 Pauline Epistles**

A somewhat different and distinctive Christian view of suffering can be found in the Pauline writings. The cross<sup>4</sup> is part and parcel of Pauline theology (Plevnik, 1986, p.89). For Paul "the word of the kingdom" (Mt 13,19) becomes "the word of

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<sup>4</sup> The word "cross" is used metaphorically. Human suffering is part of the theme of the cross both in the gospels and in Paul even when the word "cross" is not used (1Co 2:3-4; 4:9-13; Gal 6:14-17). It refers to Jesus' death on the cross as willed by God and as God's way of salvation to be appropriated by Christian. Paul speaks of his own sufferings in the context of the cross (Plevnik, 1986, p. 77, 87).

the cross"( 1Co 1,8). His theology of the cross forms the basis of his preaching on Christian worship (Hartman, 1963, p.2343). That Christ has been crucified, died, and raised from the dead are at the heart of Paul's teaching on suffering (1 Co 2:2, 15:3-4, Ga 3:1). Even though Paul had no association with Jesus during his earthly life-time whereas the Apostles did, his personal experience on encountering the risen Jesus Christ at Damascus overwhelmed on his thought and his entire life. At the event, he realizes the saving significance of Christ's death and resurrection ( Plevnik, 1986, p. 28). Paul regards the sufferings and death of Jesus as the great proof of love that Jesus has given (2 Co 5:14) and "...through whom are all things, and through whom we live" (1Co 8:6). By His vicarious sacrifice of life, all are redeemed, reconciled with God, delivered from sin, from the Law, from death, and from the cosmic powers of evil. By His sufferings and death Christ won for us, all the blessings of salvation and laid the foundation of the Church. Therefore, the message of the cross (1 Co 1:25) is at the same time a message of resurrection and life (Hartman, 1963, p.2343).

Paul's view of suffering in his writings concentrates on two areas of encouragement to those who were suffering (Freedman, 1992, p.224). First, the sufferers should be assured that no matter how severe they are treated by this life, the promise of resurrection is there for them (1Co 15). Second, God can work good out of suffering. The one who suffers can be assured that whoever hopes in God through Christ will not be disappointed (Rm 5.3-5). Suffering can be understood as discipline sent by God to make us better persons (Heb 12.3-11) and to comfort the others.

### ***2.2.3.1 Dying and Rising with Christ***

According to Paul's teaching, the whole life of a Christian revolves around the two poles of “dying” and “living” with Christ (Plevnik, 1986, p.89). Dying and rising with Christ means suffering and hope. If Jesus rose from the dead, then surely the followers of Christ will also be raised into a wonderful new existence where Jesus has defeated all enemies (1Co 15). For Paul the cross cannot be correctly understood apart from the resurrection of Christ, the believer's rising with Christ, and hope in the resurrection of the body. In Rm 6:1-11, Paul reminds the Romans that baptism into Christ means a sharing in Christ's death in order to share also in his resurrection. Through baptism we enter into Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection. Suffering and death are no longer punishment but rather a participation in the fate of Jesus which began in baptism. As we are Adam's children, born in sin, by baptism we transfer from the dominion of sin to the dominion of the risen Lord ( Plevnik, 1986, p.80).

According to Paul, it was necessary for Jesus to have been incarnated, crucified and resurrected precisely because this is the only way in which the individual might believe that his own suffering and death can be overcome. In short, God's birth into a human body and his suffering, together with his resurrection, are evidence of the possibility that believers too can hope to transcend sin, suffering and death (Eliade, 1987, p.103).

In Rm 8:3-4, St. Paul states that God sent his Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin" to condemn sin in the flesh. Christ's death on the cross was thus a death to sin. In that act, the power of sin lost its hold on Him, and through Him on all

the rest of humanity. The believer, by being united with the crucified Christ, is liberated from the oppression of sin( Plevnik, 1986 p.80).

The point which Paul wants to make here is that the believer is to die to sin in order to live to God, as the risen Christ lives to God. Paul says this is the purpose of Christ's death and resurrection in Rm 5:10-11. Paul also calls on the faithful to abandon the ways of the world and to imitate the way of Christ and of himself. Dying with Christ is not a repetition of the past event but a sharing in his cross. Only on the basis of the cross can the community achieve its unity in Christ (Plevnik, 1986, p.90). Paul talks of his suffering as a sharing in the death of Christ for the sake of the gospel and it is even worthy of boasting (Ga 6:14). Through Christ who gives him strength, he can do all things and God will fulfil all his needs (Phil 4: 12-14, 19-20).

#### ***2.2.3.2 God can Work Good out of Suffering***

Paul always convinces Christians that all suffering can produce something good. He often urges them to accept it and recognize the positive work that God will accomplish through them. He writes in his letter to the Hebrews that even Jesus as a man grew and gained something in the human maturing of his holiness through the suffering the Father allowed him to undergo.

Christ was made perfect by suffering (Heb 10:14).

And

Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Heb 5:8-9).



In another passage, Paul explains that salvation comes to us from God through Christ. It is our duty to open our hearts to receive it. The way we choose to deal with hardships plays an important role in our growth in holiness, a growth founded of course on faith (Martin, 1988, p.129):

So, then, now that we have been justified by faith, we are at peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; it is through him, by faith, that we have been admitted into God's favor in which we are living, and look forward exultantly to God's glory. Not only that; let us exult, too, in our hardships, understanding that hardship develops perseverance, and perseverance develops a tested character, something that gives us hope, and a hope which will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Rm 5:1-5).

Paul sees the suffering endured by the Christian as part of a gradual transformation of the Christian. Suffering is a way through which the Christian is transformed in preparation for sharing in the glory of God. Through suffering, the Christian can be changed for the better: that suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, and character produces hope, a hope that does not disappoint. Here, Paul points out that through God's love and the Holy Spirit, the suffering that a Christian endures can be the occasion for God's transforming power to be at work and he even rejoices in his suffering. He assures us that sufferings at present cannot compare with the glory that is to come (Rm 8:18).

Paul also confirms another good in suffering, namely that trials and suffering are a discipline from God and the Lord disciplines whom he loves. The Letter of the Hebrews says,

Perseverance is part of your training; God is treating you as his sons. Has there ever been any son whose father did not train him? If you were not getting this training, as all of you are, then you would be not sons but bastards. Besides, we all have had our human fathers who punished us, and we respected them for it; all the more readily ought we to submit to the Fathers of spirits, and so earn life. Our human fathers were training us for a short life and according to their own lights; but he does it all for our good, so that we may share his own holiness. Of course, any discipline is at the time a matter for grief, not joy; but later, in those who have undergone it, it bears fruit in peace and uprightness (Heb 12:7-11).

Paul sees suffering as earning the rewards of self-sufficiency and true virtue in this life and immense joy and glory in eternal life. He says,

I do not say this because I have lacked anything; I have learnt to manage with whatever I have, I know how to live modestly, and I know how to live luxuriously too: in every way now I have mastered the secret of all conditions: full stomach, plenty and poverty. There is nothing I cannot do in the One who strengthens me (Phil.4:11-13).

Paul also speaks of his own experience of God's power that transformed him through his weaknesses into real strength (2 Co 12:7-10). God can work good even

out of his weaknesses for the good of the community. Through suffering when one looks back, as Paul dares to boast of, lessons have been learned, humility has been realized, hope has met response and God's reassuring presence has been with the sufferer even in the depths of suffering. For whenever he feels weak, he feels strong (2 Co 12:10). Just as Jesus died for others, so should Christians be willing to suffer for the good of the others and the spreading of the gospel (2 Co 4:10-11) (Freedman, 1992, p.225).

### **2.3 The Church Teaching on Suffering**

The Catholic Church affirms much on human suffering and its results. Recently, Pope John Paul II issued "Salvifici Doloris" or "On the Christian Meaning of Suffering", dated February 11, 1984 which is the feast day of Our Lady of Lourdes. The letter is a wonderful teaching about suffering which seems to fit the present world's suffering. One can find in Paul's official letter a summary of the Catholic tradition on the nature of suffering and its meaning. The Pope states that "suffering" seems to be particularly essential to the nature of man. At the same time, it seems to belong to man's transcendence. It is one of those points in which man is, in a certain sense "destined" to go beyond himself, and is called to this in a mysterious way(No.2).He said,"..for man, in his suffering, remains an intangible mystery" (No.4).

#### ***2.3.1 Salvific Meaning***

The emphasis of the encyclical is on the fact that redemption was accomplished precisely through the suffering of Christ. Suffering has a saving power. The Church is born of the mystery of Christ's redemptive suffering, and must meet

humanity in a special way on the path of suffering for suffering is inseparable from humanity's earthly existence (No. 3).

Salvation means liberation from evil. For this reason, it is closely bound up with the problem of suffering (No.4). "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (Jn 3:16).

The passages indicates that this liberation must be achieved by the only-begotten Son through his own suffering. In this, the infinite love both of the Son and the Father is manifested for man and the world. This love is called "salvific love" (No.14).

Thus, in his messianic activity in the midst of his people of Israel, Christ drew himself closer to the world of human suffering through the fact of having taken this suffering upon his own self. During his public activity, he experienced fatigue, homelessness, misunderstanding even on the part of those closest to him, and he is unwelcomed by his own neighbors. He has to confront hostility and preparations for putting him to death (No.16).

Anyhow, Christ goes toward his own suffering with full awareness of its saving power, in obedience and united to the Father. This is the love that the Father gives for the world and man in the world. By means of this suffering, he brings it about "that man should not perish, but have eternal life". This work, in the plan of Eternal Love, has a redemptive character. It is the work of salvation (No.16)

This leads the Pope to affirm that every man becomes the way for the Church when suffering enters his life, and "..... the Church has to try to meet man in a special way on the path of suffering"(No.3).

### ***2.3.2 Suffering Can Draw People Closer to God***

The Pope confirms that in suffering, there is a particular power which is a special grace that draws a person interiorly close to God. He said,

It is suffering , more than anything else, which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls. Suffering, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the redemption (No.27).

It is to this grace that many saints such as St. Francis of Assisi, St. Ignatius of Loyola and others owe their profound conversion. A result of such a conversion is not only that the individual discovers the salvific meaning of suffering but above all that he becomes a completely new person (No.26).

The Pope also sites Jesus' words to His disciples on the need of suffering. "If anyman would come after me.....let him take up his cross daily"(Lk 9:23). The way that leads to the Kingdom of God is "hard and narrow". His disciples and confessors would meet with much persecution. These persecutions and tribulations will be a particular proof of likeness to Christ and union with him. However, Jesus also reveals the supernatural assistance that will accompany them in the midst of suffering for his name's sake (No.25)."I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (Jn 16:33).



This shows that persecution and tribulation for Christ, contains a special call to courage and fortitude, because Christ has overcome the world definitely by his resurrection after his passion and death, that is to say after suffering. Consequently, as St. Paul says, "All who desire to live godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).

### *2.3.3 The Passion of Christ is the Key to an Individual's*

#### *Understanding of Why He or She Suffers*

Christ gives the answer to the question about suffering and its meaning not only by His teaching but by His own suffering. Individuals often see their suffering as useless. The person feels in his suffering a burden to others and condemned to receive help and assistance from others (No.27). The Pope states that,

The discovery of the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ transforms this depressing feeling and that individual understands why one suffers. Faith in sharing in the suffering of Christ brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person "completes what is lacking in Christ's afflictions". In the spiritual dimension, he is serving, like Christ, the salvation of his brothers and sisters. He who suffers realizes by this time that Christ Himself is suffering and wishes to give the answer from the cross (No.26).

Christ does not answer directly about the meaning of suffering. Man really hears Christ's saving answer only as he himself gradually becomes a sharer in the suffering of Christ.

Christ's death on the cross brought an end to "definitive suffering," or the loss of eternal life. With Christ's sacrifice, suffering "entered into a completely new dimension and a new order: it has been linked to love. "By sharing in the sufferings of Christ, people share in the redemption and become mature enough to enter the kingdom of God, giving suffering a "creative character." The Pope states:

Suffering has a special value in the eyes of the Church. It is something good, before which the Church bows down in reverence with all the depth of her faith in the redemption" (No. )

With the Passion of Christ, all human suffering has found itself in a new situation. Job and those witnesses of the new Covenant, St. Peter and St. Paul, in their experience of suffering, speak of this situation. Peter in his first letter says,

You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish and spot (1P 1:18-19).

And St. Paul in his letter to the Galatians says,

He gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age (Ga 1:4),

and in the first letter to the Corinthians:

You were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body (1Co 5:20) (No.19).

With these and similar words, the witnesses of the New Covenant speak of the greatness of the Redemption, accomplished through the suffering of Christ, and not

only the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed. The Redeemer suffered in place of man and for man. He has raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption. Thus each man is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished and all human suffering has been redeemed. Man, in his suffering, can become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ (No.19).

By participating in Christ's suffering, man finds a twofold dimension. First, if one becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ, this happens because Christ has opened his suffering to man. He has become a sharer in all human suffering. And through faith, man discovers in Christ's suffering, his own sufferings. This discovery, through faith, enriches pain with a new content and new meaning (No.20).

This discovery caused St.Paul to write: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me: and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me"(Ga 2:19-20).

By sharing in the suffering of Christ, people share in the redemption and become mature enough to enter the kingdom of God, giving suffering a "creative character".

Those who share in Christ's sufferings have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and Resurrection, in which Christ descends, in the first phase, to the ultimate limits of human weakness and impotence: indeed, he dies nailed to the Cross. But if at the same time in this weakness there is accomplished his lifting up, confirmed by the power of the Resurrection, then this means that the weaknesses of all

human sufferings are capable of being infused with the same power of God manifested in Christ's Cross.

### ***2.3.4 Mary : The witness of suffering***

Mary, the mother of Jesus (Jn 2:1, Ac 1:14), has played a consistent role in the spirituality of Catholic Christians of the East and the West (Downey, 1993, p.635). Devotion to her has taken many different shapes through the ages, and the image of Mary has entered deeply into the Catholic imagination (Ibid.). Mary's participation in the sufferings of Jesus the Saviour is an important aspect of Marian spirituality (Dict. of Mary, 1985, p.334). In the Middle Ages, the devotional status of the suffering Mary was almost as common as the devotion to the cross (Keeley, 1992, p.60), and during these ages in particular Mary was recognized as loving mother of all human beings (Dict. of Mary, 1985, p. 51). The devotion to the "Sorrows of Mary"<sup>5</sup> appears toward the beginning of the 14th century in all sorts of literary expressions: meditations, prayers, poems, etc. (Dict. of Mary, 1985, p.333). The Pieta, the famous sculptured of Mary holding on her knees the blood-stained body of Christ, appeared and caught the popular imagination during this period (Dict. of Mary, 1985, p.333). This scene, the most touching of all, seems to sum up all the sufferings of the Virgin and to summarize her anguish in a wonderful way.

The Church liturgy celebrates a Feast Day in honor of our Lady of Sorrows on September 15, the day after the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross. This symbolizes

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<sup>5</sup> The Liturgy celebrates on September 15, the day after the Feast of the Triumph of the Cross, a Feast in honor of Our Lady of Sorrows. Also called the Seven Dolors of Our Lady. The Seven Sorrows of Mary are: the Prophecy of Simeon, the Massacre of the Innocents and Flight to Egypt, the Child Jesus lost in Jerusalem, Jesus Arrested and Judged, Jesus Crucified and Dying, Jesus Taken Down from the Cross and Jesus Wrapped and Laid in the Tomb (Dict. of Mary, 1985, p.333).

how Mary has a participation in the suffering of Jesus, the Saviour. (Dict.of Mary, 1985, p.331-334)

Mary's participation in Jesus' suffering and then in the Redemption is affirmed by the Vatican Council II document, "Lumen Gentium," signed on November 21, 1964. In the whole Chapter 8 of the Dogmatic Constitution, Mary is situated in her theological role within the community of believers (Downey, 1993, p.639). The chapter begins with a survey of Mary in the Divine plan of human salvation (Nos. 52-54). As the title indicates, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, is inscribed in the mystery of Christ and the Church. Scripture and Tradition, especially patristic, define the role of Mary in the economy of salvation. Mary is prefigured in the preparation of Christ's coming (Old Testament) (No.55). She begins the New Testament, at the Annunciation, where her faith, her Immaculate Conception, her Divine Motherhood move into focus (No.56). Mary is a close associate in the work of salvation throughout the life of the Savior, her Son: Mother at Nazareth, Disciple from Cana to the Cross itself, where Jesus dying gives her as "Mother" to John (Nos.57-59).

The most common but also the most proper and significant designation by which the Evangelists refer to Mary is "mother of Jesus" who is called the Messiah" (Mt.1:16). This simple title expresses all the importance of Mary in the History of Salvation. In her, "the Word was made flesh" (Jn 1:14) (Dict. of Mary, 1985, p.253). In this plan of universal salvation, Mary holds a privileged place, that of mother. Having given us the incarnate Son of God, she extends her maternity to the entire Mystical Body (Dict. of Mary, 1985, p.51).



But it cannot be doubted that in her role in the History of Salvation, Mary experienced the greatest of sufferings throughout her life (The Glory of Mary, 1990, p. 148). In his Encyclical "Salvifici Doloris," John Paul II states that Mary is in the first and most exalted place at the side of Christ. She is the exemplary testimony to the Gospel of suffering (No.25). From the secret conversation with the angel, she realized that her mission as a mother was to share in God's plan of human salvation. And very soon, she received a confirmation of this in the subsequent events which are called "The Seven Sorrows of Mary".

First is the Prophecy of Simeon (Lk 2:35) that a sword would pierce Mary's heart by reason of her son being a sign of contradiction to the world. Second is the Flight into Egypt (Mt 2:13). Third is the Loss of the child Jesus in the Temple (Lk 2:46). The final four involve Mary in her Son's Passion and Death: the Way of the cross, the Crucifixion, the Descent from the Cross and the Entombment in the Holy Sepulcher<sup>6</sup> (Catholic Encyclopedia, 1991, p.899).

Mary is also mentioned in other Documents of the Council :

In celebrating the annual cycle of Christ's mysteries, holy Church honors with especial love the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, who is joined by an inseparable bond to the saving work of her Son. In her the Church holds up and admires the most excellent fruit of the Redemption, and joyfully contemplates, as in a faultless image, that

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<sup>6</sup> The Latin Rite chapel in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem has as its focus a very moving sculpture which portrays Mary with her heart pierced by seven small swords ( Catholic Encyclopedia, 1991, p.899 ).

which she herself desires and hopes wholly to be (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, No.103).

The Most Blessed Virgin Mary is the perfect example of this type of spiritual and apostolic life.....Mary was always intimately united with her Son and in an entirely unique way cooperated in the work of the Saviour (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, No. 4).

Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, gentle Mother of God, 'whose life is a model for all' (Saint Ambrose), religious (both men and women) will experience continual increases and bear most abundant fruits of salvation" (Decree on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, No. 25).

Priests "should love and honor with filial trust the Blessed Virgin Mary, who was given as Mother to His disciple by Jesus as He was dying on the Cross" (Decree on Priestly Training, No.8).

Priests will always find a wonderful example of docility (to the Holy Spirit) in the Blessed Virgin Mary. Led by the Holy Spirit, she dedicated herself totally to the mystery of human redemption (cf.LG No.65)..... (Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, No.18).

## Conclusion of Chapter II

Suffering has been part of the human experience since man's fall into sin (Gn 3). The Old Testament portrays the suffering as the result of evil action or sin after the Fall in the Garden of Eden (Gn 3:16-19) and sin needs repentance. When personal sin is not invalid, suffering can be a test of the faithful as in the case of Job (Jb 1-42). Another type of suffering in the Old Testament is that endured for the sake of others (vicarious suffering) as in the case of "The Suffering Servant" portrayed by Isaiah when he declared "By His stripes we are healed" (Is 53:5).

The New Testament emphasizes vicarious suffering much more, in the light of Jesus Christ who gives His life for human salvation. Jesus announced repeatedly that His suffering was His mission (Mt 17:12, Lk 24:46). Peter explained that "Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God (1P 3:18)". Just as Jesus died for others, so should Christians be willing to suffer for the good of others and the spreading of the good news.

The life and the teaching of Jesus hold the meaning of suffering. The one who is blessed is the one who suffers as Jesus. Very importantly, suffering may be the sign that you are one of the faithful rather than being the consequence of a sinful life.

Paul sees in the suffering life and hope. As we die with Christ, we will rise with Christ. Suffering cannot compare with the reward to come. We should rejoice even in suffering. God can work good out of suffering. We can trust in God, our Father, who knows what is good for His children.

Church teaching emphasizes suffering as participation with Christ in the saving of the world. John Paul II's Encyclical on "The Christian Meaning of Human

Suffering" focuses on the fact that redemption was accomplished precisely through suffering. Suffering is inseparable from humanity's earthly existence. This leads the Pope to affirm that, when approached properly, suffering is something good before which the Church bows down in reverence with all the depth of her faith in the redemption.

Mary is the model of our suffering. It is impossible to meditate on the passion of Christ without thinking of the sorrows of his mother. Just as there is the passion of Christ so also is there the compassion of the Virgin.

There were seven prominent occurrences in her Son's life which were the special cause of the sufferings of Mary. They are known as the Seven Sorrows of our Lady, according to the prophecy of the old man Simeon. The Pieta, the representation of the Jesus's dead body upon Mary's knees, seems to sum up all the sufferings of the Virgin and to symbolize her anguish in a wonderful way(Pourrat, 1953, Vol.II, p.322). The faithful should imitate the Blessed Virgin who is the very image of willing participation in Christ's suffering.

# CHAPTER III

## THE LIVES AND THE TEACHINGS OF WOMEN SPIRITUAL TEACHERS

### 3.1 Two Medieval Spiritualities of Suffering

A distinctive mark of the eleventh and the twelfth centuries was a growing interest in the humanity, especially the passion of Christ. Devotion<sup>7</sup> to the humanity of Christ, particularly to the crucified Jesus, dominated later medieval spirituality. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the faithful were especially moved by the devotion to the Christ dying on the cross (Pourrat, 1953, Vol. II, p.319). Throughout the middle ages, most Christians accepted suffering as an important element in their spiritual journey. They were seeking a close relationship with God using the tools of prayer, fasting and suffering to achieve their goal (Baldwin, 1987, p.165).

Here are two women spiritual masters of the fourteenth century who have dealt courageously with suffering. Their lives and teachings are attractive and

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<sup>7</sup> Devotions are prayers or other pious practices used to demonstrate reverence for a particular aspect of God or the person of Jesus, or for a particular saint. For example, since the Middle Ages, many Christians have shown a devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a symbol of Jesus's love for humanity. This devotion gained popularity in the seventeenth century through the efforts of Saint Margaret Mary Alacoque, and in 1765 the feast of the Sacred Heart was proclaimed by the pope. Christians showed their devotion by the observance of an octave, or prayers said on the feast day and for seven days afterward (Glazier and Hellwig (Ed.), 1994, pp.240-4).



inspiring especially for female Religious who may feel in our times the need for feminine models of suffering spirituality.

St.Catherine of Siena (1347-1380), a great Italian mystic, was an example of how God's power works through the weakness of physical and spiritual illness. Her doctrine, like that of many other writers of the Middle Ages, is founded on the knowledge of God and of self in which she received revelation from God (Pourrat,1953,Vol. II, p.207).

Julian of Norwich (1342-1423) was an English mystic. Her doctrine constantly alternated between two poles: the realization and acknowledgement of God's goodness to man and the awareness of one's sinfulness. (Aumann,1978, p.161). Her near-death experience brought her to a radical choice of Jesus which, through her writings, has provided spiritual wisdom for generations.

Both had in common a typical example of a theology based on mystical experience. As women, they represent feminine teachers and feminine insights that are less rare in the Western Christian tradition than many of our contemporaries might think. Their teachings are timeless, meeting some of the urgent needs of those seeking God in our age and answering many of the crucial problems of spiritual development and contemplative consciousness. Even though both appeared in different places, their lives share the same suffering-centered spirituality devoted to the sufferings of Christ.

### ***3.1.1 Saint Catherine of Siena (1347-1380)***

#### ***3.1.1.1 Catherine : The Mystic of Jesus Crucified.***

Catherine of Siena was an ordinary girl of bourgeois background who lived only a short life of 33 years. She neither studied theology nor knew how to read and

write. But God communicated to her the infused knowledge of divine truths, so that in her Letters and her" Dialogues",<sup>8</sup> she spoke like the most learned doctors concerning these truths (Pourrat,1953,Vol. II, p.204). Consequently, on October 4, 1970, six centuries after her death, Pope Paul VI proclaimed her a Doctor<sup>9</sup> of the Church together with St. Teresa of Avila and praised her as "The Mystic of Jesus Crucified" (Baldwin, 1987, pp.150-153).

Catherine was a great teacher who filled with God's love by meditating on the suffering of Jesus Christ. She also received the Stigmata of the Passion (Pourrat,1953,Vol. II, p.205). She loved to talk about God and heaven. She reported in her book The Dialogues on the revelations she received. In the revelations, God teaches the soul how to pray, to love more perfectly, and how to follow the Way who is Jesus (Baldwin, 1987, p.160). The themes of the book were central to Catherine's life and her teaching. All of her life and all that she says can be fully understood only in the context of her most basic conviction. She writes of herself in the Prologue to the Dialogue that,

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<sup>8</sup> In the space of a single five-day ecstasy, Catherine dictated "The Dialogue" in which she called it simply "my book". The book is a series of teachings in the form of conversations between God and a soul. It is the report of her mystical experience. It was recorded by members of her religious community. She begins by discussing the intimate relationship of truth and love. Catherine next discusses the beauty and dignity of each person who becomes perfect in proportion to union with the Creator. Then follow four petitions that she makes to God: for herself (to be permitted to suffer so as to atone for her sins); for reformation of the Holy Church; for peace in the world, and for the entire world in general; for the effects of Providence in everything, but particularly for a special intention. She indicates that she is relying on God's promise to Saint John and others that God will show himself to those who love him (Magill and McGreal (Ed.), 1907, p.172)

<sup>9</sup> "Doctor" here carries the Latin original meaning, that is, "Teacher."

..... she knew that she could be of no service to her neighbors in teaching or example or prayer without first doing herself the service of attaining and possessing virtue ( The Dialogue,1980, p.26).<sup>10</sup>

Since during the 14th century, extreme suffering was considered a sign of holiness and something to be sought (Baldwin,1987, p.164), Catherine chose a life of solitude and extreme mortification when she was only thirteen years old. Her dark and stuffy cell situated at the back of her father's house was the place where she meditated hour after hour. She knelt day and night before the crucifix which she hung on the wall, gazing upon the wounds of Jesus Christ. Her spirituality was based on the contemplation of the crucifix and she came to know God's love through that contemplation. She yearned to relieve<sup>11</sup> and to share His suffering by loving Him with pain and suffering.

Catherine practised severe mortification. She always ate a tiny meal, only bread and raw vegetables with no sweets and wine. She slept little which was the form of self-denial she found most difficult of all. She always wore a hair shirt<sup>12</sup> and wound a chain tight around her waist until the wire-hatching dug in and cut her flesh. She also scourged herself three times a day with an iron-hook chain. She inflicted suffering upon herself as a daily routine, gratefully accepting all pain, both physical and mental, that came into her life. All of her mortification had only one goal : she

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<sup>10</sup> All quotations from "The Dialogue" are taken from " Catherine of Siena, St. (1980). Catherine of Siena: The Dialogue. (Suzanne Noffke. Trans.). New York: Paulist Press

<sup>11</sup> That is, she assumed Christ while on earth was able because of His Divine Nature to see ahead in time her attempts to relieve Him, and thus could console Him.

<sup>12</sup> A penitential garment of hair-cloth worn inside-out, so the long sharp hair irritates the skin.

wanted to slay her own egoistic self-will so that she could more perfectly obey the Will of God (Baldwin, 1987, pp.21-22,163).

Her devotion to Christ focuses especially on His Precious Blood, shed for the redemption of mankind. (Aumann,1987, p.174) At the hour of her death, she gazed at the crucifix and whispered, "Blood, blood, blood," followed by "Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." And then she died full of joy (Baldwin, 1987, p.132).

### ***3.1.1.2 Suffering Seen as God's Correction***

According to Catherine, a reason for suffering is the punishment of sins. From her deep knowledge of herself, she had learned that her imperfection seemed to her to be the cause of all evils in the world. She wanted to wash away her sins, saying,

O Eternal Father, I accuse myself before you, asking that you punish my sins in this life. And since I by my sins am the cause of the sufferings my neighbors must endure, I beg you in mercy to punish me for them (The Dialogue, 1980, p.27).

But God explains to her that punishment is not the only reason for suffering; suffering can also be for correction and for the attainment of higher virtues. So I want you to know that not all sufferings given in this life are given for punishment, but rather for correction, to chastise the child who offends (The Dialogue, 1980, p.28).

This became an important principle of Catherine's life. She applied it especially to the mental suffering that came her way. It was God trying again to correct and perfect the daughter whom He loved (Baldwin,1987, p.166 ).

God also indicates that he allows the world to bring forth many troubles to prove the virtue of people and that He might have reason to reward them for their suffering and the violence they do to their egoistic self-will:

I responded to your fourth petition.....letting you see from the beginning of the world's creation right up to the end how I have done and continue to do everything with divine providence, giving and permitting all that I do for your good---trials and consolations both spiritual and temporal---so that you may be sanctified in me and my truth may be fulfilled in you. And this is that truth: that I created you so that you might have eternal life;.....

(The Dialogue, 1980, pp.362-363).

So you see how through this means that I have established for you these souls show their perfection and the genuineness of their love for me by constantly winning their salvation by the sufferings they endure. Then I purify them so their trials will make them produce better and sweeter fruit, and their patience sends up a great fragrance to me (The Dialogue, 1980, p.304).

### ***3.1.1.3 Suffering: Reparation for One's Own Sins and the Sins of***

#### ***Others***

Suffering filled Catherine's life. By meditating constantly on the crucified Christ, she was overwhelmed by the way sin offends God. She wanted to make reparation to Christ so as to relieve His past suffering during His earthly life, passion,



and death. She said that it was not simple for a soul which is a finite creature to make reparation to her infinite Creator. God says to her,

Do you know, my daughter, that all the sufferings the soul bears or can bear in this life are not enough to punish one smallest sin? For an offense against me, infinite Good, demands infinite satisfaction

(The Dialogue, 1980, p.28).

Catherine considered it necessary to repent whenever she had a spare moment.

God says to her,

It is true that while you have time you can get yourselves out of the stench of sin through repentance and recourse to my ministers

(The Dialogue, 1980, p.62).

God gives her more explanation that repentance should come from one's proper intention, from love and contrition of heart:

I want work of penance and other bodily practices to be undertaken as means, not as your chief goal. By making them your chief goal you would be giving me a finite thing---like a word that comes out of the mouth and then ceases to exist---unless indeed that word comes out of the soul's love, which conceives virtue and brings it to birth in truth. I mean that finite works---which I have likened to words----must be joined with loving charity. Such works.....would please me

(The Dialogue, 1980, pp.42-3).

Catherine created a new role for women in the Church during her century.

She also is a model for women in our own times. After a period of reclusive life,

she was called as a mediator in the intense politics of 14th century Italy by writing urgent political letters and traveling a lot to reform the Church. She preached a Crusade and urged the Pope to return to Rome (Downey, 1993, p.293). Her works are equal to those of any man. In the midst of criticism and misunderstanding she accepted and trusted in God, who encouraged her by saying:

In my eyes there is neither male nor female, rich nor poor, but all are equal, .....for I can do all things with equal ease. I spread abroad the grace of my spirit where I will.....Be brave and obedient when I send you out among people. Wherever you go I will not forsake you, I will be with you, as is my custom, and will guide you in all that you are to do (Baldwin, 1987, p.184).

Catherine lived in faith and God's providence, which should likewise inspire our women of today. God tells Catherine :

No one born into this life passes through it without suffering of body and spirit. My servants may suffer physically, but their spirit is free. In other words, suffering does not weary them, because their will is in tune with mine. It is the will that causes (the deeper) pain. Those I have described to you, who taste already in this life the pledge of hell, suffer spiritually as well as physically, while my servants taste the pledge of eternal life (The Dialogue, 1980, p.91).

### *3.1.2 Julian of Norwich (1342-1423)*

#### *3.1.2.1 What Julian saw*

Similar to St. Catherine of Siena, Julian's mystical life and teaching are derived from a vision of the Passion of Jesus she received. As a young woman who was devoted to the suffering of Christ, she prayed for these three graces : (1) a vision of the Crucified, so as to grow in compassion for him; (2) the gift of a bodily sickness, so as to experience the pains of Christ's last agony; and (3) three spiritual wounds, that is, the wound of contrition for sin, the wound of loving compassion and the wound of longing with all her will for God (Chapter II, p.179).<sup>13</sup> She said that she wished to see with her own eyes the Passion so that she might suffer with Him as Magdalen and His lovers did.

Julian had her desires fulfilled when she was thirty and a half years old. In May 1373, she fell ill near to the point of death and thus she received the last rites of the Church. During the course of her illness she received a vision of the Crucified along with sixteen revelations about the love of God for humanity which she later recognized as the true gifts from God which she had requested.

I saw the red blood running down from under the crown, hot and flowing freely and copiously, a living stream, just as it was at the time when the crown of thorns was pressed on his blessed head. I perceived, truly and powerfully, that it was he who just so, both God and man, himself suffered for me, who showed

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<sup>13</sup> All chapters referred to here are from "Julian of Norwich, Showings" translation and introduction by Edmund Colledge and James Walsh. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.

it to me without any intermediary....., suddenly the Trinity filled my heart full of greatest joy, and I understood that it will be so in heaven without end to all who will come there(Chapter IV, p.181).

This is the first revelation which is about His precious crowning of thorns. The figure of Christ on the cross became alive in front of her eyes. Six other revelations concerned Christ's passion. Eight more dealt with other spiritual truths, and the final revelations concerned the indwelling of the Trinity in the soul. The totality of Julian's revelations deal with the knowledge of God and of human beings: what people are in the mercy and grace of God and what they are in sinfulness and weakness (Glazier and Hellwig, 1994, p.469).

Some time after that experience she began living as an anchoress in a cell attached to the parish church of Saint Julian in Conisford at Norwich. She took for herself the name of the Church, Julian (sometimes in her case rendered as Juliana, a more obviously feminine form of the name).

After long reflection and prayer in her solitary life, Julian recorded the content of these sixteen revelations in a text called "the Short Text of Showings", and twenty years later in a greatly expanded Long Text known as Revelations of Divine Love or Showing. Both versions are written in the first person and use an informal conversational tone. Her writing is, in Middle English, an exhibits a degree of learning unusual for women in that day. It gives very helpful encouragement even in our times. Some modern commentators have proposed that a review of her Revelations might also suggest that Julian wrote especially for women who are

experiencing situations of hopelessness or helplessness (Glazier and Hellwig, 1994, p. 469).

Julian says, however, that her writings are in the larger sense for all Christians:

In all this I was greatly moved in love towards my fellow Christians, that they might all see and know the same as I saw, for I wished it to be a comfort to them, for all this vision was shown for all men. And : Everything that I say about me I mean to apply to all my fellow Christians, for I am taught that this is what our Lord intends in this spiritual revelation. (Chapter VIII, p.190).

Julian was formally enclosed as an anchorite in her cell until the year 1413.

### **3.1.2.2 *Choosing Jesus***

For Julian, choosing Jesus transformed sorrow into joy. All of her revelations occurred when she seemed to be at death's door. She always asked that a crucifix be brought to her so that she could keep her eyes on the figure of Jesus suffering on the cross. In him she found meaning and purpose for her suffering. She says:

At this time I wanted to look to the side of the cross, but I did not dare, for I knew well that whilst I looked at the cross I was safe and secure. Therefore I would not agree to put my soul in danger, for apart from the cross there was no safety, but only the horror of devils (Chapter X, p.143).

The decision to keep her eyes fixed on the cross was one that Julian had made often. As it became a habit, she could sense the beneficial effects of her choice. She tells us:



Thus I choose Jesus for my heaven, whom I saw only in pain at that time. No other heaven was pleasing to me than Jesus, who will be my bliss when I am there; and this has always been a comfort for me, that I chose Jesus as my heaven in all times of suffering and of sorrow. And that has taught me that I should always do so and choose only him to be my heaven in well-being and in woe (Chapter X, p.143).

Julian emphasizes on divine love and insists that souls should have confidence in the divine mercy. Even sinners can trust in the divine mercy and know that God loves them. Those who do penance for their sins will find therein a motive for joy:

So I saw how Christ has compassion on us because of sin; and just as I was before filled full of pain and compassion on account of Christ's passion, so I was now in a measure filled with compassion for all my fellow Christians, and then I saw that every kind of compassion which one has for one's fellow Christian in love is Christ in us (Chapter XIII, p.149).

### ***3.1.2.3 Julian's Response to Suffering***

Julian is well known for her positive response to suffering. Her intimate relationship with Jesus taught her that suffering can give way to joy, though it may not make sense from a temporal perspective. From a spiritual perspective, it is full of meaning and purpose:

God wishes us to know that he keeps us safe all the time, in sorrow and in joy;.....it is not God's will that when we feel pain

we should pursue it in sorrow and mourning over it, but that suddenly we should pass it over, and preserve ourselves in the endless delight which is God (Chapter XV, p.205).

Julian always cultivated her attitude of trust and hope in God even in the midst of suffering. Fear itself, for lack of trust in God, is evil. Instead, we need to learn to expect good to happen. God will reward men for their patience in awaiting the time of His will. We can live in faith and hope and be not afraid. Julian conveys this message to us throughout her writings. She says:

Then God said to me, for my patience and endurance:"Suddenly you will be taken out of all your pain, all your unrest and all your woe. And you will come up above, and you will have me for your reward, and you will be filled full of joy and bliss. Why, then should it grieve you to endure for a while, since it is my will and to my glory (Chapter XX, p.160)?

Julian also recognized the purifying effects of suffering in her own life and in the lives of others. The effects of suffering, permitted by God, work toward good. Suffering is permitted by God either for us to learn better how to love and serve God and others or for others to be helped on their pathway toward God. She says,

It seems to me that this pain is something for a time, for it purges us and makes us know ourselves and ask for mercy; for the Passion of our Lord is comfort to us against all this, and that is his blessed will for all who will be saved (Chapter XIII, p.149).

Jesus is our true Mother in nature by our first creation, and he is our true Mother in grace by his taking our created nature"; Christ on the cross gave us birth and in Holy Communion nourishes us at His (maternal) breast.

It is of interest to note that Julian is one of the relatively few spiritual writers in any age who speaks of the maternity of God, and even the maternity of Christ's Humanity (Aumann, 1989, p.161). She speaks particularly of Christ as "our Mother, brother and saviour," an image more common in the earlier Middle Ages, particularly with Anselm. She had noted that:

So our Lady is our mother, in whom we are all enclosed and born of her in Christ.....;and our saviour is our true Mother, in whom we are endlessly born and out of whom we shall never come (Chapter 57, p. 292).

Julian talks of how we were born out of the travail of Christ's passion. She goes on to say that as the mother can give her child to suck of her milk, so our precious Mother Jesus can feed us with himself, and does, most courteously and most tenderly, with the blessed sacrament (Chapter 60, p.298).

### 3.2 A Renaissance and A Seventeenth Century Spirituality of Suffering

In the sixteenth century, at the very time in human history when the charge was broadcast that true Christianity was dead, that the old spiritual tradition was lost and that a burdensome code of observances and formalities had taken its place, there appeared in Spain a great mystic, a doctor of the Church and the foundress of the reform of the Order of Mt. Carmel called the Order of Discalced Carmelites. She is Teresa of Avila whose root and essence of spirituality are prayer and penance. Contemplation and a life of great mortification brought her close to God. By this great zeal God revealed that she had converted numberless souls by her prayers and penances (Lourdes, (Ed.), 1987, pp.170-1). Though it is almost four centuries since Teresa died, her memory and influence are as fresh and vital today as if she were still alive. Thousands of holy souls are still attracted by her example, her stirring words and her persuasive writings.

In the 17th century, devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus became popular in Western Europe. Jane de Chantal and Francis De Sales wrote often about Heart of Jesus. John Eudes promoted the institution of the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1646 and that of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1672. Margaret Mary Alacoque claimed to have received visions of the Heart of Jesus between 1673-1675, motivating her to spread the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in reparation for sins (Downey, 1993, p.470).

The Lord revealed her His heart encompassed by a crown of thorns and surmounted by a cross. The heart of Christ symbolized the center of Christ's humanity. It is a symbol of His love for His divine Father, for His most holy Mother and above

all His love for mankind which He had made known to her through the mystery of His passion. As the result, she devoted her whole life to the love of the cross and participation in Christ's sufferings (Pourrat, Vol.3, 1955, p.400). Who are these two great women saints ?

### ***3.2.1 St. Teresa of Avila (1515-1582)***

St. Teresa of Avila, a foundress of the discalced Carmel and a mystic, was born on March 28, 1515 and died on October 15, 1582. The Catholic Church canonized her in 1622. And in this century, on September 27, 1970, Pope Paul VI declared her and St. Catherine of Siena, the first women Doctors of the Church and saluted St. Teresa of Avila as the Teacher of Prayer (Glazier and Hellwig, (Ed.), 1994, p.858). The whole Christian world celebrated recently the 400th anniversary of her death. In this occasion Pope John Paul II, in his letter addressed to the Superior General of the Discalced Carmelites, stated

Teresa considered that her vocation and her mission was prayer in the Church and with the Church, which is a praying community moved by the Holy Spirit to adore the Father in and with Jesus 'in spirit and truth' (Jn 4:23) (CF. L. Osservatore Romano (English edition) November 9, 1981).

Honoured as a great teacher of prayer, her life experience and teaching were accompanied with suffering. Teresa sees in suffering the potential for progress in union with God, and the way to perfection. She wrote many spiritual books. Her major works are: The Book of Her Life (1562-1565), Way of Perfection (1565), The Foundations (1573), and The Interior Castle (1588) (Magill and McGreal, (Ed.), 1907,



p.249). Her holy example and writings attract people of all faiths, both Religious and lay persons, both male and female. Teresa, by her own life and her writings, informs the whole world about the concept of suffering

### 3.2.1.1 ECCE HOMO

Teresa's childhood<sup>11</sup> was happy and pious because of good parentage and up-bringing. Her devout spirit was fostered by the example of her parents. She practised various devotions, and especially enjoyed reading the Lives of the Saints. At an early age, she undertook two departures from home. First, at only 7, she escaped from home with her brother, hoping to be beheaded in the land of the Moors for God's sake as a martyr. Second, at 20, she entered the Carmelite Convent of the Incarnation at Avila in spite of her father's unwillingness. Two years after, she made her religious profession as a Carmelite nun and received the name "Teresa de Jesus".

A few months after her profession of vows, Teresa became so seriously ill that her Superiors thought there was no way for her to recover and a grave was prepared for her. Gradually, she recovered but she remained completely paralyzed for years. Finally, she recovered completely through the intercession of St. Joseph, and thereafter she always had a deep devotion to him.

At that time, religious life at the Incarnation was far from the eremitical spirit proper to Carmelites. It was a large and easy-going community whose members enjoyed the use of their own property and had free contacts with the outside world. Teresa herself, exhausted and depressed, gave up mental prayer and spent her time in the midst of activity, having daily conversations with relatives, friends and all kinds of

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<sup>11</sup> Taken from "The Book of Her Life" in "The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila " Vol. I. Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez, 1976.

people who came for consultation. Anyhow, in her pauses of silence, Teresa realized that she was not progressing spiritually. She wanted to reconcile a life of prayer with socializing but found her prayer-life mostly dry and frustrating.

When Teresa has reached the age of 39, God called her back to Him through the image of Christ most wounded - an "ECCE HOMO"<sup>12</sup> that had been brought to the Convent for a certain feast to be celebrated. Seeing that image, she said,

.....I was utterly distressed in seeing Him that way, for it well represented what He suffered for us. I felt so keenly aware of how poorly I thanked Him for those wounds that, it seems to me, my heart broke. Beseeching Him to strengthen me once and for all that I might not offend Him, I threw myself down before Him with the greatest outpouring of tears (The Book of Her Life, Chapter 9, p.70-71).

From that day on, she began to give herself more in prayer and to become less involved with things that did her harm. God was helping her turn aside from them. Her amazing life of intimate union with God begins, her interior life improves. The statue of the wounded Christ made her realize how distrustful she was. Then she placed all her trust in God. Whenever she could not reflect discursively with the intellect, she strove to picture Christ in this scene which helped her a lot in prayer. Especially, the scene of Jesus' prayer in the garden, which she imagined before going to bed, was a comfort to her. She became more recollected and drawn to solitude.

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<sup>12</sup> This Latin phrase translated into English is "behold (here is) the man" and is taken from John 19:5 (Greek, IDOU HO ANTHROPOS), the words Pilate used to present a disfigured Jesus crowned with thorns to the chief priests and their attendants (Stravinskis, (Ed.), Catholic Encyclopedia, 1991, p.335).

At 47, she was not happy with the lax ways of Carmelite life; thus she decided to reform it by returning the Carmel to its Primitive Rule and a life of solitude, mortification and prayer. To be able to carry out the work, Teresa suffered all kinds of problems and difficulties, even persecution. In the meantime, she wrote many books on prayer and the spiritual life. Her writing is a guide for all Religious and lay Christians. Her life is a model for those who want to imitate Christ, as she always took Jesus Christ as her greatest friend.

### ***2.1.2 Suffering : The Way to Perfection***

Teresa wrote formally in the "Prologue" of The Way to Perfection of her intention to help her Religious sisters, her spiritual daughters, to make great progress in the service of the Lord. As the Foundress of the discalced Carmelite nuns, she gives three rules for her Religious: (1) Love for one another, (2) Detachment from all created things, and (3) True humility (Chapter 4).<sup>13</sup>

These three things, Teresa said, can help those who possess inwardly and outwardly the peace that the Lord recommends so highly to them. This is the path that their former spiritual holy Religious fathers established to fulfil the Will of God. There is no other way to walk.

Of all three, the first is the most important. First of all, Religious should love God and love one another. If this commandment were observed as it should be, it would be very helpful for the observance of other commandments. The Carmelites who live in community especially need mutual love to bear with one another. Fraternal charity is the great remedy for the difficulties arising from the common life.

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<sup>13</sup> All chapters refer in this part are taken from "The Way of Perfection".

For those who love God and love one another, they can embrace all trials. This love imitates that love which Jesus has for us (Chapter 4).

In Chapter 18, Teresa writes that God won't give a lighter cross to the contemplatives. The trials God gives them are tolerable because contemplatives are his intimate friends. He loves them. He will lead them along the rough road and give them much greater trials. But for those who love much, they are courageous and determined to suffer. They can endure trials because God gives them courage and makes them unafraid if otherwise they are weak. The duties of contemplatives are to suffer as Christ did, to hold high the cross as the captain carries the flag in war. Even though they cut the captain to pieces he must not let the flag out of his hands. The contemplatives will not let the cross out of their hands whatever the dangers they see themselves in, nor will they let any weakness in suffering be seen in them. For if the captain lets the flag down, the battle will be lost.

In Chapter 32, Teresa told her nuns of the Will of God. Jesus has asked and taught us to ask for something so highly valuable, that is, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven". We can see His Father's will while He was praying in the garden to accept the trials, sorrows, injuries and persecutions. He suffered until His life came to an end through death on the cross. By this we understand what His will is for us. To those who love more, He gives more. He gives according to the courage He sees in each and the love each has for His Majesty. Love is the measure for being able to bear a large or small cross. And this is the way to perfection.

### 2.1.3 *How to Cope with Suffering*

Teresa always keeps in her mind that on this path there is no other reason for living than to suffer trials.

Lord, either to die or to suffer; I don't ask anything else for myself

(The Book of Her life, Chapter 40, p.283).

It is a great help in carrying out our suffering if we become close to God by prayer and recollection. Who will be a better companion than the Master Himself when we are in troubles. The Lord will not leave us abandoned of His friendship. He will not deny it for His friend. Teresa said that,

If you grow accustomed to having Him present at your side, and He sees that you do so with love and that you go about striving to please Him..... He will never fail you; He will help you in all your trials; you will find Him everywhere..... ( The Way of Perfection, Chapter 26, p.133)

Drawing a comparison to a husband and a wife, Teresa says that each of them tries to please the other one both in the time of happiness or of suffering. The Lord truly acts in such a way with us. If we are joyful, look at Him as risen, the Beauty, the Majesty! How victorious! How joyful! Likewise, if we are in troubles and sadness, behold Him on the way to the garden. What great affliction He bore in His soul, for having become suffering itself. Behold Him, filled with pain, burdened with the cross, with all His flesh torn in pieces for the great love He bears for us; so much suffering. He will look at us with those eyes so beautiful and compassionate, filled with tears.



He will forget His sorrows so as to console us. Or as a good spouse, go to Him to be consoled ( The Way of Perfection, Chapter 26, p.134).

Teresa also added in the same chapter that if we want to imitate Jesus in something, take all the trials that come to us and esteem them as a great good. She advised her nuns to consider carefully the fatigue with which our Lord walks and how much greater His trials are than those trials we suffer. It will give us consolation when we see that they are something to be laughed at when compared to those of the Lord.

Teresa warned her nuns that one won't be capable of such great trials if one is not capable of such little ones. By exercising oneself with these little trials, one will be able to suffer other greater ones ( The Way of Perfection, Chapter 26, p.136).

The other thing that can help to cope with suffering is thinking of our sins. God forgives us our sins which otherwise would deserve eternal fire. There is very little we can offer Him in return even symbolically, if we don't have our sufferings to offer:

You see here why the saints were pleased with the wrongs and persecutions they suffered; they then had something to offer the Lord when they prayed to Him ( The Way of Perfection, Chapter 36, p.177).

In one place Teresa encourages us by representing Christ saying :

Do you think daughter, that merit lies in enjoyment? No, rather it lies in working and suffering and loving.....Look at my whole life filled with suffering, and only in the incident on Mount Tabor do you hear about my joy. When you see My Mother holding Me in her arms,

don't think she enjoyed those consolations without heavy torment.....The great saints who lived in deserts, since they were guided by God, performed severe penances; .....Believe, daughter, that My Father gives greater trials to anyone whom He loves more; and love responds to these.....Suffering is the Way of Truth.....(Spiritual Testimonies, Chapter 32).

### **3.2.2 St. Margaret Mary (1647-1690)**

Margaret Mary Alacoque is well known as one of the pioneers who spread the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, a devotion the Lord Himself revealed to her and He charged her with its promotion. The way in which the Lord prepared her for His very special mission is really the way of suffering that He traveled before. Margaret is a person from whom God demands a great deal in marking her life for reparation and compensation for others. Her life of suffering seems to her understanding to be the most willing acceptance of the message of Jesus Christ. While still very young she received the gift of prayer and a remarkable longing for the Holy Eucharist, as well as several mystical graces such as intellectual visions of the suffering Christ (Pourrat, 1955, p.326)

#### **3.2.2.1 The Way of God is the Way of Suffering**

Margaret Mary Alacoque(Cristiani, 1974, pp.11-36) was born on July 22, 1647 at Verosvres, a place in the Charollais in France. Her father, Claude Alacoque was a royal notary in Verosvres. He had seven children, four sons and three daughters. Margaret was the fifth. She grew up in a wholesome, profoundly Christian

environment. When she was only four, she made her first vow of virginity even though she didn't fully realize what she was doing. When she was at the age of 8, she suffered a serious attack of rheumatism which kept her in bed for four years. But she was cured by the Blessed Virgin to whom she had a very great devotion. Margaret Mary promised the Blessed Virgin to become a Religious for restoring her to health.

Margaret Mary's family fell into financial hardships after Claude Alacoque passed away. Margaret had to live with an uncle in a large family of relatives where she and her mother were treated like common servants. Home life here became a kind of purgatory. Margaret herself was accused, rebuffed and calumniated by the people in the house. She suffered with tears for a great number years. She expresses her life at that time by writing:

And when I returned home, it was with such great fear and trembling that I felt like a poor criminal who was coming to be convicted and sentenced, and I would have considered myself more fortunate to go and beg for my bread than to live like that, for very often I didn't dare take any food at the table. For, from the moment I entered the house, the attack started over again more furiously than before: about my not having done the housework and taken care of the children..... and without having a chance to say a single word, I set to work with the servants. After which, I would spend my nights as I had spent the days, weeping before my crucifix( Cristiani,1974, p.23).

But in the midst of suffering, Margaret found pleasure and consolation only before the Most Blessed Sacrament on the altar. In her reflection, she realized later that these events happened to her as secretly planned for by His Providence. Through these persecutions, she made great progress in understanding the cross. She came to love her pain, as an expression of her love. She explains about herself during this time:

And from that moment on, my soul was so completely penetrated with Him that I would have wished my sufferings had not ceased for an instant. For He was always present to me, in the form of a crucifix or of an ECCE HOMO carrying His cross, and this implanted into me so much compassion and love for His sufferings that all my sufferings became light in comparison with the yearning I had to suffer, to conform with my suffering Jesus. And I regretted that the hands sometimes raised to strike me were held back and did not unleash all their harshness against me( Cristiani,1974, p.23).

Margaret had to learn more about the cross. She was called to share in His suffering. When she was 18, she was faced with a serious problem. Her mother asked her to get married so as to escape from the misery in the house. Her relatives pressed her to appear in society. Whereas Margaret remembered her vow of chastity and the promise to the Blessed Virgin Mary, this brought upon her a great struggle. Every time she yielded to her family's wishes by agreeing to take part in social activities and being eager to please her mother, she would hear inner voice which spoke more sternly as time went on. In order to overcome on her struggles against herself and her

true vocation, she increased more severe penances. We find the answer in her Autobiography:

In order to avenge myself in some way against myself for the wrongs I was doing Him, to relieve the pain that oppressed me, I would bind this miserable, criminal body with knotted ropes, which I tied so tightly that it could scarcely breathe and eat. I left these ropes around me so long that they sank so deep into the flesh, and it grew over them, so that I could pull them off only with great violence and cruel pain. And likewise for the little chains that I bound tightly around my arms, which pulled off pieces of flesh when they were removed. And besides I slept on the board, or on sticks with pointed knots, which I used as my bed (Cristiani,1974, p.34).

Margaret spent several years amid these torments and struggles and many other sufferings with perseverance. But this seemed not yet to satisfy her. She asked Jesus to send her a spiritual guide. Jesus answered :

Am I not enough for you? What are you afraid of ?

Can a child who is loved as much as I love you perish

in the arms of an almighty Father (Cristiani,1974, p.47)?

### ***2.2.2 Greater Trials***

After the great struggles of choosing the convent and the problem of dowry, in 1672 Margaret was admitted to the Visitation convent at Paray when she was twenty-three years of age. She was so happy that she exclaimed that this place was where God wanted her to come.



Margaret tried hard to follow the rules of the community and did everything under obedience to the Mistress of Novices because she realized that obedience would lead her to the divine Master. Nonetheless, her life in the convent was not so happy as she had expected. Soon after entering the convent, she again faced many trials. Her religious ecstasies the other sisters. They interpreted the ecstasies as signs of deceptive self-importance and dealt with her rudely over them. She was ordered by the Mistress to give up all external signs and the Mistress sent her to various works during times of prayer. Sometimes she had to fight against herself for fear that she might be the victim of delusions. Once she was forced to eat cheese which she had denied herself all her past life at home. Worst of all, she was at first not permitted to pronounce her vows on the reason that she had no aptitude for the spirit of the Visitation. Her spiritual ways might be nothing but delusions. This caused her great sorrow. She had to wait patiently, meanwhile making a close relationship with God. After two more months she was allowed to take vows. During these trials, Margaret affirmed her intention to do the Will of God. She did nothing but obey so that she might suffer for her Jesus. As her mistress advised her, she often presented herself before the Blessed Sacrament like a blank canvas before a painter. He made her understand that on this waiting canvas, He wanted to paint all the marks of His suffering life, the mystery of His passion and death. She concluded,

.....I shall only say that this is what has given me so great a love for the cross that I cannot live a single instant without suffering, but suffering in silence, without consolation, relief or compassion, and dying with

this Sovereign of my soul, crushed under the cross by every sort of shame, humiliation, rejection and scorn (Pourrat, Vol.III, 1955, p.326).

The love of the cross and participation in Christ's sufferings were the most important aspects of Margaret's life. She realized that she has chosen to share in His own sacrifice as a victim of reparation. She said,

Since the day I had the happiness to become the bride of the crucified God I never remember being without the dear livery of the cross, beginning with the day of my profession when I had a very perceptible reminder of it (Pourrat, Vol.III, 1955, p.326).

She learned from God the two ways in which perfected souls are santified, a teaching that sheds a clear light on mystical states. One day God enabled her to see two kinds of holiness: "One of love, the other of justice, each distinct in its mode of action, both continually acting upon me" (Ibid., p.326).

Like St.Teresa of Avila, St. Margaret Mary experienced our Lord's sensible presence: "She saw and felt Him near her, and heard Him in a way surpassing any perception by the bodily senses, which might have distracted her. She said that she was unable to stop it, for she had no part in what was going on" (Ibid., p.326).

### ***3.2.2.3 The Message of Revelations***

In the account of the tenth Revelation, Julian of Norwich recorded a vision of the heart of Jesus split in two and Catherine of Siena spoke of an exchange of Hearts with Jesus (Downey, 1993, p.470). Margaret Mary claimed to have received four visions of the heart of Jesus between 1673-1675. The heart of Christ symbolized the center of Christ's humanity. It is the symbolic locus of His affectivity, freedom, and

consciousness, the place where he surrendered to the mystery of God and of life. It is the symbol of love (Downey, 1993, p.470).

For those who love Christ more than anything, they are allowed to share in His cross. Thus St. Paul did not hesitate to say that he found his joy in the suffering. This is also true to Margaret's life. Consecrated suffering filled her with happiness. In her letter to Mother de Saumaise, her superior, she writes

Truthfully, my dear Mother, I don't know what to say to those I love, unless I speak to them of the cross of Jesus Christ, and when I am asked what graces our Lord grants me, an unworthy sinner, I can only speak of the happiness there is in suffering with Jesus Christ, for I see nothing more precious in this life, for those who love Him, than to suffer for love of Him (Cristiani, 1974, p.123).

The heart of Jesus disclosed inwardly to St. Margaret Mary. One day she read these words in His heart: "My love reigns in suffering; it triumphs in humility; it rejoices in unity." Another time the Lord told her "to look at the open wound in His sacred side," to go within it and there lose herself as in the depths of love. His heart is "a delightful garden.....whose flowers are as lovely in their diversity as they are wondrous in their beauty." Into this garden she was invited to enter. Moreover, the heart of Jesus is "a spring of living water." But these manifestations were only a preparation for the great external revelations that were to come.

Margaret experienced four visions of Jesus Christ, concerning devotion towards His Heart as symbolizing His love for mankind, which men so often reject. The first revelation happened on St. John the Evangelist's day, December 27, 1673.

Before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, God allowed her to rest for a long time on His divine breast and revealed to her that His divine Heart so passionately loves all men and especially her that He was no longer able to contain the flames of its burning charity, it had to pour them forth to all through her. He chose her for fulfilment of His plan. About one or two months after the first revelation, the second revelation took place. The Lord showed His Heart surrounded by thorns and surmounted with a cross: it symbolizes the part of the Saviour's manhood that suffered most during His passion. And He made her understand more that devotion to His Divine Heart was to be for the reparation of sins. In the third apparition, Jesus asked her to promote the practice of receiving Holy Communion on the first Friday of each month, and the practice of a Holy Hour before the Blessed Sacrament during the night of Thursday to Friday. Finally, in the fourth apparition, He requested that a liturgical feast in honor of the Sacred Heart be instituted in the Church and this feast was to be celebrated on Friday after the end of the Octave of Corpus Christi.

Margaret's mission was to spread these devotions to Catholics both religious and lay everywhere. She had (1) to make known to the world the Sacred Heart of Jesus which symbolizes love known to the world, (2) to recommend the First Fridays and Holy Hour devotions in reparation for man's ingratitude and in compassion for the sufferings of the Saviour's passion; and (3) to obtain the institution of a Feast of the Sacred Heart for the Friday after the octave of Corpus Christi. Margaret assures us that these exercises of devotion are the most suitable for raising a soul to the highest perfection in a short time and for enabling one to taste the real sweetness of serving Jesus Christ (Pourrat, Vol.III, 1955, p.332).

In carrying out her mission Margaret expected so many difficulties that she protested to Christ, referring to her own unworthiness. Then the divine Master replied,

.....do you not know that I make use of the weak to confound the strong, and that I usually show forth My power most strikingly upon the little ones and (the) poor in spirit that they may attribute nothing to themselves (Pourrat, Vol III, 1955, p.330)?

Then Father La Colombiere, the new superior of the Jesuit house of Paray, came to help, promising "everything possible to establish this devotion" and thus bring happiness to the divine heart (Pourrat, Vol III, 1955, p.330).

All the visions Margaret received make clear that Christ wants our participation in His passion, and also to make reparation to His honor. This is later the idea the Church has chosen to emphasize in Margaret Mary's message. Her visions and teachings were approved by the Church. In his Encyclical Miserentissimus Redemptor, Pope Pius XI has clearly made this point:

When Christ appeared to Margaret Mary and revealed His infinite charity to her, He also let her perceive a kind of sadness in Him in His complaints against the countless and grievous insults He suffered by reason of men's ingratitude. May the words He then spoke become firmly emgraved in the souls of the faithful and never be erased!

(Cristiani, 1974, p.120)

Then he declares that one of our principal duties toward the Heart of Jesus is the "reparation of honor," which we called a duty "in justice and love." Because "compensations are due to uncreated Love for the injustice inflicted upon it by neglect and indifference or by offenses committed against it."





### 3.3 Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Spiritualities of Suffering

Here are two important quotations about two of the great spiritual masters of our times. Yves Congar stated that "the beacons which the hand of God has set aflame on the threshold of the atomic century are called Therese of Lisieux and Charles de Foucauld." (Aumann, 1989, p.261) Paul VI stated to the Focolare originated by Chiara Lubich, "Be faithful to your inspiration which is modern and so fruitful" (Catholic Encyclopedia, 1967, p.234).

Therese of Lisieux and Chiara Lubich are two vital models of lives for the modern world, a world in which people seek new inventions to better their lives and ignore the value of suffering. Suffering held a great place in their spiritual lives and their teachings witness to the power and efficacy of suffering with Christ. In 1996, the Church celebrated the 100th year anniversary of Therese's death; Chiara Lubich is still alive.

#### 3.3.1 *St. Therese of Lisieux (1873-1897)*

Therese was born on January 2, 1873, at Alençon, France and moved to Lisieux at an early age. She was the last of the nine in a middle-class family influenced by religion. Her mother died when she was still quite young. Her father was a warm, loving man whose life was grounded in his Catholicism. He and her sisters cared for Therese very kindly. From her earliest days, Therese was so attracted to Jesus and to religious life that she intended to be a nun. The young child became convinced that spiritual perfection was attained in large part through suffering and that obedience to God's will is very important. At the age of fifteen, she was permitted

to enter the Carmelite convent where two of her sisters already were. She received her religious name as "Sister Therese of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face."

Living only to 24 years of age, and with only 9 years in the convent, she died of tuberculosis after much suffering on September 29, 1897. Her life in the convent was completely unknown to the outside world. But already by the year following her death, she became known all over through her The Story of a Soul which is the book she wrote in obedience to her Prioresses a few years before she died.

The Story of a Soul became a modern spiritual classic. The book is a collection of three manuscripts written for three different people. The first was written in 1895 for her older sister, Pauline, who was Mother Agnes, the Prioress of the convent at that time. It is a series of her childhood memories until her long-awaited acceptance into the Carmelite convent at the age of fifteen. The second was the shortest of the three. She wrote it to her sister, Marie (Sister Marie of the Sacred Heart), in September of the next year. Therese reveals her discovery that it is only love that makes us acceptable to God.

The last was written for Mother Marie de Gonzague during Therese's last illness. Therese discusses her 7 years in religious life and this part reveals her own real self. She says that the Lord has shown her how insignificant she is and indicates that now she faces continuous suffering with peace and joy rather than with the bitterness of an earlier period. She relates her month-long illness that also brought her a happy anticipation of heaven. But she did not ask God for the favour of being allowed to die young although she believed that she would. However, if it were God's will that she continue on this earth in order to serve others, she would gladly do so, at

Carmel or at various missionary locations wherever God chose to send her (Pourrat, 1955, p.450).

Therese is a saint for the modern world. She did not suffer any bloody martyrdom or public dramatic suffering, but she showed us how to take the ordinary things and the constant trials of everyday life as the means for sanctity and above all in doing them with "LOVE". She said her way is the "Little Way."

### ***3.3.1.1 Suffering to Save Souls***

Through her meditation, Therese had a deep appreciation of the Gospels: "God is Love". For her, God's love is a merciful love bending down to our nothingness to transform it into a fiery love for Himself. Therese gained this insight and realized that God's love extends to all men. Christ has given His life for all. So she devoted herself wholeheartedly to making her life a complete act of love and for the salvation of souls.

The desire of gaining souls for God was kindled in Therese's heart since she was a child and she regarded enlightened suffering as the price for gaining souls. The Lord made her understand that if she wished to win souls for Him it must be through the cross. She wrote of her experiences to Pauline that she received a grace which changed her heart first on Christmas 1886. Love filled her heart with the desire of always forgetting herself. She experienced a great desire to work for the conversion of sinners. Like the apostles, Jesus made her a fisher of men. Some time later, it was a Sunday of July, 1887- while closing her missal, a picture of the crucifixion slipped sideways out from its pages, showing her a hand pierced and bleeding. That sight made her heart fill with sorrow. Her greatest sorrow was to see the Precious Blood

falling to the ground without any one hastening to collect it. She determined to stay continually at the foot of the Cross and receive it and soon realized she would have to spread it among other souls (The Story of a Soul, pp. 62-63).

Henceforth, she understood her role to cooperate in the work of redemption by suffering. She constantly heard Jesus expressing His thirst of love for souls. Therese burned with this desire of saving souls. She sacrificed continually, suffering both physical and mental anguish, offering everything to God and keeping nothing for herself so that she could purchase souls for Him.

This determination remained with her for the rest of her life. She explained to her sister Celine the reason she chose the cloistered life instead of an active missionary life was that she could suffer more self-denial and mortification in the cloister and thereby gain more souls for Jesus. Therese fulfilled her intention in entering the convent, to save souls and to pray for priests by her continual prayer and suffering (Autobiography, p.91) She writes,

If one wants to achieve one's object, one has to use the right means, and as Jesus had told me He would give me souls through the cross, I welcomed the Cross and my love of suffering grew steadily. For five years I trod this path, but no one else knew of it (Autobiography, p.91).

Therese suffered a great deal in her whole life. Even though she lived a short life (only 24 years and eight months when she died), she was proclaimed a saint by Pope Pius XI in 1925, and in 1927 she was named Patroness of the missions along with St. Francis Xavier. In 1944, Pope Pius XII named St. Therese co-patroness of France, together with St. Joan of Arc (Aumann, p.262).

### 3.3.1.2 *Her Little Way*

All the saints have their own means to reach perfection. Most of them have lived a life full of austerity and hard penances. But Therese showed us how to take the ordinary things and the constant trials of everyday life as the means for sanctity. She insisted on teaching her "Little Way" which is straight, short and entirely new. She wanted to teach souls to take this way to perfection. On 17 July 1887 before she died, she said to her sister, Mother Agnes :

I feel that I'm about to enter my rest. But I feel especially that my mission is about to begin, my mission of making God loved as I love Him, of giving my little way to souls....." (Her Last Conversation, John Clarke.Trans. 1977, p.102).

And when she was asked about the "way" she wanted to teach to souls, she said,

It is the way of spiritual childhood, it's the way of confidence and total abandon. I want to teach them the little means that have so perfectly succeeded with me, to tell them there is only one thing to do here on earth: to cast at Jesus the flowers of little sacrifices, to take Him by caresses; this is the way I've taken Him, and it's for this that I shall be so well received" (Her Last Conversation, John Clarke.Trans. 1977, p.257).

Therese tells us that she discovered her little way in the Holy Scripture. Her discovery happened in June,1897. She told her Mother Pauline that she had always desired to become a saint. But when she compared herself with other saints, she felt

discouraged, but still hoped in God. She thought He would not make her wish what was impossible. She tried to look for some means of a little way she considered as a lift to carry her to Jesus. And she found this lift in the Holy Scripture, she said:

So I sought in Holy Scripture some idea of what this lift I wanted would be, and I read these words from the very mouth of eternal Wisdom : "Whosoever is a little one, let him come to me." I drew nearer to God, fully realized that I had found what I was looking for. I also wanted to know how God would deal with a "little one", so I continued my search and found this: "You shall be carried at the breasts and upon the knees; as one whom the mother caresseth, so will I comfort you." Never before had I been gladdened by such sweet and tender words. It is your arms, Jesus, which are the lift to carry me to heaven. And so there is no need for me to grow up. In fact, just the opposite: I must stay little and become less and less

(Autobiography, p.114)

Hence in order to be a saint, we must go to God by way of humility, confidence and abandonment. It means that we acknowledge our nothingness, to worry about nothing, seeking only to gather the flowers of sacrifice and offer them to the Lord.

Therese said that this way is short, straight and new. It is short because straight way we go to God as infinite love and He accomplishes in us what we cannot. It is new because it relies totally on the merciful love of God.



In order to carry out our suffering, Therese told us to learn to suffer moment to moment, for the cross is less heavy when we carry only what is actually laid on our shoulders. "We can bear much suffering, when we suffer it from moment to moment." (Her Last Conversation, p.64) Moreover, we receive grace only for the present moment. To stop and recall the sufferings we have already endured; to try to foresee what might happen to us, is a vain pursuit and merely serves to increase our burden of crosses. She wrote: "I'm suffering only for an instant. It's because we think of the past and the future that we become discouraged and fall into despair" (Her Last Conversation, p.155).

Therese understood the greatness and effectiveness of suffering. It's God's gift to men. Moreover, it sanctifies us and increases our capacity for happiness. It is the instrument of the salvation of the souls. For it serves to identify us with the suffering Christ and makes us His co-workers in the plan of redemption. It is by means of suffering that we sanctify ourselves.

Sanctity does not consist in saying beautiful things, it  
does not even consist in thinking them, in feeling

them....it consists in suffering and suffering (To Celine 26 April 1889).

This is her "little way," the way of complete abandonment to God. But to live in its fullness as Therese conceived and lived it presupposes heroic faith, hope and love. By this way we can find the peace of union with Him.

### 3.3.2. Chiara Lubich

Chiara Lubich is the Foundress and President of the Focolare<sup>14</sup> Movement which is said by some to be the most extraordinary and silent revolution to come about within the Catholic Church in the last fifty years. The aim of the movement is to strive for LOVE and UNITY, as universal principles that can be lived by everyone.

The spirituality of love and unity attaches to people of all religions, and no religion. Not long after Chiara started the movement, people of all walks of life joined the movement and practiced her spirituality. After 50 years, the membership is about 110,000 internal members and two million adherents from other religions: Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Zoroastrians and Buddhists and from among Christians of other denominations such as Orthodox, Lutherans and Anglicans. Approximately 20 million people altogether are reached through international gatherings and the mass-media. In 1962, the Movement was initially approved by Pope John XXIII, and in 1987 Pope Paul VI described the Movement as "a tree that has become luxuriant and fruitful." Chiara Lubich herself was awarded the Templeton Prize for progress in religion in 1977.

In 1987, she was appointed by Pope John Paul II as an observer to the Synod of Bishops on the vocation and mission of the laity. She also was appointed as a permanent consultor to the Vatican regarding participation of lay persons in Church

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<sup>14</sup> Focolare is an Italian word which literally means the "fireplace." It refers to the fireplace of a home where, in winter, family members used to gather around to keep themselves warm and where food was cooked. The word connotes a feeling of communion among family members, the warmth of loving relationships, and the security of a stable family.

affairs. In 1996, she was awarded the 1996 Unesco Prize for " Education for Peace." In December 1996, Chiara took a trip to Thailand invited by the great Buddhist master Ajarn Thong, to meet and address the Buddhist monks at Chiang Mai.

Chiara was born on January 22, 1920 in Trent, Italy. She was brought up in a family with very diverse ideologies: her brother was a Communist, her father a leading Socialist, and her mother a devout Catholic (very few Socialists were Catholic in Italy in those days). Chiara matured firmly in her religious faith. She was only 23 when she founded the Focolare Movement in 1943 in her hometown during World War II ( Lubich, 1992, pp.29-32).

### *3.3.2.1 From an Origin in Suffering to Growth as A Worldwide Movement*

The Focolare Movement had the humblest of origins, like every tree originating from seed. Its growth happened as the Gospel says,

If a kernel falls to the ground and dies not, it remains single, but if it dies it produces many fruits (Jn 12:24 ).

This is true to the Focolare movement. The Focolare Movement started when Chiara and a group of her young friends experienced the consequences of hatred between peoples. While bombs fell over their city, they huddled in the underground shelters where they read the Scriptures and came to realize that Love is the only ideal worth living for, and nothing else. Chiara reported,

As the war and its destruction continued, my friends and I tried to give a meaning to our lives. All our youthful dreams fell apart. The girl who had been looking forward to a family of her own received the tragic

news of her fiance's death at the front, the one who had had great hopes for her studies couldn't get to the university because of the road blocks, the one who was planning to set up a beautiful home saw it destroyed by the bombs, and so on. Each of us discovered how frail our dreams had been, but, at the same time, it was as if the war was teaching us an important lesson, that "all is vanity": everything passed.

We couldn't give our all to such transitory things (Lubich, 1992, p.44).

In and through suffering, God helped her to understand the words of Christian teaching that "God is love" and "Where there is love, there is God". To her surprise, these words which she had, heard so many times in the past, acquired a new meaningfulness in time of suffering. Chiara and her friends realized that by putting the words into practice, the world would change. "God is love" is a reality that no bomb can destroy. Only God lasts forever. Surrounded by the painful circumstances of the war, they would practice love. They began to offer their assistance to the homeless and the poor; they shared what they had with those who suffered, confident that among these people they saw the face of God. They believed that in the suffering people and through the suffering people Jesus could be loved (Lubich, 1977, p.38). By acts of charity, they experienced within themselves the fruits of the Spirit: the fullness of joy, light and peace.

The Focolarini (the members) believe that everything that happens, joy or suffering, can become part of God's plan, permitted by His love. It means that God loves us as a father who loves his children. The life of Chiara and her group took on a new meaning. There was a great revolution inside and around them in living the

new spirituality based so exclusively on "mutual love". The people around them were inspired and amazed by the way they lead their lives, and decided to join them. Later on, a small group became a bigger community. This was the humble foundation of the Movement which Chiara and her friends started more than 50 years ago. And it resembles a tree. The movement has twenty-two different branches and is active in about 156 countries today (Lubich, 1992, p.8).

### ***3.3.2.2 The Theology of "Jesus Forsaken" : Key to Union with God and with Neighbor***

Love and redemptive, transformed suffering are the truly vital elements of the Focolare Movement (Lubich, 1977, p.50). Love brings unity with God and with others. And in order to love God and neighbors, one must suffer purely and without bitterness. Chiara attained to a deep understanding of how much Jesus suffered on the cross when He cried:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me

(Mt 27:46; Mk 15:34).

She was fascinated by that cry of Jesus who felt abandoned from His Father. The theology explaining this is that since Jesus chose to bear the diverse kinds of human suffering, He bore the human suffering of abandonment too: He chose to be deprived of the consolation of His divine nature so He called fully experience with His human nature the agony of abandonment. Chiara understood that the spiritual suffering of Jesus was at once His great love for the Father and His love for men. Sufferings become a motive and an invitation for her to love and to suffer more

intensely like her Master in order to make present the God who wills the salvation for all. She said,

If Jesus' greatest pain was His abandonment by His Father, we will choose as our Ideal "the Forsaken One" and that is the way we will follow Him (Lubich, 1985, p.46).

She affirmed to the members that it was therefore necessary to love Jesus in this way within oneself and in others, to embrace through love all separations, and yet discover the face and heart of the Forsaken One in all who suffer. For the spiritual feeling of abandonment seems inherent in every human suffering.

In Christianity, love generally overcomes suffering. Mutual charity involves the mutual sharing of suffering. Chiara says,

It is not that the Lord asked us always to die for one another; indeed this is the maximum measure of love. He asked us for other, smaller things. For example, we suffered with her (the fellow-member of the groups) and the cross was divided out; if another was very happy, we were happy with her and the happiness was multiplied (Lubich, 1985, p.10).

She also added that the more we loved Christ in everyone, renouncing ourselves, the more our heart was filled with the divine, and the more easily in the evening prayer the Lord made our soul feel his sweet presence. Living in the spirituality of "Jesus Forsaken" is the way to union with God and neighbor (Lubich, 1985, p.26).



Chiara learned and experienced love while she was faced with suffering all around. In her book Unity And Jesus Forsaken, Chiara Lubich expresses these two inseparable elements of Christian spirituality:

The book of light that the Lord is writing within my soul has two aspects-- a page shining with mysterious love: Unity. A page luminous with mysterious suffering: Jesus Forsaken. They are two sides of a single coin (Lubich, 1985, p.7).

The Focolare has been living by these two pages of light since then, for it has been rooted in love for Jesus Forsaken and been working for unity within and outside of the Church. They are also universal principles that can be lived by everyone, in all vocations, and make it possible to live in the Spirit of Jesus. That is to say, to share his own sentiments of love, in the indissoluble experience of death and resurrection, in the continuous and luminous transition from suffering to love, in union with the very Spirit of the Crucified-Risen One (Lubich, 1985, pp.8-9).

# **CHAPTER IV**

## **TENTATIVE APPLICATIONS FOR CONTEMPORARY**

### **THAI WOMEN RELIGIOUS**

Now I feel my investigation of Biblical views of suffering, of Church teaching on suffering, and the relevant teachings of six women spiritual instructors, is accomplished. Permit me to offer this one page recapitalation, and then pass on to my last topic.

The Old Testament gives perspectives as (1) suffering as punishment for sin (Gn 2-3). Suffering can be (2) a test of a faith, as in the case of Job who always lives a good life and turns away from evil, though he must suffer tremendously (Jb 1:8, 2:3). Suffering has (3) a redemptive value. The Suffering Servant takes on suffering for the benefit of others (Is 40-55).

The New Testament continues to teach that evil is punished and good rewarded, but stresses that these do not necessarily happen within this life. Justice comes through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, but will not triumph on earth until Christ's second coming at the end of the world. The New Testament put an emphasis on suffering for others as Jesus died for others.

Paul sees in suffering both life and hope. All suffering can produce something good if an intention is right. He assured us that suffering at present cannot compare with the glory that is to come (Rm 8:18).

The Church sees suffering as participation with Christ in saving the world. Redemption is accomplished through suffering. Suffering is inseparable from humanity's earthly existence. The passion of Christ is the key for an individual to understand suffering,

St.Catherine of Siena sees suffering as God's correction. She herself chose to live a life of extreme mortification to please God and to make reparation to Christ. Julian of Norwich emphasize the positive side more. Suffering can give way to joy. It is permitted by God for us to learn how to love God and for others to be saved. Julian saw the maternal love of God. She compares our natural mother giving her milk to us, so our mother Jesus feeding us with Himself. Jesus suffered and died to bring us to life.

St. Teresa of Avila values suffering as the way to perfection. God gives more trials to those who love more. Love is the measure for being able to bear all suffering. And this is the way to perfection. St.Margaret Mary sees suffering as reparation for sin. All the visions she received conveyed that Christ wants our participation in His passion and also in order to make reparation to His honor.

St.Therese of Lisieux set an example in her own life by accepting the ordinary things and constant trials in everyday life as means for sanctity and the instruments for gaining souls. Chiara Lubich, by her own experience of suffering, sees suffering lead to unity.

The present chapter is the writer's attempt to offer some possible responses for contemporary women religious in Thailand about how to interpret suffering in their everyday lives and their mission.

There may be a question, "Is there a place for suffering in religious life ? The answer is surely "Yes." People who vow themselves to poverty, chastity and obedience are really supposed to suffer as part of their religious commitment. By profession, the religious lay themselves open to suffering. Their lives are in a sense dedicated to suffering. But at times suffering can mute a religious's positive relation with God and can even blot their response (good intentions and desires) to God's call. Some became depressed, lose faith, and finally leave the religious life.

First of all, the writer would like to outline what religious life is.

Religious life ( Glazier, 1994, p.736) is a call to a particular form of Christian discipleship. It is rooted in a personal call for a Christian to follow Christ in the service of God and mankind. The religious distinguish themselves as persons who take three vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, and live in community according to a specific constitution or rule of life. Vatican Council II affirmed religious as belonging to the life and holiness of the Church.

### **What are vows?**

**Vows** (Glazier, 1994, p.904) are solemn promises made freely to God to do some task or to live according to a certain way of life. By profession of religious vows, an individual dedicates one's life to God and the service of God's people through a public commitment which is liturgically celebrated. The traditional vows of religion are poverty, chastity and obedience.

The vow of poverty, traditionally understood, means that all resources are held in common. Religious people own nothing for themselves. One asks for what one needs. The community lives a simple life like the poor and depends on God in order

to imitate Jesus Christ who emptied Himself. One who vows poverty witnesses to hospitality, detachment, service to the poor and commitment to justice.

As for the vow of chastity, in order to serve God and mankind fruitfully, a religious person chooses a single life, not to marry and have children or engage in sexual activity, so that one can love God and devote oneself to the service of the people of God.

As for the vow of obedience, a religious person takes the example of Jesus Christ who came to the world to do God's will. A religious does so by obeying Community leaders, Church documents and rules of the order. Through faith, religious recognize the manifestation of God's will for them through the superiors of the community religious obey as if the command comes from God.

Every religious community is identified by its specific charism or "community spirit," such as education for the poor, teaching, hospital work, youth work, peace and justice apostolate and parish work, health care for the most abandoned. Each generation of religious receives, clarifies, deepens, and shares the charism in ways appropriate for the culture and time.

Religious institutes are either diocesan and called local institutes or of pontifical right, and called international institutes. Diocesan institutes are subject to the local diocesan authority. Institutes of pontifical right report directly to the Holy See, especially to the Congregation of Religious and Secular Institutes.

Religious people in the Catholic Church are either male or female. Men religious are called "Brother." If they are ordained they are "Priest," too. Women religious are called "Sister."

In Thailand, there are both male and female religious, the latter being the larger groups. There are 7 local and 23 international institutes for women religious in Thailand. The total member of religious is about 2000.

Be warned! Suffering can be the cause of personal destruction as well as an invitation to personal growth! The value of suffering is contingent upon personal response when suffering enters our lives. Suffering by itself is never a friend, but it need not be an enemy. It can be a source of meaning in one's life; it can gift one with compassion for others; and it can call one to work for the eradication of suffering in the lives of oppressed neighbors (as religious call demands). Then, we can see how suffering can be expressed through our creativity, and how it can unite one to the Suffering Christ by participation with Him..

#### 4.1 Suffering and God

Naturally, those who have medical problems look for doctors and those who have financial problems turn to their friends or relatives. As soon as there is a glimmer of hope that help might be coming, they begin to feel relieved. When faced with suffering, Christians and especially religious turn to God for help, asking Him to release their pain. But what kind of God do they look for in the midst of suffering? A God who may take the suffering away, or a God who (in Jesus) has chosen his uniquely divine way of dealing with our suffering? They are free to choose.

Let's consider Job in the Old Testament. God declared Job blameless and upright, yet Job suffers tremendously. His friends came to him with all kinds of reasons and advice for understanding of his suffering. But that caused him more suffering. He could not find any answers at first. Once he really realized how superior God is to himself, he humbled himself and trusted in God. His new attitude made him



feel better immediately. It was in his own suffering that Job found the Lord. Christians and religious should have the same attitude.

#### ***4.1.1 Suffering as God's Punishment***

The Scriptures, from the beginning to the end, are the story of God's love. God is Love (1 Jn 4:16). Christians believe that God is all-knowing and all-loving. He is the creator of the heaven and earth. God is infinitely Good and Perfect. Since Goodness is of itself communicative, tending to be shared by others, out of Divine Love, God created all the world to share His Goodness. The Bible says:

God saw all he had made, and indeed it was very good (Gn 1:31).

Particularly in man, God made a being different from other creatures. He created man in His own image and likeness, which means human beings have rationality and free will.

Let us make man in our own image, in the likeness of ourselves, and let them be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of heaven, the cattle, all the wild beasts and all the reptiles that crawl upon the earth (Gn 1:26).

This means that man as a personal and moral being already exists in God's image (Hick, 1966, p.290). Each human being is capable of having a direct personal relationship with God, a relationship of knowledge, love, friendship and communion. This indicates that man, in his first creation, receives the human dignity which is based on the fact that God cares for all His creatures according to their capacity.

.....you are precious in my eyes,..... and I love you (Isa 43:4),

I have loved you with an everlasting love; so I am constant in my affection for you (Jr 31:3).

In the history of Israel, we often heard of God's goodness and mercy. God has chosen his people Israel and has entered into relationship with man in so personal a way through the prophets. The people are always protected by God's love. The climax of His love is that He did not turn away from His people in spite of their repeated unfaithfulness.

But man does not live in the love of God. Then suffering exists in humanity. The book of Genesis gives us a clear message that the origin of suffering is sin, in the fall of Adam who is both an individual and responsible as the first human for the status of all mankind. We suffer because we sin. The punishment is appropriate to the specific functions of each: the woman suffers as mother and wife, the man as bread-earner (Gn 3:16-19). But the worst thing is the loss of intimacy with God. Suffering affects us as a result of sin, from the misuse of free will and from disobedience. And the connection is necessary and natural. It is like getting sick when one drinks poison.

Sin needs atonement. While God is Goodness itself, he is also justice itself.

God is a righteous Judge (Ps 7:11).

He judges the world with righteousness, He judges the peoples with equity (Ps 9:8).

Justice demands payment. Suffering is the payment of sin. Paul indicates that in the long run:

Pain and suffering will come to every human being who employs himself in evil.....honour and peace will come to everyone who does good.....God has no favorite (Rm 2:9-11).

God like a good parent sometimes practices “tough love.” It is precisely because good parents love their children that they practice love this way. They want their children to correct their misconduct and to grow in maturity. They train them, they teach them, they punish them, so that eventually they can share in the joy and happiness of maturity. That is how God loves human beings too. But He is training and disciplining us for the most lasting things---- to share in His holiness and bear the weight of His glory (Rm 8:18, Heb 2:7-13).

Anyhow, God does not abandon human beings. Immediately after the fall of Adam, God begins the long restoration program of the history of Christianity through Jesus Christ, His only Son, who will destroy sin, death and suffering and restore human nature:

God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not be lost but may have eternal life (Jn 3:16).

God has chosen to make the suffering and death of Jesus be the expression of His love for man. The suffering and death of the Son manifested the unconditional love of God. Because Jesus is God, we can say that Jesus' suffering is God's own. God suffers with us. This is how we know what love is. Jesus Christ gave his life for us (1 Jn 3:16).

Ulrich Eibach maintains that "a God who cannot suffer cannot be close to the suffering creature" (Theological Studies 52(1991) p.331). God, as man, knows all suffering by experiencing it Himself. It came to Him in many forms. He knew poverty from birth and all the disadvantages that poverty brings. He was a labourer

who worked for a living with his hands. He lacked the education and opportunities of the upper classes, and suffered the consequences all his life.

Naturally, the beloved wishes to be as closely as possible with the lover. Since Jesus is He who suffered most out of love for us, we wish to return that love by suffering with him out of love for him.

#### ***4.1.2 Suffering as Christlike***

Human beings are created in God's image and His likeness. We long for fellowship with God. Therefore the way for us to realize ourselves is to live according to His image and likeness. The features of this likeness are revealed in the person of Christ. God has sent us His Son, Jesus, to conform ourselves not only to God's rationality and free will, but in particular as Christians to Christ's special image: to His image as Paul says,

They [who love God] are the ones he chose specially long ago and intended to become true images of His Son (Rm 8:29).

This conveys that Jesus Christ as God's image has come. Human should imitate him so that the fallen man should be restored to the "new man" and to the glory of God. Peter also says,

This, in fact, is what you were called to do, because Christ suffered for you and left an example for you to follow the way He took (1 Pet.2,21).

All Christians are called to imitate Christ and this necessarily includes an imitation of His attitude towards suffering.

If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save

his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it (Mt 16:24-25).

A disciple's fate should be closely connected with that of his Master. Following Jesus is no guarantee that one will avoid suffering, but quite the opposite. Jesus makes it clear to his followers that to be his disciple is to share in the cross. The disciples, who share their Lord's destiny, must expect suffering, rejection and persecution.

The disciple is not superior to his teacher, nor the slave to his master (Mt 10:24).

But fidelity to the Master means that the disciples must enter into the same struggle that Jesus entered to fulfill God's plan for creation. Those who surrender their lives to God in imitation of and for the sake of the crucified Jesus, will receive the fullness of life as a gift from God.

Jesus tells His disciples that His role as Messiah was to suffer, to be rejected, to be put to death, but after three days to rise again (Mk 8:31).

It is because Jesus suffered and died that Christians, as imitators of Christ, must also suffer and die, and only then can they share in His resurrection. According to Paul, one who proclaims and lives by the teaching of Christ must expect to come into conflict with worldly structures and be persecuted by them (2 Tm 3:12). It is by enduring in the midst of this conflict that one wins the right to inherit eternal glory (2 Cor 4:17). To follow Christ means to have renounced the world and all that it stands for in opposition to Christ's teachings (Ga 5:24). This is why Paul delivered himself to that death and life with joy (Col 1:24).

The teaching of the Beatitudes (Mt 5:3-11) is a highlight of Jesus' teaching. It clarifies the character of true discipleship. His disciples will experience suffering similar to that their Master withstands. But Jesus indicates that His disciples should be happy when being insulted and persecuted for following Him, for their reward will be great in heaven. Here again, Jesus makes it clear that anyone who makes the commitment to Him and His teaching will find himself in opposition to the world and its standards. In Jesus' disciples, the suffering and death of Christ must take place before they can share in God's glory.

Religious are called to walk as He walked. In our own way, in our own lives, in our mission, religious are called to "make up in our bodies what is lacking in the suffering of Christ" (Col 1:24). And those who follow His way will never lack for reward. Once the disciples asked Jesus what will they gain from the hardships they encounter on the road to holiness. Jesus reminds them:

There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life (Mk 10:29-30).

Suffering for religious can take many forms: individual suffering and suffering in the apostolate. They include the acceptance of oneself and others in living the common life; acceptance too, of our talents or lack of them, of the responsibilities of work, or of trying to cope with our fellow humans in this. Sometimes this includes persecution, being slandered, poverty, obedience, selfless service, inner and outer discipline, discouragement and sorrow, loneliness, sickness and suffering, and death



in its various forms. No matter what, we must say “no” to the world in so far as the world is organized against the kingdom of God.

There is no contradiction in this. For under earthly conditions, to love very often means to suffer.

#### 4.2 Suffering as Means to Growth

A modern wise man in a Nazi concentration camp wrote :

If life as a whole has meaning,  
then suffering has meaning,  
for suffering is an inherent part of life (Kreeft, 1986, p.170).

The saying is really true. Suffering is real and universal. Since we cannot escape the experience of sorrow and suffering, it is wise to learn how to benefit from it and put it to good use (Hogan, 1990, p.24).

The book of Wisdom, referring to the creation and the fall of man recounted in Genesis, gives us a premise saying:

Death was not God's doing, he takes no pleasure in the extinction of the living.....he made him in the image of his own nature; it was the devil's envy that brought death into the world,...(Ws 1:13-15, 2:23-24).

Our sufferings, though not intended by God, are nevertheless permitted and sent by Him in some ways for Divine purpose:

Consider carefully,  
how evil and bitter it is for you to abandon Yahweh  
your God and not to stand in awe of me--  
it is Yahweh Sabaoth who speaks (Jr 2:19).

Suffering certainly is undesirable experience but it may lead to some greater good. It can convert us from our wicked way. It can help others and it can make us realize who God is. Many have found that after some time has passed they come to realize that some good has come from the suffering. God will work something good from what seems so bad.

#### ***4.2.1 Suffering Leading Us to Some Greater Good***

Suffering offers a prime opportunity for spiritual growth. As our bodily pain serve as a warning sign of something wrong about our organism and that it serves as the preserver of life, so suffering can do the same.

Christians believe that everything comes ultimately from God, even in the case of suffering which God did not originally will. Suffering is, then, not outside His will. And all that He wills in anyway has a purpose. God has reasons for allowing His children to suffer and the reasons are loving. Suffering leads us to holiness. St. Paul says:

He disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness

(Heb 12:10).

Paul explains that salvation comes to us from God through Christ at his initiative, and we need merely open our hearts in faith to receive it. The way we choose to deal with hardships plays an important role in our growth in holiness (Rm 5:1-5) Holiness and suffering are connected. Even Jesus gained something in His human maturity (that is, in His human nature, not His Divine nature) through suffering. St. Paul says:

Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him (Heb 5:8-9).

In this sense, Christ's human nature was made perfect through suffering. His trials paved the way for his resurrection and glory and then salvation for all.

Paul always admonished those who are undergoing trials to expect good, since only good can come from God. He reminded them that sufferings in this earthly life are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us in Heaven (Rm 8:18). According to Paul, Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection are evidence of the possibility that believers can hope to transcend sin, suffering and death. By being one with Him who suffered, a person is able to achieve a state that is free both from suffering and from death. *When we suffer, it is only for our consolation and salvation.*

Paul says :

Indeed, as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so through Christ, does our consolation overflow (2 Cor 1: 5).

Suffering can be a blessing. The meaning and purpose of suffering in the history of Israel is that it leads to repentance. It is only after suffering and disaster that Israel, nations and individuals can back to God and be blessed (Kreeft, 1986, p. 112). Suffering brings repentance. Repentance then leads to blessedness.

Our spiritual freedom allows us to cultivate an attitude of trust and hope in God in the midst of suffering. We know that God finds those irresistible who live and love only to do His will. He is content with simple, daily sufferings which are endured for love of Him. Therefore, we are not to be afraid, fear itself, if it is caused by lack of

trust in God, is evil. Instead, we need to learn to expect good to happen by trust in Him. We can live in faith and hope and be not afraid.

Religious, therefore, will endure suffering patiently without fear or anxiety. No matter how heavily one has to suffer, believers can be sure of Christ's final triumph over all the power of evil. All suffering can work to produce a clear understanding of what is important. It can help us keep our priorities clear. It can produce confidence in God rather than in ourselves, humbling us, showing us our limits and weaknesses, convincing us of how much we need power from on high and help from God. In the Old Testament, God reminds us that sorrow is better than laughter, because when the face is sad the heart grows wiser (Qo 7:3). Thus, suffering can make us truly wise.

Finally, suffering helps us grow in patience and generosity. Through suffering, we learn how to better live. Suffering can lead us to a life of contemplation. It teaches us to trust in God. Present suffering builds on our past suffering so that reflection on how we get through any previous suffering reminds us that God is always present. This strengthens our faith.

#### ***4.2.2 A True Heart is Known***

Suffering serves as a test like gold in the furnace, and testing establishes one as worthy of God. One who can carry on all the trials in one's life proves his faithfulness to God. Through suffering a true heart is known. For this reason God who is the source of all joy, all life and all good, tested the Israelites. The Bible says:

And you shall remember all the ways which the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you,

testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not (Dt 8:2).

Without testing, there is no virtue. It is easy to be virtuous if we are not tempted to do wrong. It is easy not to steal if we feel no inclination to steal. It is only under testing that we discover whether we are honest. Our sufferings serve also as a test of our virtue, to show whether our love is truly for Him. The Old Testament teaches us:

Because thou was acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee (Tb 12:13)

Be mindful how our fathers were tempted, that they might be proved whether they worshipped their God truly; remember how our father Abraham was tempted, and being proved by many tribulations, was made the friend of God. So Isaac, so Jacob, so Joseph, so Moses, and all that have pleased God, passed through many tribulations, remaining faithful (Jdt 8:21-23).

Let us recall Job's story which is familiar to all. Job is put to the severe test. Yet Job's faith in God remains firm as he works through his problem. He is the model of an innocent sufferer who is faithful to God. The biblical story defines Job as a blameless and upright man who feared God and avoided evil. All of his earthly wealth and even his children are taken away from him, then even his health is taken. Through all this, Job remains faithful to God. He even can say that,

Naked I came from my mother's womb,  
naked I shall return.

Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back,

Blessed be the name of Yahweh! (Jb 1:21).

If we take happiness from God's hand, must we not  
take sorrow too(Jb 2:10)?

Suffering can be understood as discipline, sent by God to make us better persons just as earthly fathers who love their sons sometimes must discipline them.

The Bible says:

My son, do not scorn correction from Yahweh,  
do not resent His rebuke;  
for Yahweh reproves the man he loves,  
as a father checks a well-beloved son (Pr 3:12).

Sometimes God's love and mercy may seem severe. But He will never fail us if we stay in His grace and ask for help. A doctor prescribing a bitter medicine or a painful operation does not like the patient to suffer but to be cured. St.Paul tells us:

The trials that you have had to bear are no more than people normally have. You can trust God not to let you be tried beyond your strength, and with any trials he will give you a way out of it and the strength to bear it (1Cor 10:13).

This is why, Jesus tells His disciples to pray and ask for help in order that they might be able to bear all trials which could assail them unexpectedly and tragically:

Do not lead us to the test, but save us from the evil one (Mt 6:13).

Pope John Paul II confirmed that suffering is always a trial for all men and at the same time it will be a proof of Christ's followers. He said:



Suffering, infact, is always a trial---at times a very hard one---to which humanity is subjected (Salvifici Doloris, No.23).

These persecutions and tribulations will also be a particular proof of likeness to Christ and union with him (Salvifici Doloris, No.25).

Sufferings also purify our souls. The Bible says:

Whatever happens to you, accept it, and in the uncertainties of your humble state, be patient, since gold is tested in the fire, and chosen men in the furnace of humiliation (Si 2:4-5).

James was another apostle who saw the purpose of trials as tests so clearly that he could rejoice when they came:

Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (Jms 1:2-4).

All tribulation is a test of love; to those who accept it, it becomes a proof of love as many saints has shown. The six women spiritual teachers whom the writer discusses in this thesis proved their love to God by suffering. The faithful will discover the meaning of suffering to prove their love to Him.

Religious should be grateful to the Lord our God, for putting us to the test, as He did to our forefathers and foremothers. Not for vengeance did the Lord put our holy predecessors in the crucible to try their hearts, nor has He done so with us. It is by way of admonition that He chastises those who are close to Him. God would certainly not permit such evil to come on us if it were not for a greater good that it may bring us, if only we trust in Him and love Him.

### 4.3 Suffering as Healing

The sufferers usually seek for a person who suffered so that they can share their troubles. The wounded person can understand his suffering brothers better than the others. He needs no techniques to approach the sufferers. They can relate to pain on an experiential level. Suffering levels all and unites them in a deep bond of understanding.

When a person experiences suffering and reflects deeply on the meaning of it in his own life, he becomes aware of new depths and creativity in himself. He will find that he is more sensitive to others and is more deeply touched by others and learns to listen with understanding and love. Compassion which is a sense of shared suffering grows in him. The more he opens himself to the pain of others, the more he finds himself in their service.

Jesus redeemed and healed us by His suffering and death. He then called us to continue his redemptive work on earth. Many people who suffer want someone else to feel their pain along with them. What are we Religious to do ? To turn away from their suffering people or to help heal them.

#### 4.3.1 *The Law of Love*

The parable of the Rich man and Lazarus narrated by Luke (Lk 16:19-31) is an invitation for us to have the heart of God: to love. The Rich Man was punished not because of his richness as such but because he ignored the poor and the needy. The Rich Man found himself in a terrible isolation in the next life. But Lazarus who was ignored by the rich man, sits by Abraham's side at the celestial banquet, filled with joy and contentment.

God, in Jesus Christ, expresses his solidarity with men and women, especially the poor, the sick, and the downtrodden. Jesus has become one with his brothers and sisters so that He says:

I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me.....in so far as you neglected to do this to one of the least of these, you neglected to do it to me (Mt 25:40,45).

Jesus is identified with Lazarus lying on the ground at the Rich Man's gate. Those who want to serve God can serve Him in the brothers and sisters, the human beings who live around them. Pope John Paul II reminded American citizens in particular during his visit to the United States in October 1979, alluding to the parable above:

The poor of the United States and the world are your brothers and sisters in Christ. You must never be content to leave them just the crumbs of the feast....You must take of your substance, and not just of your abundance, in order to help them. And you must treat them like guests at your family table

(365 Days with the Lord 1998, St. Paul's Press, Philippines, 1998).

The meaning of suffering is that we are not isolated beings. We need companionship; we need human support and compassion. We need others to talk with about our feelings and we need to share one another's strength. We need someone to listen. Jesus himself sums His teaching up in the Commandment for His followers:

This is my commandment, love one another as I have loved you  
(Jn 15:12).

Love is impossible without works of mercy such as: feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, visiting the sick and imprisoned, teaching youth, assertively correcting and bearing wrongs, ministering to the emotionally impoverished, washing dirty feet, and praying with people. These merciful works are supposed to identify those who have taken His Name to themselves, namely, the Christ-ians. The Scripture says:

be compassionate as your heavenly Father is compassionate (Lk 6:36).

Jesus calls his disciples to behave as He does. To be compassionate one must partake of hunger, nakedness, loneliness and pain; and empathize with ambiguity in the lives of neighbors. The followers of Jesus were to be recognized by their loving concern and their compassionate care of their brothers and sisters. We should not hesitate to do this, because what we do to our neighbors we do to Jesus Christ who gave up everything for love of all mankind. He even forgives those who crucified him.

True disciples should love as the Master loves who loves everyone--the good and the bad, the just and the unjust. Following Jesus in his ministry requires an active work. The Scripture says:

If a man who was rich enough in this world's goods saw that one of his brothers was in need, but closed his heart to him, how could true love of God be living in him? My children, our love is not just words or mere talk, but something real and active (Lk 3:18).

During His human activity on earth, Jesus drew Himself close to the world of suffering. And His actions concerned primarily those who were suffering and seeking help. He was sensitive to every human suffering, whether of the body or of the soul. He healed the sick, consoled the afflicted, fed the hungry, freed people from deafness, from blindness, from leprosy, from the devil and from various physical disabilities, three times restoring even the dead to life. When he taught, the heart of His teaching was the eight beatitudes which are addressed directly to those who suffered in their temporal life (Mt 5:1-12). Jesus goes towards His mission with full awareness He has to fulfill precisely in this way.

The criterion of judgment on the last day is really **LOVE**.

The gospel parable pictures the last day when men are judged on a single criterion: ministry to the needs of one's neighbour. Whatever is done for another, especially for the poor and helpless, is done for him. God does not keep record of isolated or self-serving good works, but of what one shares with those who have less advantage in life. Such a given will receive a great reward. The Scripture says:

When the Son of man comes in his glory,.....All the nations will be assembled before him....Come you whom my Father has blessed, take for your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food.....  
(Mt 25:31-46).

Note how St.Paul values love above all things. He says:

If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal...If I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I gain nothing (1Cor13:1-2).

### 4.3.2 *The World in Need of Help*

Finally, there is no room for endless philosophical speculation about why suffering exists in the world and why the innocent suffer. Suffering is with us. Suffering is human. Christians and Religious in particular should witness to the world's people the meaning and purpose of their suffering actively through their lives and mission.

If suffering is somehow a result of sins, then sin surely continues to work in our time. Religious should not close their eyes to world events. Many people in various countries are so poor, victims of wars and suffering from AIDS. Many are on the edge of death by starvation. While scientific proof and experiential data are much emphasized in our days, the challenge for Religious is to be one with those who suffer by seeing God's face in the poor. God lives on in His members. He is suffering in individual persons and in suffering people. The call for Religious is to see them and serve them.

Religious life is a call to a particular form of Christian discipleship. The call is God's invitation to work in His harvest field. Religious should be the first who respond to God's call:

The harvest is rich, but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to his harvest (Lk 10:2).

Suffering is rooted in the feeling of helplessness. Those who suffer most believe that they are helpless. They want some help. How can a true Religious ignore them?

The parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) has much to teach us Religious. In his Apostolic Letter "Salvific Doloris", Pope John Paul II points to the



parable of the Good Samaritan as belonging to the gospel of suffering. It indicates what the relationship of each one of us must be towards our suffering neighbour. Religious should ask themselves: "Who is my neighbor" (Lk 10:29) ?

"Neighbors" are all around in Thailand and today's world. They are the poor, the needy, the AIDS victims, etc. They all are in need of help. They are helpless. They want someone to touch their suffering.

According to the parable of the Good Samaritan, when the priest and the Levite see the injured man, they pass by on the opposite side. It is the Samaritan who shows mercy to the unfortunate man. Without hesitation, he tends to the robbers' victim and pays the innkeeper to look after him in his absence. The Samaritan shows his love of God by caring for a neighbor who is in need of help. He put his whole heart into it. Jesus points out that he is the real neighbour. In Pope John Paul II's words:

Man cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.  
A good Samaritan is the person capable of exactly such a gift of self.....( "Salvifici Doloris", No.28)

The task of relieving suffering does not stop at sympathy, the Pope states, but must be carried to effective social action involving families, schools and individuals. The Pope expresses his gratitude to those who exercise service to their suffering neighbors in an unselfish way through any kind of social work in which such service can be called an apostolate ( "Salvifici Doloris", No.29)

It is only if we die with Christ that we have the right to hope in being raised with him. A reformation in society and a proclamation of the good news will take place. Jesus' dying love is at the center of the good news. It is the source of our

deepest hope. Because behind the death is the resurrection. Without resurrection, suffering and death are useless. By suffering and death of Jesus Christ all are transformed. The most abandoned, like the AIDS victims, have much to teach us: pardon for the oppressor, willingness to share the little one has, gratitude for the presence and support of others. Only if we share the suffering of our brothers and sisters does our suffering have meaning.

The world of human suffering unceasingly calls, so to speak, another world: the world of human love; and in a sense man owes to suffering whatever unselfish love stirs in his heart and actions. The person who is a "neighbour" cannot indifferently pass by the suffering of another:.....He must stop, sympathize, just like the Samaritan of the Gospel parable. It is not without reason that any activity on behalf of the suffering and needy is called "Good Samaritan" work ("Salvifici Doloris", No.29).

After Jesus is rejected in His native place, by His own people (Mk 6:7-13), he turns his attention to his special disciples (Mk 3:13-19). He sends them on a missionary journey with special instructions on how they must conduct themselves. Especially he gives them authority over unclean spirits: to cure and to heal. Religious who are alert to God's call should listen to what Jesus told the Good Samaritan,--  
 " Then go and do the same" (Lk10:37)!

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

**5.1** Suffering in Christianity concerns itself most of all with faith in God whose love is for all mankind. It is sufficient for a Christian to believe that God, the Creator, is the cause of created things and that there is no existent entity which directly or indirectly is not from Him. Christ came into humanity and suffered with us. In suffering with man, He transformed the meaning of suffering. It is part of His work of redemption. God had paid the price for sin and opened heaven to man, so that those who follow the way Christ did should not perish, but have eternal life. By being one with Christ who suffered, a person is able to finally achieve a state that is free both from suffering and from death, as St. Paul affirms:

Indeed, as the sufferings of Christ overflow to us, so through Christ, does our consolation overflow (2 Co 1:5).

The suffering and death of Jesus Christ can assure us that in imitating Christ in suffering, we participate in the salvation of mankind. In any suffering and in death, God calls each human being close to Himself in Christ, to become Christlike, so that we can transform our suffering in a free act of giving to the Father, and participate in the redemption of humanity. This is the essential novelty in Christians' lives.

At present, he who is one with Christ will indeed continue to suffer. God has promised, however, that man will not be left to suffer continually, but will eventually overcome that suffering through his faith in Christ. Christ Himself is the evidence that

the worshippers may overcome suffering and death as He did. The gospel of St. John says:

In the world you will have trouble, but be brave:

I have conquered the world (Jn 16:33).

**5.2** Suffering provides an opportunity for growth. Every experience of suffering carries within it a lesson for the sufferer himself or for others. It can be an antidote to counteract the evil effects of sin. It can convert us from our own wicked ways. It can help others and it can make us realize more completely the ways of God.

Suffering is life situation which teaches. If we see suffering as a hindrance, frustration, fear and anger will follow. But if we look at it as an opportunity to correct past mistakes, to test our love for God and to learn the lessons it offers on the road to maturity, it will be a blessing, even though at times an uninvited blessing. Everyday in our life, we witness that nothing good, nothing useful, nothing fruitful for the world can be achieved without weariness and pain. Many have found that after some time of undesirable experience, they realize that some good has come from it. In a word, in the present order of thing, nothing good is achieved without some kind of suffering. God can always work something good from what seems so bad, if we cooperate with Him.

In the case of human “fallenness”, without pain and suffering, there would be no self-sacrifice or care for others, no devotion to the public good, courage, perseverance, skill or honesty.

In the present dispensation, sufferings may become a wonderful means to save others by applying Christ's redeeming merits to them who are our brethen in Christ, through our sufferings in union with Christ. St. Paul says:

It makes me happy to suffer for you, as I am suffering now, and in my own body to do what I can to make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of his body, the Church (Col.1:24).

**5.3** Religious life is a call to a particular form of Christian discipleship. The call is part of that great mystery of God's love for a person and that person's faithful response to God's love. For this reason, Religious should stand in the first line to respond to God's love. To accept His love is to learn to suffer with His compassionate love for all. His children still suffer nowadays in various forms. Jesus Christ voluntarily laid down His life so that His disciples might be able to do likewise. This is the Religious' challenge in and for today's world.

Nothing will nourish an apostolic spirituality of a Religious more than focusing on God's love which often reveals itself to us through suffering. However much we suffer, either through our missions or our vowed commitment or through our own fault, all is governed by Christ's mysterious love. In the life of a Religious and in a missionary, suffering may take on forms such as: self-giving, laboring daily in the service of the poor, standing in solidarity with the abandoned and suffering for justice's sake, accepting events that displease us, sharing some of the privations of the poor, bearing our own sickness and that of others, witnessing to gospel values in living religious vows, coming to grips with advancing old age, and so on. We should

know that through our suffering, we Religious exemplify to the Church a radical way of living the Christian life. We should exemplify a reformation that would make the world and our Thai society a better place. We, Christians, must proclaim the ultimate message of Christ: that it is only if we die with Christ that we have a right to hope in being raised with him. Fidelity to the Master means that the disciples must enter into the same struggle that Jesus entered to fulfill God's plan for salvation.

**5.4** Man tries hard to find a satisfying answer to his suffering. He can partially find. No matter how hard one tries, however, unanswered questions remain. At some points, one is finally confronted with an Unknown that no mere intellectual search can resolve. Job and his friends never got an intellectual word which adequately explained suffering. There is an infinite gap between what God as the ultimate Other knows, and what humans know.

We then see that, suffering may not make sense from a temporal perspective, but from a spiritual perspective it is full of meaning and purpose. We are capable of choosing to look in the right direction in the midst of suffering. If we make a crucial choice, we can live in peace and joy and can be a source of peace and joy to others. This is the way of the spiritual life: love, peace, and joy through progress in service to God and His children.

The writer would like to conclude here with St. Augustin's confession:

You seek happiness of life in the land of death, and it is not there. For how shall there be happiness of life where there is no life? But our life came down to this our earth and took away our death, slew down with the abundance of his own life; and he thundered, calling us to



return to him into that secret place from which he came forth to us-- coming first into the Virgin's womb, where humanity was wedded to him, our mortal flesh, though not always to be mortal; and thence "like a bridegroom coming out of his bride chamber, rejoicing as giant to run his course". For he did not delay, but rushed on, calling to us by what he said, and what he did, calling to us by his death and life, descent and ascension, to return to him. and he withdrew from our eyes, that we might return to our own heart and find him (Confession IV, 12).

The passage as a whole emphasizes how essential in the Christian response to suffering is the acceptance of the life and death and resurrection of Jesus. These transform the whole situation. The last sentence specifically insists how these "events" become consequential and indeed causal when they are lived in our hearts as true.

Finally, our Lord reminds us that all of us who suffer on earth: the oppressed, the disinherited, the sick and the poor, the lonely-- all of us who experience personal suffering in our lives must also remember daily our example in Christ and his eternal promise to us. For He says:

So also now indeed you have sorrow, but I will see you again and your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you (Jn 16:22).

**5.5 Suggestions for Further Researches.** The interpretation of suffering here is of course not final. The problem of suffering in Christianity always invites more study. I would like to propose further research in topics such as: (1) The theology of suffering in The Book of Job, (2) The theology of suffering in the Pauline epistles. A religious or anyone interested in this topic will find treasures of inspiration in our Catholic tradition.



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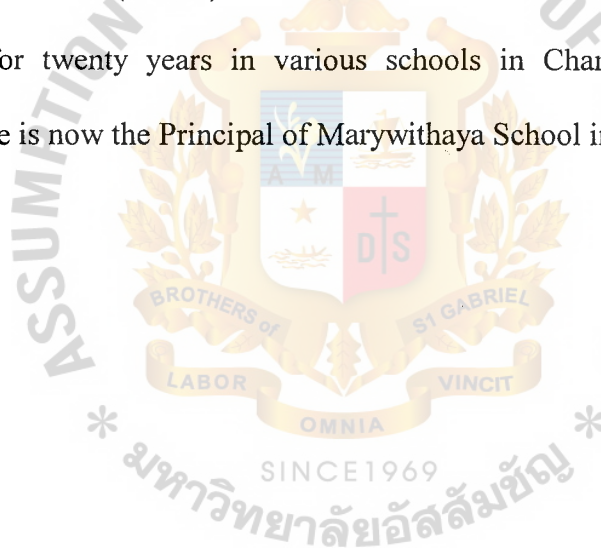
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