

THE PSYCHO-THERAPEUTICAL MANAGEMENT OF SUFFERING IN ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

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ABSTRACT

The present study - elaborated as a theological and psycho-spiritual approach - aims at evidencing one of the fundamental beliefs of Orthodox spirituality, frequently discussed in medical literature, as well, on the genesis and manifestation of suffering, types of suffering, on its psycho-spiritual management through acceptance and turning to good account, on the meaningful investment of a life of suffering, as well as on the complementary role of an interdisciplinary team in the treatment of any type of suffering: physical, psychic, moral, spiritual, existential or social.

Keywords: *suffering, pain, spirituality, psychotherapy, interdisciplinarity.*

1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Human mind has been always interested in discovering the logic and role of suffering, in spite of its inability to find answers to interrogations of the following type: Where does pain come from? Why should one suffer? How is it possible that the human being - a rational, most perfect creature of the world - should be doomed to suffer? This type of questions haunted the minds of the wisest people all around the world, since Antiquity up to our days, while the failure to detect the etiology of suffering and of pain, the irrelevant and erroneous answers provided by some people, as well as the ignorance of others have only multiplied the causes and scopes of deep pain, and increased spiritual turmoils [1].

In the opinion of the contemporary world - a world characterized by comfort, morally mutilated by sin, frivolousness, and too many short-lived delusions - pain/suffering does not appear as a Christian victory, but rather as something that should be avoided. Nowadays,

modern people do not experience suffering following a patristic or eschatological pattern, but - much more frequently than in the past - they flee the suffering, its taking upon and acceptance, thus trying to escape it for good.

One should never forget that any suffering and disease brought about in the life of a person cause profound modifications of his status and role, from both a professional, family, social, interpersonal and intrapersonal perspective. As generally acknowledged, in most situations of pain/disease, the ill one becomes dependent on the others, on his next of kins and on the pluridisciplinary team, that should offer a high quality medical, psychological, social and spiritual assistance, for either psychosomatic healing or for rendering a creative meaning to suffering. An ideal medical and spiritual assistance aims at maintaining one's health condition or at recovering health and the bio-psycho-social and spiritual integrity of each human person.

In this beginning of a new millenium, we understand that contemporary medicine becomes more and more aware of the fact that many of the physical diseases are caused by either spiritual disequilibria or by some negative condition of the soul. The unrest, fear, troubles, failures, regrets, qualms of conscience or remorse cause deep, intense grief, manifested, later on, at physical level.

There exist authors who, in the numerous volumes they wrote, demonstrated that, mainly until the XIXth century, the management and assistance of pain and suffering were exclusively the task of religion; a medical, authentic scientific approach of pain should be mentioned only starting with the year 1970 [2]. A possible

explanation might be that, along the history, melioration of pain and of grief had not been pharmacologically and technically possible, the suffering people looking for support, for the discovery of their internal and external resources exclusively in religion. The techniques applied in such cases - confession, personal or mediated prayer - helped the suffering ones to redefine the experience of pain and grief, to detach themselves psychologically from the painful sensations they used to feel and to attain a certain ease of mind.

Nowadays, probably more than ever, medical literature attests - on the basis of sound investigations and research - that the religious function and the spiritual practices appear as the most frequent resources approached by patients for accepting pain and suffering. Other studies demonstrate that, second to medication, prayer is the most useful strategy of coping with grief. Consequently, such researches recommend a bio-psycho-social and spiritual-pastoral approaching of physical and spiritual suffering, alongwith all the other methods which have demonstrated their efficiency in time [3-9].

The patristic - and, equally, scientific - treatment of physical, psychological and spiritual pain should include aspects underlying the reality that we are unique human beings, created by God's endless love, which gives us an inestimable value; also, management of the spiritual treatment involves an open attitude when confronted with pain, alongwith repentance and acceptance, reconciliation and understanding of life's ultimate meaning, as - according to Viktor Frankl - as soon as the patient finds a logic explanation for his suffering or a meaning for his life, in spite of his grief, he becomes capable to bear it. That is why, the Christian Church recommends Christian physicians to approach pain not only from physical, but also from emotional, social and spiritual perspectives, and to permanently bear in mind the endless love and compassion manifested by our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Christian spirituality provides a remarkable plurality of meanings, all related to some common features of pain, as well as most diverse interpretations. It operates with the holistic concept on malady and suffering, which involves the spiritual, biological, mental and social

compound. From this perspective, pain is not viewed in purely negative terms, instead justifiable explanations are offered on the manner in which pain involves the whole creation; equally, reliable indications are provided on the ways through which pain can be transformed into a spiritual gain.

As known, all theologians of today assert that it is not God the author of suffering; He is, at most, the One who allows suffering: "Suffering is estrange to God's plans and has not been created by Him" [10]. God did not want a suffering human, as demonstrated both by the old-century writings of the Church and by contemporary writers: "In the paradise, prior to his fall, man did not know what suffering is"; [11] this is the result of sin and of an incorrect utilization of our decisional freedom.

A last preliminary aspect refers to the fact that any discussion about grief leads invariably and directly to the love of God, Who is always sharing our suffering and understands it. No matter how paradoxical and absurd might suffering appear in our eyes, it does not exclude the love of God and does not isolate us from Him [12].

2. SUFFERING. CONCEPTUAL AND TAXONOMIC APPROACHES

When discussing the management of suffering's treatment and the efficiency of the psycho-medical and spiritual assistance of the suffering ones, one cannot neglect the notions related to it, such as pain, malady, soul suffering, spiritual turmoil, total pain, existential grief, death, etc. However - according to specialized dictionaries - a first differentiation should be made between suffering and pain.

Even if difficult to define, as - at first sight - such terms might appear as perfectly synonymous, the literature of the field shows a different reality. One should know that, etymologically, the term "suffering" comes from the Latin *suffero*, meaning "bearing patiently the burden of pain" [13]. Other sources define suffering as a physical, moral, psychic and social pain or as the suffering condition of the suffering person [14]. All such considerations associate suffering with pain, when the two terms are frequently employed in

the common language; equally, the spiritual language is also characterized by a relation of equivalence.

Medical literature evidences significant differences between the notions of suffering and pain. *The International Association for the Study of Pain* defines pain as a sensorial and emotional experience, induced by a real or potential tissular lesion, or by a description in terms referring to such a lesion [2]. The unique, globally accepted definition accepts the reality of pain without a compulsory presence of a lesional cause, permitting an integral approach, related to the bio-psycho-social entity of the patient [2].

The term *pain* is also defined as "a sensation of varying intensity, duration, localization and characteristics which permit its classification within a certain category of pain" [13]. Also, pain is described as "an unpleasant sensorial or emotional experience, associated with a real or potential deterioration of tissues", [13] namely "a physical suffering caused by a lesion or a disease, experimented by means of the central nervous system" [15].

Considered in a larger perspective, "pain is a perceptive, polymorphic, multidimensional phenomenon which associates sensorial manifestations with somatic, psycho-affective reactions of suffering, involving some specific and non-specific neurostructures", stress being laid on an elementary aspect, which elucidates the indefinite character of the two concepts, asserting that "separation of the physical suffering from the emotional one is artificial" [2]. According to another interpretation, the notion of suffering involves more than physical or psychic pain, being understood as an unpleasant emotional condition of major intensity, associated with considerable pain and unhappiness" [13].

From a biblical perspective, as described in dictionaries, suffering, considered as the pain of the soul, may be also associated with sadness; equally, the term *suffering* includes, according to the Hebrew vision upon the unitary character of the human being, both emotional and physical pain [16]. For example, the *LiddellScott Lexicon* states that the term $\lambda\omicron\pi\acute{\nu}\epsilon\omega$ also involves a physical, and not only a spiritual grief [17], while, for Anatole Bailly, the third meaning of the term, $\lambda\omicron\pi\eta,-\eta\varsigma$, makes mention of "physical pain" [18].

According to the philosophical and moral-spiritual concepts, pain has to be beared, whereas suffering has to be assumed [19]. Ontologically - as to its meaning and importance - suffering is much more than pain.

In a spiritual perspective, human suffering "is a unique and complex reality of the universe", as it may include both physical and spiritual, metaphysical pain, appearing as a sort of "bite of the absolute" [20]. At any rate, in the human world suffering is universal, a belief firmly and conclusively expressed by both experience and meditation: "Each human bears his tiny grain of pain, either benumbed or active and proliferating" [21]. Some authors define suffering as "a diffuse pain, while a malady gives a name to pain, rendering it specific and peculiar"; anyhow, suffering is a sort of anticipation of death [22].

The psychological perspective asserts that pain is intimately related to grief, being sometimes unjustly confused with it; suffering is one of the conditions configuring blocked situations. In the opinion of Constantin Enăchescu, pain is quite precise, with clear-cut limits. Unlike it, suffering involves a larger area, appearing as a specific spiritual, moral and metaphysical personal experience. Pain is contained in suffering, while suffering is much larger, being possibly manifested even in the absence of pain [23].

As to the *taxonomy* of suffering, in an attempt made at considering all forms of suffering, the human being of our time is doomed to experience it; the religious, as well as the medical literature, begins with a simple, superficial differentiation between physical suffering - the equivalent of concrete maladies or of bodily pain - and the spiritual/psychic suffering (which distorts and alters cognition and emotions), after which, against quite diverse backgrounds, divides it into fragments and branches it out according to different generating etiologies [24]. Consequently, some authors add to the two types of suffering other categories, such as social suffering - caused by social institutions and various types of unjust actions and atrocities, with baneful repercussions upon the human person and upon the manifestation of one's human dignity, as well as by the indifference of his human fellows; moral suffering - caused by the sense of guilt felt along

the spiritual path covered during the struggle against the various tentations of the body and soul, and existential suffering, generated by the absence of any meaning of life, experimented, most often, during depressive disorders [13]. All these types of suffering require an adequate management of the psycho-spiritual treatment, along with a full involvement from the part of the medical staff. The vocation of physicians and of the other medical professionals is that of easing, as much as this is possible, the suffering produced by maladies, trauma and other somatic disorders. Spiritual grief, frequently associated with such somato-psychic pain, should be approached by a priest or a father confessor.

3. ETIOLOGICAL APPROACHES OF SUFFERING: A THEOLOGICAL AND SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

The etiology or origin of maladies is – in most of the cases – sin, as shown in numerous texts of the Holy Scripture (Numeri 12, 10; II Paralipomena 26, 16-21; Marcu 2, 1-12; Ioan 5, 1-14; Fapte 12, 21-23). However, there also exist innocent people who suffer without being sinful – see the unanimously known example of Iov (Iov 2, 10) or of Saint Paul (II Corinteni 12, 7). In these texts, some exegetes identified multiple causes of – direct or indirect – suffering, manifested at three levels.

The first one refers to *punitive suffering* for some faults of the people, with roots in the ancestral sin, applicable both to a person and to the whole community. The second considers the innocent or undeserved suffering, quite difficult to be understood and accepted – the most illustrative case being that of the rightful Iov. The third dimension has an educative finality, expressing a sort of divine paedagogy, as it reveals the positive efficiency of suffering [25].

In his survey of the century-old patristic thinking, Jean Claude Larche [26] distinguishes, in the etiology of suffering, the one caused by or resulted from the ancestral sin – namely, what is rooted in the nature of all people – and the suffering induced by an incorrect understanding of one's own freedom and of one's personal sins; he also states that suffering is a diabolical work

and views suffering as a divine paedagogy, aimed at repairing, strengthening and at returning to faith, for attaining salvation and spiritual accomplishment. The last type of suffering cannot be rationally explained, so that it almost always "shocked the human person", rendering him incapable of finding justifications [25]. Consequently, whichever the perspective of considering suffering, it should be understood constructively and fully assumed (IV Kings 20, 1-7; The Jews 12, 6-11).

In full agreement with the Holy Scripture, with the writings and experiences of the Holy Fathers, contemporary theologians state that the origin of suffering, of any type, lies in the ancestral sin, which is continuously regenerated and amplified by personal sins. In this respect, the medical science confirms the fact that they are transmitted genetically from generation to generation, both biologically and socially, to say nothing of the pastoral area, of the moral passions or virtues, or of one's maladies and general health condition. Obviously, contemporary authors also mention the three conditions of suffering's transmission: negative heredity, the evil deeds of one's own nation and the personal sins [27]. In this respect, the causes of suffering lie both in the sins of the ancestors, who transmit genetically the physical predisposition and the physical, psychic or moral vulnerability, as well as in one's personal sins.

3.1. GENESIS OF SUFFERING IN THE VISION OF ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

From a theological-spiritual perspective, the issue of suffering's genesis or origin becomes quite manifest, being related exclusively to the primordial human being. The Holy Fathers and the religious writers put forward a multitude of ideas which demonstrate beyond any doubt that suffering has not been created by God. Based on scripturist arguments, they assert that the main origin of disease and suffering is the sin of Adam, who deliberately disregarded the will of God – a heavy burden on the shoulders of mankind.

This situation rendered vulnerable the human being and exposed him to numerous sufferings, as revealed in the dialogue between God and our Forefathers Adam and Eve, which also evidences

other aspects of suffering, such as: misfortunes, pain and curse (Genesis 3, 16-19). In this way, we understand that suffering is caused by fall, appearing as a consequence of seclusion and of breaking the natural communion with God, our Creator [28]. There results from here that, in his perfect primordial condition, the human was not suffering. It is only the refusal to obey to God and to leave the spiritual path of existence that human's orientation becomes exclusively of physical, sensorial nature. Chasing from the paradise – namely from the vicinity of God – brought the human to a perpetual facing of grief [29].

For a better understanding of the genesis of suffering, according to patristic interpretations, mention should be made of one of the most profound and highly actual learnings, formulated by Saint Grigorie Palama, which synthesizes the whole patristic science on the origin of suffering in our world: "Where do our feebleness, maladies and all the others evils which lead to death come from? Where does death itself come from? It is from our disobedience of God's word, of the law he gave to us, from the ancestral sin committed in the Paradise of God. Maladies, infirmities and trials of all sorts have their origins in sin. By committing sin, we took upon ourselves the skin clothing of our sinful, mortal and suffering body, being condemned to live in this mortal, transient world a life permanently exposed to evils and misery. The disease thus appears as a short, difficult path to which we were condemned by the committed sins, whose final end is death" [30].

The words of the Holy Father evidence the intrinsic causal structure of suffering, which always leads to death: ancestral sin – suffering – death [31]. A Nobel Prize laureate, Alexis Carrel, asserts that it is civilization which creates the premises favorizing the installation of suffering. The sources of pleasure are more and more numerous, more varied, more intense, until becoming factors of stress and anxiety [32]. Under such circumstances, our too intense sensations yield and, paradoxically, excessive and prolonged pleasure becomes a source of weariness, unrest and suffering. In such situations, life appears as devoid of any meaning, of its traditional moral and spiritual values and the human being gets lost [23].

3.2. MANAGEMENT OF THE SPIRITUAL THERAPY OF SUFFERING, BY INVESTING IT WITH A DIVINE-HUMAN MEANING

Along the history, the attitude towards suffering has been manifested in various modes - from one religion to another, from one culture to another, from one people to another, obviously, as a function of the mentality, cultural level and mental capacity of each individual. According to empirical evidence, one might assert that human suffering, similarly to pain, is a preferred theme for both philosophical anthropology, and for the biblical or patristic one, a predilection which does not involve only suffering's establishment. It extends to methodological aspects about healing or facing of suffering through its acceptance, according to the model of our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Management of suffering's therapy is equally a medical and a spiritual action, while its understanding and elucidation are almost impossible for the human mind, circumscribed to the immanent world. The numerous medical studies which confirm that religious practices diminish the intensity of pain and suffering back up the spiritual perspective which should always accompany the therapeutical assistance of suffering [3-9]. Even if rationally unconceivable, a contemporary Christian psychologist asserts that any type of suffering has a meaning; no suffering is meaningless or accidental. Accordingly, in a human approach, suffering should be and must be borne, tolerated and accepted; more than that, in certain pathological situations – such as *algophilia* – it is even desired [23].

When analyzing suffering, pain and medical intervention, one actually refers to the importance of the therapeutical assistance of suffering and to the quality of life, which involves a whole team of professionals. As to the importance of the specialists forming the interdisciplinary team – and mainly of the priest or confessor and physician – delimitation of their role should refer strictly to their field of competence, the final scope being their reciprocal completion, as asserted by Bishop Bartolomeu Anania: "The relation between the priest and the physician is not a competitive, but a complementary one. The

priest never does what the physician should do, nor vice-versa. Each one has his specific contribution, and no substitution between them is possible" [33].

Daily reality demonstrates permanently that life is accompanied by incurable maladies and pains, which provokes the despair of the suffering person. On one side, their medical and spiritual management should calm down the ill person, because not always a severe disease is incurable, so that he should come to believe in divine miracles, which might help him, by the gift of his prayers, to resist by his own inner resources. Several unfavorable diagnoses have been contradicted by such miracles, as suggestively asserted by a contemporary physician: "the very taumaturgic act appears as a miracle, being nevertheless viewed as a proof in the strictly physical historical field" [34].

On the other hand, one should understand that each malady – even an incurable one – is a challenge, which offers to the patient the possibility to change his inner and outer attitude in relation with the world and with himself, leading to a modification of life's external aspects. Under such circumstances, suffering may appear as a "supreme teacher", who proposes a paedagogy by means of which suffering may be turned to good account by a total intimacy with God. In this way, undoubtedly, its secrete meaning may be also disclosed.

In this respect, Orthodox spirituality proposes an attitude of Christian hope and optimism, for the discovery of its deep, hidden meanings and mainly of the truth stating that suffering is meant at being the ultimate and supreme chance for attaining spiritual purity and raising. If a malady affects our body, it simultaneously raises our soul towards God.

In this way, suffering becomes a "ransom value", which renders permanent the intimate relation with God, while intensifying a perpetual communication with Him. The profound conception of Christianity about life, suffering and death is a very special story, involving individual persons, as well as their relation with a transcendental, yet personal God [35]. At the same time, one should not forget that the suffering person can be transformed into an apostle of Christ. Several physicians turned their face to

God simply by assisting and watching the miracles He made for the suffering ones.

According to the theological, philosophical and common thinking, suffering is understood in various ways, there exists, however, an experimental, direct knowledge, in which the human person brings together, concomitantly, all its three meanings. This type of knowledge and experience is existential knowledge, equal for both the theologian and the philosopher, and for simple persons. It springs from existential experience, as "the suffering of the innocent ones is a heavy burden, in which the silence of God and His non-involvement appear as a sign of failure" [36], and, at the same time, the key of an unexpected success for the suffering person, and for the one who assists him, as well. In this way, existential knowledge shows us that suffering is eventually "the school of God", leading us towards the optimum and supreme fulfilment.

Christian spirituality shows that suffering has always a scope. In its absence, the human being can live and avoid the world and his fellows. Suffering appears as the imperative forcing the human being to take into consideration the existence of his fellows, to accept them, to be open towards them and, eventually, to sacrifice himself for them. Suffering is the total, supreme path of recognition, the best and most paedagogic means of man's formation and accomplishment on the earth; "suffering is one of the most secrete and wonderful divine paedagogies, a gift of God's wisdom, possessing an authentic healing power, an extraordinary school of patience, humility, gratitude, prayer and fast. At the same time, suffering may serve the literary creation, as a genuine and incredible source of inspiration" [37].

Apart from the models they offer, pastoral writings also recommend self-seclusion inside one's inner spirituality, where detachment from suffering and its acceptance become possible. To cite the words of Andre Scrima, the only answer to suffering is the Christian attitude, the search of Christ's truth, which annihilates suffering through the pressure of the verb "to assume" [38].

Orthodox spirituality provides a multitude of models of saints and of simple persons who approached pain as martyrs. In this respect, implementation of an efficient therapeutical

management in assisting suffering should resort to the memory of the saints who accompanied their suffering by prayers – both individual and communitary prayers –, as a form of permanent dialogue with divinity. Equally efficient appeared meditation, contemplation, church singing and involvement in community activities, considered as valuable modalities of rendering a spiritual meaning to suffering, while making possible detachment from pain. All such works, performed under the direct protection of the Church of Christ, by His grace and in communion with religious ministrants and with their parishoners, aim at socializing suffering, thus contributing to appeasing the suffering person, namely to what might be defined as “socialization of the prayer” [39].

In spite of the fact that suffering is so actual and present all over the world, neither the scientific or technical progress, nor even the brightest minds succeeded, at least for now, in defeating it [29]. Orthodox spirituality, especially by the means it provides for relieving grief, is first concerned to help the suffering person discover the lofty meaning of his torments and to offer an encouraging answer to interrogations of the following type: Where does suffering come from? Why do we have to suffer? Even if the Church of Christ provided answers to such questions, they should be explained in a perceptible language for the people living in the contemporary cultural milieu.

For ordinary people, a correct and efficient management of suffering appeals to each specialist from the interdisciplinary team, as each of them has – as already mentioned – the moral and deontological duty to ceaselessly support the suffering person, to take care of him in the most dignified and human manner, according to the professional ethical norms in force, and to communicate with his colleagues. The specialist should evaluate all elements of suffering and, more than anything, involve the patient in the management of pain therapy and care, encourage him, making him play an interactive role in the fight against pain.

Under such conditions, the management of an efficient approaching of suffering will reflect not only the modifications produced in the scientific understanding of human pain and suffering, but

also in the personal, social, psycho-spiritual and cultural beliefs. Obviously, such an efficient management should be based on various healing processes and interventions, but also on the conviction that all problems are to be accepted and solved with the cooperation of the suffering patient.

From a psychological perspective, a correct management of suffering and pain treatment assumes a rapid intervention, which might prevent the evolution towards a severe psychosocial condition, while focussing the action not only towards the one who complains of pain in loud voice but also towards the silent ones or those with delayed reactions, which might stir abnormal situations. That is why, the interaction between the therapists and the assisted subject plays an essential role. However, neither of them should ignore the complex reality of patient’s personality.

As one may easily observe, the fear of suffering is deeply rooted in human conscience, people buliding up barriers to protect themselves against it: oblivion, ignorance and other substitutes. Facing the suffering has equally a revealing significance, as it may offer to the suffering one the awareness of the futility of life, orienting him towards himself. Development of functional coping, for attaining an efficient adaptation capacity to the factors of stress, may bring about improvements at personal level, a better understanding of the fact that both pain and the personal condition should be accepted, alongwith the elaboration of positive strategies and attitudes for combating suffering, and the discovery of the numerous methods and solutions offered by his own spirituality which, in time, may facilitate healing and, in a subsequent stage, even a complete biological healing.

Nevertheless, the role of medicine is not absolutely that of healing, but also of rendering the unbearable bearable, of avoiding sinking of the human being in the abyss of despair. That is why, the medical act should be necessarily based on the axiom of ecclesial knowledge: in any ill person it is Christ who suffers, in the doctor it is Christ who works, in the priest it is Christ who absolves [40]. From the perspective of contemporary people, who can also contemplate the history of the time, suffering belongs to a

complex psycho-somatic and spiritual reality. In this respect, no therapeutical act can ignore the religious aspect, which assumes a continuous prayer from the part of both actors: the ill person and the ministrant [28]. In other words, one may assert that suffering is part and parcel of our life and, as an inevitable consequence of life and faith, it becomes sacred, which means that it has to be observed and treated as humanly as possible.

4. THE DIVINE PAEDAGOGY OF SUFFERING

Patristic doctrine is unitary as to suffering and pain; suffering is only transitory in the world, its role being of purification and spiritual renewal, thus leading to the possible obtaining of the reward of eternal life. The Holy Fathers make mention of a certain paedagogy of the malady, a divine paedagogy of ripening and accomplishment through suffering, and in no case of an absence – on the contrary, of a paternal presence and support of God. In this respect, Alexander Schmemmann states that “in relation to Christ, every event of life – health and malady, joy and suffering have become an ascendent path towards the life into Christ”. For the ill one, “the malady manifested in the world” appears as one of the most efficient means “for discovering the supreme and permanent defeat of man and of life, a defeat which none of the partial victories of medicine, no matter how wonderful or miraculous might they be, can attain. Into Christ, suffering is not «eliminated»; it is turned into a triumph. Defeat itself becomes a victory, a path, an entrance in the Kingdom, as it is the real genuine healing” [41].

Discussion on the moral and psycho-paedagogic valorisation of suffering may evidence and explain the following aspects: suffering renders the human person aware of his frailty and vulnerability, of his being dependent on the love and compassion of his fellows; it may develop a high self-conscience and the understanding of one’s own limits; suffering discloses the fact that we are not always the masters of our own body and that, in the absence of God, we can do nothing; suffering has a

purifying effect upon evil thoughts and deeds, making the human aware of the finitude of his existence and of the necessity of fighting death by the power of life; suffering favors communion with other persons, empathy, confession and inter-human faith; suffering offers to the others an efficient example of human living. Even if devoid of any meaning, bearing no value in itself, it acquires significance only when acting in the service of superior values, which makes it human [42].

5. THE INTERCESSION AND THE INDIVIDUAL PRAYER: ASSISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

The supportability of suffering refers to its investment with a superior, transcendental meaning, to which one should associate or to which one should assign each accomplishment of human existence. Even if we are aware of the suffering manifested in the life of the others and we all know that a lot of people are suffering and we feel solidary with them, when it is our turn to suffer, this is not easily accepted. Both suffering and pain are experienced in loneliness and they remain incomprehensible for the others. They have an ontological dimension and they belong to the closed situations of one’s individual life, appearing as its restricted condition, as a person, as well as of its life, as a possible development and accomplishment [23].

The role of prayer in the treatment of suffering and in the resilience process has been demonstrated and checked up along the history, both by the ministrants of the Church, and by scientific researchers. The prayer may have multiple therapeutical implications upon the emotional feeling of a patient, various studies having demonstrated that the intercession prayer, namely the prayer for another person or for suffering people, has significantly improved the condition of those confronted with difficulties. Even if this aspect is scientifically debatable, other interpretations are still possible. Equally, a discussion with a spiritual father confessor/psychotherapist, apart from the medical treatment, may have significant positive results [43].

Alexis Carrel is one of the numerous scientists who reflected profoundly upon the relation between science and prayer [32]. He substantiated his conclusions on the miraculous effects of the prayer from the medical situations recorded among the pilgrims of Lourdes, making however the specification that the prayer has healing effects only when practised on a regular basis. The ill people Carrel saw recovering, at Lourdes, from various organic diseases, convinced him to be converted to Christianity. For this Nobel Prize winner, prayer has become the essential element of religious experience, a psychic ascension towards God, if practised consciously and patiently, with the participation of all psychic faculties. According to him, prayer assures preservation of one's peace of mind in the turmoil of our modern world, while outlining the role of moral spirituality in the social progress of mankind.

In his opinion, the presence and personal grasping of the divine is explained through prayer, during which the conscience should contemplate the communion of the immanent with the transcendent world, of the profane with the sacred world, because the prayer discloses the thesaurus hidden inside the human being, namely the serene equilibrium between the psychic and the moral traits. The prayer for the other or for our fellows is the most divine form of prayer, involving self-oblivion and a quite special form of ascetism.

6. CONCLUSIONS. PASTORAL MANAGEMENT OF SUFFERING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ORTHODOX SPIRITUALITY

Nowadays, for any type of malady or suffering there exists a multitude of therapeutical options, starting with the administration of drugs even for the suffering of the soul, up to psychotherapy or other related treatments. The therapeutical approaching of the spiritual or corporal suffering or pain varies with the response to the treatment, as well as with the needs of the patient, with which the therapist is confronted in his professional or vocational activities. Under such circumstances, the therapeutical approach

should be differentiated according to the socioeconomic milieu in which the patient lives, to his age, religion, culture or comorbidities.

In the therapeutical practice, which approaches the human being as a whole, body and soul, interrogation, conversation, dialogue are essential; they should be individualized by the therapist and evaluated in correlation with the results of the analysis of the non-verbal conduct or of the diagnosis. The prophylaxy and an early identification of the signs and symptoms that might indicate human's ontological collapse when confronted with suffering or pain require a rapid intervention, not only therapeutically, but mainly the development of the possibilities for rendering to them a deep meaning.

Orthodox spirituality, expressed by the unanimous voices of the Holy Fathers, recommends people to assume suffering, to turn it to a good pastoral account, backing up the idea according to which "suffering is not part of God's plan about the humans; suffering does not need value in itself, as it does not redeems apriorically". If the meaning rendered to suffering is not assumed from the perspective of Christ's ordeal, the preference for the path of suffering may even push man towards evil deeds. Consequently, suffering "should not be intentionally looked for, nor cultivated. It is only when it cannot be avoided, any more, that it should be assumed in a Christian manner, for obtaining pastoral benefit from it, and thus following the path of Christ" [44].

In any type of therapy, especially in the therapy of spiritual suffering, a very important part is played by the therapist, be he a psychologist, counselor, psychiatrist or confessor, as well as by the family, implicitly the community, which facilitates bodily and spiritual healing. If considering that any pattern of actual psychotherapy is based on the technique of dialogue, as a method of understanding the essential, specific aspects of the contemporary human being, The Secret of Confession is another form of psychotherapeutical dialogue, involving the capacity of the therapist of "correctly talking to and listening to" his human fellow [45]. As already mentioned, no therapy, no change, related either to one's spiritual life, to the Secret of Confession or to the collaboration

for attaining healing and even redemption are not possible without the consent of the person involved [46].

In any type of suffering, the role of the confessor is that of bringing to life the spiritual potential specific to the human being, namely ease of mind and recovery of hope, which are the result of a powerful faith in God. Curing of the human person, considered in his/her psychosomatic body-soul unique entity, assumes the discovery of the human person and of the perspectives of his/her direct relation with God, the source of life, as well as with the other human fellows. Human being's fulfilment can be realized only in communion with God and with the love of his neighbour.

The person whose faith in God is feeble may rediscover, with the support of a father confessor, the communitary dimension of Christian life, as all persons are expected to help one another and to build up one another. The Christians, who have been baptized in Christ, are the first to take "the armour of faith and love", "taking the helmet of hope in their redemption", being the first ones to understand that God did not create us for anger, but for redemption in our Lord Jesus Christ" (I Tesaloniceni 5, 11 și 810).

Sociological researches confirm that the whole experience of suffering and of the manner in which we feel it is influenced by religious, cultural and social models. That is why, a phenomenon like suffering can be understood only by a holistic and multidisciplinary approach, as suffering is simultaneously a personal and a social experience, the history of mankind being closely interweaved with the very history of human suffering [47].

In spite of the numerous papers devoted to suffering, each one approaching the topic from different scientific or cultural perspectives, according to one's own religious orientation and tradition, no one can pretend to have reached the final truth. No matter how long is it to last - a few seconds, hours or a lifetime - suffering, this supreme bodily trial, will affect the subject in a decisive manner.

Nowadays, when the meaning of life and of suffering is obscured and blocked by various ideological orientations, recovery of the biblical and patristic vision is absolutely mandatory in

our lives. The noisy, disordered life we are living, the stressed and disoriented mind, the absence of religious feeling hide the profound meaning of life and of suffering, preventing our communion with God and with the suffering human fellows. Any type of ideology seizes and distorts the deep meaning of suffering.

The absence of sound landmarks in the contemporary society induces an acute absence of meaning, which explains why, when faced with a malady, the human being of today feels either guilty or responsible. The difference is that guilt imposes upon him a spiritual burden, leading to depression, hypochondria, "dissection" of one's own soul, "pastoral fall", while responsibility appears as beneficial, aiming at correction of one's own sins, mainly when confronted with death and the judgement of God. It is a profitable attitude, urging to repentance [48].

A holistic approach of suffering should necessarily consider all therapeutical dimensions, taken together, for creating the general background for interpreting the etiology of suffering, of the manner in which it influences and challenges mankind. The healing perspectives should be also had in view as, most often, not everything depends on a general rule, but on the personal choice of the one who assists, as harmoniously as possible, the ill person [49], without ignoring the advantages offered by religious faith, the Christian one especially.

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