

## Suffering in St. Paul

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*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Rom 8:35-36*

The Apostle Paul knew much about suffering. His stirring words cited in the epigraph are not merely rhetorical. He knew firsthand the depth and agony of suffering – natural dangers, physical assaults, emotional distress, betrayal, rejection, sickness, lack of food and shelter, as well as the ordinary but no less challenging aspects of his apostolic work (2 Cor 11:24-29). He was not only the recipient of suffering but also the cause of suffering to others. Prior to his conversion, he was implicated in the mob killing of St. Stephen (Acts 7:58). Soon afterwards, driven by religious zeal, he sought to destroy the fledging Christian movement by means of violence (Gal 1:13). Even as an apostle of Christ, his work generated not insignificant conflicts among Christians, for example in Jerusalem and in Corinth. Among other things, he speaks of a “letter of tears” and the need for mutual forgiveness over troubles in Corinth (2 Cor 2:1-11; 7:8-13). Confrontations with other Christian leaders such as Peter and Barnabas are also documented (Gal 2:11-14; Acts 15:36-40). Although the Apostle experienced a full share of various

kinds of suffering, his life ending in martyrdom, nevertheless, he could proclaim with triumphal conviction that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Such a man deserves to be heard.

The present essay is written in honor of the memory of the late George Pilitsis, dear friend and colleague at Hellenic College and Holy Cross. Professor Pilitsis knew suffering firsthand too, his life cut short by debilitating illness. An exceedingly kind and honest man, he was a most enthusiastic and competent teacher of Greek. He was a good man to a fault, almost naïve about the ways of the world. Caught up in confounding circumstances of personal and professional suffering, he embodied the image of the righteous sufferer in the Scriptures. Privately he would lament with words reminiscent of the Book of Psalms: "Why are these things happening to me? What have I done? Perhaps it is God's will that I should suffer." No, dear friend, it was not God's will, far from it. It was the cruel reality of evil that infects us all. We beg your and God's forgiveness for what you suffered in your professional career. May your memory strengthen our willingness to speak and do the truth, and so to build up principles and structures of justice and community everywhere.

### Suffering in the Old Testament

Suffering is closely linked with evil because evil is the ultimate cause of suffering. Evil works through agents, forces, conditions and institutions. Evil is that which harms life, abuses human dignity, corrupts relationships, corrodes truth, promotes falsehood, produces injustice, causes conflict, and brings division and dehumanization. Of course not all suffering is an expression of evil. We discipline our children with love and wisdom as part of sound nurture. We submit to surgery to maintain physical health. We endure the daily grind of work as necessary to livelihood. Too, accidents and

natural disasters can cause great harm. However, the evils that human beings inflict on each other are far more numbing and morally culpable. Moral evil results in dehumanization for both perpetrators and victims.

Avowed atheists and naturalists may not be so troubled about suffering. If the cosmos is the result of blind forces that define human existence itself, then talk of moral evil and accountability before God is of little consequence. Life becomes a struggle to control impersonal forces, including sociological forces for the viability of civilization, an enterprise presumably best guided by enlightened self-interest. However, for those whose life is based on a theistic outlook, the presence and extent of suffering create many difficulties. As Christians we trust in a loving and compassionate God, a personal Being who is just, wise and almighty. What sense can then be made of the moral chaos and suffering in a world overseen by God's providence? Why does evil often break out in such immense proportions? If much suffering is explainable and even deserved for various reasons, how can starkly disproportionate and innocent suffering be countenanced?

The authors of the Bible wrestled with such questions and have provided diverse answers. They engaged these questions not in terms of abstract philosophical thought, but in terms of faith in God and direct human experience. As a man of the Bible, St. Paul was deeply influenced by his religious background. To understand him and his distinctive contributions to the Christian perspective on suffering, we need to look at the basic explanations of suffering in the Old Testament.

1. Genesis explains the presence of evil and suffering in the account of Adam and Eve, a story powerful in its simplicity and profound in its sophistication. The point of the story is not its literal imagery, as if one could figure out when Adam and Eve lived or how their ideal status could be harmonized



with geological history. Rather, the point is the tragic truth that evil and suffering have as source human hubris – the desire “to be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). Hubris lies in the refusal to accept and be satisfied with God’s good order of things. Instead, there is the willful desire and foolish arrogance to replace God and violate the integrity of God’s good world. Human pride and self-assertion tragically disrupt the relations between God, human beings and creation itself, ending up in alienation and misery. Suffering and pain are not God’s positive will. On the contrary, they are evil – a corruption of God’s good world. According to Genesis, the primary cause and culpability lies with human beings bent on willful autonomy and rebellion.

However, something more is in the story. A crafty serpent, working by deceit, appears paradoxically in a perfect garden. The first parents, although innocent and pure, knowingly abuse their freedom and succumb to temptation. They persist in their self-deception and guilt, choosing to hide rather than admit and correct their evil. Soon evil passes on and engulfs humanity as Cain murders his brother. These subtleties suggest that evil and suffering involve larger and mysterious aspects beyond human understanding and strength. The Genesis story, which is the story of humanity, conveys a twofold message. On the one hand, men and women everywhere are morally culpable and suffer self-inflicted wounds. On the other hand, they are also caught up in an incomprehensible tragedy, helpless before the mystery of evil that they perpetuate in spite of their lofty dignity and noble intentions. Nevertheless, God’s care toward his weak and wayward creatures does not cease. Even after the expulsion from Eden “the Lord God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them” (Gen 3:21).

2. The Book of Deuteronomy takes a much less nuanced approach to evil and suffering. Deuteronomy expounds at length a rigid principle of retributive justice, i.e., that in this

life good is rewarded and evil is punished. This principle is rooted in the “law of retaliation” – an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth – widely known in cultures of the ancient Near East. The good reason for the law of retaliation is that it was originally intended not to encourage but restrict violence by the application of an equitable standard of social justice. Deuteronomy and much of the Bible applied this principle to the level of God as creator and guardian of the moral order. The concept of retributive justice answers a profound human need for intelligibility and stability in the universe over against absurdity and chaos. That God as a wise and just Being is the guardian of the moral order adds to the ground of human hope. Deuteronomy also emphasizes both God’s good will toward humanity and the critical role of human choice and responsibility. “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life...” (Deut 30:19). However, the acute problem with retributive justice is that, as the Book of Job demonstrates, too many good people suffer and too many scoundrels prosper in this world. Moreover, the subtlety that evil is an overpowering reality that engulfs and captivates humanity is lost within the simple perspective of retributive justice.

3. In the prophetic books of the Old Testament the same basic principle of just rewards and punishments is fundamental and applied to the Judaic nation as a whole. The prophets raised their voices against the domination of the weak by the strong, the exploitation of the widow and the orphan, the mistreatment of the stranger, the worship of idols leading to moral decadence. Their righteous indignation was particularly directed against the leaders of the people, the kings, wealthy landowners and priests. The prophets perceived and predicted the coming calamities at the hands of foreign invaders (Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and later Greeks and Romans) which were viewed as just chastisements by



God. In subsequent generations the theme of suffering on account of the nation's sins became a standard, sorrowful refrain, a desperate effort to make sense of the trials of the nation while holding on to faith in a just God.

The abiding message of the prophets is that injustices, moral decadence and corrupt leadership inevitably lead a community to disaster. However, the prophets also announced a new future age, a day of deliverance from evil and suffering. That day of freedom and restoration would come not on the basis of human achievement but through the faithfulness and mercy of God who would transform human hearts in a new covenant. "This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33).

4. Within the wisdom books of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Sirach, as well the Book of Psalms, there is wide diversity of responses to the problem of suffering. The Book of Job offers a magnificent lament and daring protest against God by an innocent man beset by crushing trials. Job refuses to concede to the arguments that inexplicable suffering must entail some hidden sin or bear some redeeming value. In the end, however, Job retains faith in God and submits to the ambiguities of life. He accepts the inscrutability of suffering in the face of God's unfathomable greatness and wisdom. The books of Proverbs and Sirach stress the instructive and beneficial role of suffering. As a means of testing faith and character, suffering works toward repentance, moral conduct and maturity of character. Thus, God's chastisements are reason to affirm rather than question God's care and goodness. "My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves the one he loves, just as the father reproves the son in whom he delights" (Prov 3:11-12).

Ecclesiastes offers a very different perspective. Here we

encounter a kind of deistic and skeptical outlook that makes us wonder about its inclusion in the Bible. Here God is viewed as creator of the world, but quite unconcerned about its affairs. Suffering is indiscriminate, whether it pertains to kings or soldiers, rich or poor, wise or foolish. The mindful person ought to know the proper time for various things such as laughing and mourning, building and plucking up, speaking and holding silence, and the like (cf. Eccl 3:1-8). Beyond that, only skepticism and resignation beckon humanity: "Vanity of vanities ... all is vanity" (Eccl 1:2).

In contrast, the Book of Psalms alternately celebrates and laments the life of faith in all circumstances. The Psalms provide a mirror of humanity's innumerable trials and tribulations, pain and despair, faith and hope, joy and exultation. All the above themes of retributive justice, personal and corporate guilt, undeserved trials, the instructional role of suffering, as well as the inscrutability of evil, are interwoven, sometimes in the same psalm. But they all are anchored on trust in God's mercy and ultimate rescue. Even the bitter cries and protests of the soul before God function within the horizon of faith. The significant presupposition is that, in spite of the experiences of the sufferer and the silence of God, dialogue and connection with him are the only option of faith over against the abyss of despair. Even protest and lament before God constitute forms of communication made possible because of trust in a personal, approachable and merciful God.

### **The Apocalyptic Perspective**

The magnitude and inscrutability of evil and suffering created a crisis of faith in biblical history. This crisis of faith was particularly unendurable when hope of deliverance was confined, as is largely the case in the Old Testament, within the bounds of this present life. The great prophets envisioned



a new age of justice and peace in continuity with history. However, in the view of some of the prophets such as Ezekiel, the depth and immensity of evil required a drastic, even cosmic, change in the world order. As the trials of God's people continued unabated during and after the exile, God's future judgment and new age took on apocalyptic dimensions. For later books of the Old Testament, such as Daniel, the present age is hopelessly captive to the evil forces. In due time God would suddenly intervene with cosmic signs and actions to destroy the dominion of evil and construct an entirely new world. Meanwhile, righteous men and women are called to endure trials, while remaining faithful to the point of martyrdom. They could be persecuted and killed, but would be rewarded with bodily resurrection and a blissful life with God, free of suffering. In contrast, the destiny of evildoers would be destruction or eternal punishment. In the apocalyptic perspective, too, the final word belongs to faith and hope, not pessimism and despair, because of faith in God's faithfulness and final triumph over evil.

### Suffering in St. Paul

The authors of the New Testament, rooted in the Jewish heritage, share in various ways the above views concerning evil and suffering. What is decisively new pertains to the person and work of Christ. Evil and sin, suffering and pain, endurance and victory, are now interpreted from the angle of Jesus' message and work of salvation. Jesus himself announced the good news of the immanence of God's kingdom, God's new order of life, into which responsive hearers were invited to enter and find forgiveness and healing. Jesus did not merely announce God's reign but actively enacted its presence and power through his person, words and deeds. Above all, he broke the dominion of sin and death by his death and resurrection, thus inaugurating a new covenant

and a new order of life no longer in helpless bondage to evil. These shining convictions and hopes of the early Christians were not mere conceptual developments in theological thought. They were the direct, liberating, and joyful result of immediate religious experience – men and women being transformed and propelled forward by a great wave of grace and renewal. What is more, the veracity of their new life was concretely attested by a community of love and solidarity, the beachhead of a new way of life offered to all. The good news was: "Behold, now is the acceptable time; behold, now is the time of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2). One of those who shared in that reality of God's renewal of life, and who uttered those words, was Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles.

The Letter to the Romans is the most coherent statement of St. Paul's thought. The main subject concerns the gospel as the saving power of God at work in Christ, and thus the new life in Christ offered as a free gift in the midst of a world still gripped by the forces of sin and death. In Rom 1:18-3:20, Paul reflects on the corporate and universal nature of evil. He uses words such as *asebeia* (ungodliness or impiety), *adikia* (injustice, unrighteousness, or wickedness), and *hamartia* (sin or evil). Ungodliness is literally lack of reverence for God as creator. Injustice is the violation of God's order, visible in countless manifestations of man's inhumanity to man. Sin signifies not merely individual sins in a moralistic sense but the power of sin as a stark and corrupting reality – the force of evil in the world. The Apostle's indictment is that, although creation gives sufficient evidence of God's presence and majesty, human beings inexcusably turn to idolatry, suppressing the truth and refusing to give glory and thanks to God. Unhinged from a right relationship to God, humanity is "abandoned" to its own deceitful ways, from which accrue all kinds of inescapable wickedness and decadence. Paul thunders:



All people, both Jews and Gentiles, are under the power of sin, as it is written: 'None is righteous, no, not one'...so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God (Rom 3:9-10).

The good news is that God by no means gives up on his creatures. For Paul, the answer to humanity's plight is God's decisive saving work in Christ, now offered to all (Rom 1:16). God's saving action is *dikaosune* (justice or righteousness), i.e., God's ongoing action in Christ to put things right, in opposition to rampant *adikia* (injustice or unrighteousness) in human society. For Paul, God's *dikaosune* is disclosed as wrath and judgment on evil, and as grace and life for those who turn to God. God's "wrath" is not an emotional state but the implacable opposition to evil as the corruptive force in God's good world. At the core of the tragedy are, just as in the story of Genesis, the choice and responsibility of human beings who, "claiming to be wise, they become fools" (Rom 1:22). They willfully "suppress" God's truth before their own eyes; they "worship" the material creation instead of the creator, and in their "senseless minds" construct a world of unspeakable misery (cf. Rom. 1:18-32).

St. Paul interprets reality as he sees it based on his new understanding in Christ. He does not theorize about evil in philosophical terms. Nor does he suggest a causal relationship between God's wrath and human tribulations. To be sure, the plight of humanity is still under God's providence. Thus God "abandons" or permits humanity to follow its chosen ways of ungodliness and injustice with the inevitable tragic results. However, the responsibility lies with humanity in its inveterate refusal to acknowledge God, give thanks to him, and follow his ways. The root of evil is idolatry – worship (*latreia*, literally "service") rendered to other powers and things. The deception is that men and women think they can get out of created things what they can only receive from God. The forms of idolatry change, but the evil

persists. As long as creatures heedlessly follow their own willful ways, they keep on constructing new "gods" in the pursuit of wealth, power, fame, pleasure, war and the like, resulting in self-inflicted evils. In the end, idolatry is self-idolatry, the worship and service of self, operating under the falsehood of moral autonomy and absolute freedom.

In Rom 7:7-25 St. Paul takes up the theme of human captivity in evil at a personal and existential level. Here we encounter Paul's famous statements about human nature sold under *hamartia* (sin), i.e., the power of evil. No writer ever expressed the agony of the inner struggle with evil as dramatically as Paul:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... For I know that nothing good dwells within me.... I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.... I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am (Rom 7:14-24).

Two things must be said about these poignant words. The first is that they are not autobiographical in the strict sense. They reflect Paul's own experience neither as a Pharisee nor as a Christian. Looking back to his self-understanding as a Pharisee, Paul testifies that he was blameless under the law (Phil 3:7). The only sin he concedes and regrets is the persecution of the nascent Church (1 Cor 15:9). Blameless does not mean sinless. God's law provided for forgiveness of sins and ongoing life of faithfulness with God. However, prior to his conversion, no great conflict and agony over the law racked Paul's inner world, as is often supposed. The Jewish tradition envisioned faithful people who delighted in the sweetness of the law and the benefits of its guidance. Neither do the above words reflect Paul's self-understand-



ing as a Christian. In the new life in Christ, Paul radiates a confident sense of integrity and blamelessness, yet without absolving himself from God's future judgment (1 Cor 4:2-5; 2 Cor 2:17, 5:10). Besides, if the above words were intended to express Paul's captivity to sin as a Christian, Paul would undercut his whole argument in Romans (chs 5-8) that in Christ and the Spirit, Christians have been transposed to an entirely new situation and have been freed from the conditions ruled by the powers of law, sin and death.

The second thing that must be said is that Paul's dramatic statement above reflects his new understanding of humanity's plight apart from Christ. This new understanding is not a description of himself as a Christian believer united with Christ, but of women and men in general who are separated from Christ. In other words, in the light of Christ, Paul sees far more clearly than any thinker before him. This was not an insight of Paul as a Pharisee arising out of his own alleged inner turmoil. Nor was it an expression of captivity to sin as an apostle of Christ. Rather, it was a deepened perception of the common human experience, i.e., the failure to live up to our highest ideals, but now from the vantage point of the new life in Christ.

St. Paul connects this existential predicament with the larger tragedy of humanity's corporate evil and suffering. His words in Romans 7:7-11 about once being alive prior to the commandment, as well as about sin finding opportunity in the commandment and causing death by deceit, echo the Genesis story. The Genesis story, seen in its own context, powerfully hints at the inexplicable presence of overpowering evil. God was not the author of evil. And of course there was no idea of a devil at the writing of the Genesis story. Yet lurking evil was somehow there. The first innocents somehow shared in the mystery of evil because they knowingly allowed themselves to be deceived. Now, in a similar way, Paul in Romans vividly paints the specter of the magnitude

of corporate and personal evil that renders humanity helpless in spite of its goodness. God's law is "holy, just and good," yet it proves to be a curse through sin's manipulation (Rom 7:7-12). The self also is good and delights in God's law, yet is held captive to sin. Sin, the power of evil, is somehow just there in life as a personified and self-acting force working its sinister purposes. Of immense importance is that, in Rom 7, Paul is not concerned with the guilt and condemnation of humanity, though he surely assumes it. His main purposes are to defend the goodness of both the law and the self, to blame the sinister power of sin, and to show humanity's need for liberation accomplished through Christ: "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom 7:25).

The answer to the corporate and personal plight of humanity is immediately celebrated in Rom 8. The liberation from the powers of sin and death is accomplished not only through Christ but also through God's Spirit (Rom 8:1-4). Astonishingly, Christ and the Spirit personally dwell in the hearts of believers and so attest to their identity as sons and daughters of God, and energize the new life in them (Rom 8:9-16). The new life is filled with grace and freedom, an intimate filial communion with God making possible the exultant bold cry in prayer: "Abba! Father!" (Rom 8:15). Nevertheless, according to Paul, the gift of new life is not magic, an easy walk in a rose garden. The Apostle issues sharp warnings to the Christians themselves: "If you live according to the flesh ["flesh" in Paul signifies the whole person captive to sin], you will die" (Rom 8:13). To be sure, Christians are children of God and heirs with Christ, yet under the provision that "we suffer with him in order that we may be gloried with him" (Rom 8:17). The new life is indeed liberation from the evil powers, attested by immediate experience of Christ and the Spirit, but it is not cheap grace. It is not an easy, painless escape from labors and suffering.

There are different categories of suffering in St. Paul. One



major category is the dark reality we have examined thus far, the senseless and pathetic suffering due to the forces of evil that enslave humanity and use human beings as tools of evil and suffering. That was the case of Paul prior to his conversion when religious fanaticism drove him to murderous violence. After his conversion, he was equally zealous for Christ and the gospel, but entirely gone were the hatred and fanaticism. In the new life of grace his message was that Christ won a decisive victory over evil, and in him we can be victors, too. However, Christians must be wholly committed to the blessing they have received. The new life is both a gift and a task: a gift freely given, but also a task to be fully embraced and faithfully fulfilled. Christians are urged to be "strong in the Lord" and to "put on the armor of God" – truth, righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the sword of the word of God, and unceasing prayer – in order to stand against "the principalities, powers, and world rulers of the present darkness" (see Eph 6:10-18). What Christians must not do, for it is a betrayal of the gift and their identity in Christ, is to become themselves instruments of sin and perpetrators of suffering. Through faith and baptism, they have become "dead to sin and alive to God," but must not yield "to sin as instruments of wickedness (*adikia*)" (Rom 6:11, 13). While the free gift of God is life in Christ, "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23).

St. Paul was not naïve about the continuing impact of sin and evil on Christians. In Corinth he faced factions, petty jealousies and immorality "not found even among pagans" (1 Cor 5:1). The Galatians argued over matters of the Mosaic Law to the extent that they risked being "consumed by one another" (Gal 3:15). Rival Christian missionaries, whom Paul called false apostles and servants of Satan, distorted the gospel and undermined his authority and work (2 Cor 11:5-15). Corporate and personal sin could cast over Christian congregations the dark shadow of the "old age" in which

futile and destructive suffering could be perpetuated. Along with his pastoral wisdom and strong exhortations concerning unity, forgiveness, mutual support and growth in the likeness of Christ, Paul was uncompromising about evildoers. He warned them by invoking the principle of retributive justice. Christians, too, would "appear before the judgment seat of Christ [to] receive good or evil, according to what [each] has done" (2 Cor 5:10). Corrupters within the Christian community risked destruction by God (1 Cor 3:17). God would not be mocked. The works of sin (fornication, idolatry, dissension and the like) are just as evident as the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace and the like). The Christians themselves who persisted in evil and did "such things [would] not inherit the kingdom of God" (cf. Gal 5:16-23, 6:7-8; 1 Cor 5:9-10).

Most often the Apostle speaks of another kind of suffering: meaningful and redemptive suffering. Included here are, first of all, the toils and tribulations of life that Paul frequently mentions in his letters. These are sufferings generated by the ordinary trials of life, and also by the evil deeds of others. These kinds of sufferings would in the end be meaningless and pathetic, too, except for the hope, strength and joy of the gift of Christ. In Christ and with Christ, ordinary toils and assaults by others, when faithfully endured, become meaningful. They are testimonies to the Christian faith and entail spiritual growth. In Christ

we rejoice in our afflictions, knowing that afflictions produce endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured in our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us (Rom 5:3-5).

Paul does not suggest anywhere that toils and persecutions ought to be pursued for their own sake. Nonetheless, when they do inevitably come, as they did in great measure in the case of Paul, the "treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor 4:7),



the new light of Christ in our hearts, holds us together in strength and hope:

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in [us] the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in [us].... So we do not lose hope. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day (2 Cor 4:8-10, 16).

Baring his soul, St. Paul tells us about a chronic ailment that caused him much suffering. Although the nature of this ailment remains unknown, it is clear that it threatened his health and seriously impeded his apostolic work (2 Cor 12:7-10; Gal 4:13-14). In a spirit reminiscent of the Book of Job, Paul says that the "thorn in the flesh" was "given" to him, or allowed by God, in the form of harassment by Satan. Its purpose was "to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations" (2 Cor 12:7). Nevertheless, Paul prayed three times, just as any pious Jew would, and as Jesus did in Gethsemane, to be relieved of the burden. But the Lord's answer was different from that requested: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). The Apostle did not fret about the answer. On the contrary, because of his personal closeness to Christ, he celebrated it: "I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong (2 Cor 9-10). He says something similar about lack of food and other provisions in Philippians 4:12-13: "In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want. I can do all things in him who strengthens me."

Thus the most distinctive aspect of St. Paul's understanding of Christian suffering is its connection with Christ. For

him, as for all New Testament authors, Christ is the supreme model of righteous and redemptive suffering. At one level the connection seems to be one of ethical significance. Jesus actively challenged the established patterns of religious life and suffered the fate of a righteous person such as the prophets before him. Now, on behalf of the gospel, Paul and the early Christians actively confront the patterns of a pagan society and have to endure parallel trials. Jesus had blessed those who would be reviled and persecuted for his sake, telling them to rejoice because of the great reward in heaven (Matt 5:11). Now Paul finds himself in jail on account of his apostolic work and yet he is full of joy: "Rejoice in the Lord always! Again I will say rejoice" (Phil 4:4). Righteous suffering on behalf of God and his kingdom marks shining witness to faith in him, cleanses the life of believers, and promises glorious reward in God's coming kingdom.

However, Paul's connection of Christian suffering with the suffering of Christ goes much deeper. The death of Jesus on the cross is not merely an ethical example of a righteous sufferer. It is an event of redemption, an act of God of cosmic significance, by which God defeated death by death and released humanity from the reign of sin. According to Paul, Christians participate in that redemptive sacrifice through faith and baptism. They "die" with Christ, they are "buried" with Christ, and they "rise" to a new life in Christ (Rom 6:3-11). Here is the sacramental base of how Christ's suffering is shared by and manifested in the lives of Christians. Just as Christ died for humanity, so also Paul's ministry is an offering and libation for the faith and salvation of others (Phil 2:17; 2 Cor 5:11-12). By suffering for the sake of Christ, Paul and the Philippian Christians are engaged in the same great contest (*agon*) in advancing the cause of the gospel (Phil 1:27-30). The new "law" of Christ is to bear each other's burdens for mutual edification and a life in praise of God (Rom 15:1-6; Gal 6:2). It is in this sense that Paul can



speak of "boasting" and "rejoicing" in suffering for the sake of Christ and thus fulfilling "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col 1:24), according to his daring words. Such suffering is truly a reason for celebration, in as much as it serves Christ's work of salvation and transforms futile into redemptive suffering.

The references to joy in suffering both in Jesus and Paul should not lead to a kind of glorification of suffering as such. J. Christiaan Beker, in his book *Suffering and Hope*, makes the considerable point that, without attention to the hope of the resurrection, excessive emphasis on suffering can lead to wrong suppositions. Some theologians have argued that Christ's suffering on the cross expresses God's deepest self-revelation, the utter powerlessness of God and the triumph of suffering love. However, this may come close to suggesting that God is a sadist and Christians ought to be masochists. On the contrary, according to Beker, Christians ought to proclaim that God hates suffering and that suffering is alien to his coming kingdom. Although the cross is a corrective to facile triumphalism, nevertheless the cross points primarily to the necessity, not the nobility, of suffering in conflict with evil. Consequently, the resurrection is not merely a confirmation of the meaning of the cross but evidence of the final defeat of the evil powers in God's coming kingdom.

The balance between the cross and the resurrection is clear in two extended expositions of St. Paul. In 1 Cor 15, the whole truth and hope of the Christian life is anchored on Christ's resurrection and its implications for us. "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins ... If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Cor 15:17, 19). Paul argues strongly not only to prove the fact of Jesus' resurrection by references to eyewitnesses, but also interprets its cosmic significance as a new age ending with the destruction of the last enemy, the last power of evil, death itself (1 Cor 15:26).

Only through the power of the resurrection can humanity hope to be transformed into a new order of life freed from corruption and decay. According to Paul, only then will all suffering and death be "swallowed up in victory" (cf. 1 Cor 15:51-51).

In Romans 8:18-39 Paul takes us further. Here he envisions the rescue of creation itself from the futile subjection to evil and corruption. The redemption of humanity will not occur apart from the freedom of all creation from bondage to the powers of evil. At the present time, groaning and suffering mark all created things. The first fruits of redemption and liberation are already attested through the gift of Christ and the Spirit. Yet, it is by hope that we are saved and we see things but through a glass darkly (Rom 8:24; 1 Cor 13:12). The glorious final victory lies in the future. Because of the strength of his own inner life in Christ and the Spirit, the Apostle bursts with invincible confidence and lyrical powers as he advances to the zenith of his exposition in Rom 8. For now the Spirit helps us in our weakness and God's providence assures us about the final outcome. If God did not spare his own Son, will he not do all things for our glorification in him? If Christ presently intercedes for us before God, then who can separate us from his love? In all trials and tribulations we have the promise of victory: "For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38-39).



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## Science, Technology and Faith: Overcoming False Barriers

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### Orthodox Theology and the Scientific Process

The unprecedented achievements of modern science have added greatly to our knowledge of the cosmos and have raised to new and unparalleled heights the quality of our biological existence. Progressing into the twenty-first century, scientists promise us an even greater expansion of human capabilities.

The pursuits and activities of science and technology, as reported in a popular national magazine, are leading to "increased human control over the environment, over other living organisms, over mountains of data, above all over one's psychology and genetics and destiny."<sup>1</sup> What all this means for the future of humankind is yet to be revealed. As the boundaries of human knowledge continuously expand, the opportunities for good are enormous, as are the possibilities for unimaginable destruction.

Human beings both design and manage the scientific process. At every stage of the process people have at their disposal a wide range of possibilities to give form and shape to nature. Who is to help determine and develop the principles of choice by which the scientific process is guided and its purposes and ends are defined? And how are these purposes related to the ultimate destiny of humanity and the cosmos? Certainly, Orthodox theology must play a significant role in