

**TANGAZA COLLEGE**  
**THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA**

**JORGE ENRIQUE ORMEÑO QUIROZ, S.D.B.**

**THE CHRISTIAN IN FRONT OF SUFFERING**  
**Response to the Problem of Suffering**  
**in Job 40:4-5; 42:2-6 and Rom 8:28-30**

Moderator  
**Rev. Dr. Christopher Owczarek, S.D.B.**

A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Bachelor of Sacred Theology

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*To  
Jessica*

*“Scio enim redemptor meus vivit”*  
(Job 19:25)

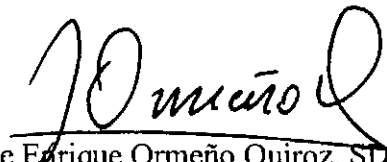
## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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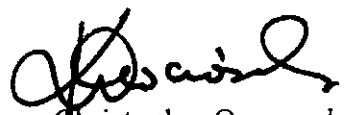
Finally, my heartedly thanks to my parents, Carlos y Martha, who teach much more about the Christian way of dealing with suffering that this paper shows; and to my friends Mary, Enrico and Javier, who share with me my small moments of suffering and gave me Christian support.

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Sacred Theology. It has never been submitted to any or any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

  
Jorge Enrique Ormeño Quiroz, SDB

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2005

This Long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

  
Christopher Owczarek

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2005

## INTRODUCTION

Every human being at some time in their lives is touched by suffering, and I was not an exception. Suffering knocked at my door in different circumstances. However, I looked around me and I found different ways people suffer. Among those ways, there are people who suffer for no apparent reason, especially those children sexually abused by people whom they trusted. From news around the world we came to know of so many priests who abused not only the trust, but also the lives and bodies of children in their care. These abuses leave on the victims a wound that is difficult to heal, especially because they have been inflicted by people who are “representing” God. This moved my pastoral heart to find ways to help them first of all to understand their suffering and the role God plays in it. This was the spark that started the present work and drove me to continue the investigation.

Thus, aiming at a deeper understanding of suffering, we try to distinguish a way a Christian may understand suffering. To this end, we investigate three passages in the Christian Scriptures Job 40:4-5; 42:2-6 and Rom 8:28-30. We chose these passages because they present an understanding of suffering in the Old and New Testament respectively.

In this work, we use the Book of Job to understand undeserved suffering in the Old Testament. Thus, we also presuppose that Job is righteous and that his sufferings are undeserved. The fact that Romans explains the Christian life is not a matter of discussion; this Christian life is lived by Christians who have been made righteous by God. Then, the sufferings that they undergo are not supposed to happen to them because Christ had already paid the price for their victory.

Thus, this essay is divided into three chapters. In this chapter, we analyse Job's response to his suffering. In this analysis, we survey the different ways in which the Old Testament understood suffering; then, we proceed with the delimitation and context of the text. This is followed by the exegesis of the text, and, finally, we present its theological message.

In the second chapter, we survey Rom 8:28-30 to understand the place suffering has in the life of the Christian. We start with presenting the approach on suffering of Jesus and his disciples; then, we will have the delimitation of the text and the examination of its context; subsequently, we will do the exegesis to finish with the theological message of the text. Finally, in the third chapter we will compare the findings of the previous two chapters and underline the particular Christian response to suffering.

## **Chapter I**

### **Response to the Problem of Suffering in Job 40:4-5; 42:2-6**

#### **1. Introduction**

In this chapter, we analyse Job's response to his suffering. Job's suffering seems to have affected his relationship with God. Thus, Job tries to deal with his suffering, but primarily with God, who can explain the reason behind it. In our evaluation we survey the different ways to understand suffering in the Old Testament, and then we examine the climatic moment of his encounter with God, namely, Job 40:4-5 and 42:2-6. In this examination we attempt to understand the way he addresses his problem, his relationship with God and his final reaction to this encounter.

#### **2. Understanding of Suffering in the Old Testament**

Suffering is a reality of human life that was also experienced by the Israelites. They tried to understand it within their religion.<sup>1</sup> Because of their holistic understanding of the human being, they saw the corporeal and the spiritual suffering

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. D.J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 219.



as one.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the Old Testament presents the cause, the reason and the purpose of suffering.

Israelites believe in a good God, and suffering was anything but good. Thus, they were challenged in their concept of God.<sup>3</sup> Evidently, suffering could not come from a good God; consequently, they had to draw an explanation to relate suffering with evil -- evil as the product of man's action: the Fall.<sup>4</sup> However, a further reflection put evil under the realm of God's power. If God is creator of everything, they thought, he is also creator of evil.<sup>5</sup>

The understanding of the reason for suffering was progressive. There is growth that goes from putting the cause of suffering in man to see it as an opportunity for God's manifestation. The theory of retribution makes sense to establish a relationship between suffering and sin. This theory affirms that God rewards or punishes man according to man's fidelity to the Law. Thus, the pre-exilic prophets reminded Israel to keep the Covenant and, in this way, to avoid suffering.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, Israel did not keep the covenant and was punished with the Exile.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. O.A. PIPER, "Suffering and Evil", 451-452.

<sup>3</sup> The natural question is how it is that, having a good God, he allows to evil to exist and to touch the lives of his faithful. It is the same struggle today the people of our time have to undergo. The questions concerning evil threaten the relationship with the divine and are seen as a 'fundament' for modern atheism. Cf. R.B. EDWARDS, "Suffering", 650; N. FOGLIACCO, *The God of all Consolation*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Israel rethinking their lives and their experience of God realised that God was indeed a good God who has created everything good (Gen 1) and put the responsibility of the evil and suffering in the world in man. This is the message of the ethiology of the Fall. Suffering and evil are present in the world because of man's sin (Gen 3). Thus, there are two clear examples of this entrance of suffering into the world: the suffering to get the necessary food and the suffering to bring new men to the world (Gen 3:16-19). Cf. J. BUKOVSKY, "Suffering", 775; A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering?*, 53-54; D.J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 220.

<sup>5</sup> The passage from enotheism to monotheism as such was very strong in order to discard any reminiscence of double principle for creation and their consequent other gods. Cf. Amos 3:6; Isa 45:7; Job 2:10. Cf. J. BUKOVSKY, "Suffering", 775.

<sup>6</sup> Because Israel had understood suffering as the product of man's sin, it was the logical consequence to think he had to be accountable for it. That is exactly what the Law taught. This gives

At first, Israel felt the Exile was the punishment for their sins. However, the Exile was unbearable, long and afflicted upon the Israelites not by a morally superior group. Besides, God had previously rescued them in times of distress, but this time his response was not forthcoming.<sup>7</sup> This situation put Israel in crisis and challenged the theory of retribution. At this point, the prophets broke away from the theory of retribution and announced an individual retribution.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, a further reflection gave the post-exilic prophets a new insight: God, in a final intervention, will take away all suffering. The day of this final intervention came to be known as the Day of the Lord.<sup>9</sup>

The Old Testament presents different purposes of suffering: suffering exists to punish sin. This point of view is represented by the theory of retribution and was widely held. Then, suffering was also thought to have an educative purpose. Taking the image of father-son relationship, the Old Testament presents God as educating his children through suffering (Deut 8:5). Thus, God leads people to fulfil his will (Ps 94:12-13); he uses suffering for our good to form our character and to make us return to him (Jer 31:18).

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birth the theory of the retribution: man has to pay for his personal sins (Exod 21:12,17-25; Num 12:1-15; 2Chro 26:16-21) and even the nation has to pay for his unfaithfulness (Deut 8:28; 28:15-68; Isa 3:16-26; 22:1-14; Jer 2:19; 4:18). Cf. J. BUKOVSKY, "Suffering", 776.

<sup>7</sup> This is the occasion to a genre that comes to be known as Lamentation. It is produced by a strong feeling of meaninglessness together with the delay in the redemption. Cf. D.J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 222.

<sup>8</sup> This came as an intellectual help to a people worn out with their fate. This helped them to come to know God from a different perspective: God is merciful and the work of salvation is totally his. Cf. Ezek 31:29-30.

<sup>9</sup> The apocalyptic eschatology present in some of the later prophets marks this final stage of the understanding of the history of understanding of suffering. There will be a time where suffering will be only a bad dream of the past and the reign of God be established in its fullness (Dan 7:13-14; 9:24; 12:1-3; Ezek 37; Isa 24-27; Zech 9-14). Cf. Z. HAYES, *Visions of a Future*, 36-38.

God also uses suffering to test faithfulness. He wants people to trust in him as the one leading history (Gen 22:1-2) and the one who cares because he loves (Deut 8:3; Zech 13:9; Mal 3:3-4; Isa 48:10-11). Finally, God uses suffering as intercessory and redemptive; a glimpse of this purpose can be seen in the figure of Moses. Moses intercedes for his people (Exod 17:2-5; Num 11:1-2) and even offers his life for them (Exod 32:32-33). Jeremiah presents another example of this suffering for others (Jer 8:18.21; 11:19; 15:18). However, the best illustration of this purpose is portrayed by the Servant of Yahweh of Second Isaiah. For the Servant of Yahweh sufferings are part of his existence (Isa 52:14; 53:3) that eventually lead to the offering of his life (Isa 53:10-12).<sup>10</sup>

### **3. Delimitation of the Text**

Job 40:4-5 and 42:2-6 are Job's answers to the challenge placed by Yahweh's speeches — Job 38:3-40:2 and 40:6-41:34. The texts do not present difficulties in their delimitation; however, because they are intimately associated to Yahweh's speeches, they have undergone the same fate.

We take these texts as they actually are in the Bible because any other attempt of interpretation would be only a theory and we try to stick to the text. Following the text we encounter kind of process both in the plot of the Yahweh's speeches and in Job's answers to them. However, not all the scholars regard the text as it is and interpret it differently. The first group of scholars get rid of them altogether as a later composition that adds nothing to the plot of the Book of Job. The second group accept these texts partially. Some sustain that there were two

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. J. BUKOVSKY, "Suffering", 775; R.B. EDWARDS, "Suffering", 650-651; M.L. RAMLOT – J. GUILLET, "Suffering", 588; H. KOESTER, "Suffering Servant and Royal Messiah", 106.

parallel traditions that made their way through the text and stand independently; others believe that there was one speech of Yahweh and one answer of Job and they were divided for esthetical purposes.<sup>11</sup>

Job's answer to Yahweh in 40:4-5 is preceded by a verse that clearly states the change of character in the poem; Job 40:3 mentions explicitly Job answering Yahweh — וַיַּעַן אֵיּוֹב אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר<sup>12</sup> “and Job answered Yahweh and said”. The following verse to Job 40:4-5 likewise presents another change of character, in this case God — וַיַּעַן־יְהוָה אֶת־אֵיּוֹב מִן־סַעֲרָה וַיֹּאמֶר — “and Yahweh spoke to Job in the storm and said”.

Job's final answer to Yahweh (42:2-6) is also preceded by an explanatory verse that states the change of character — וַיַּעַן אֵיּוֹב אֶת־יְהוָה וַיֹּאמֶר “and Job replied to Yahweh and said”. Job 42:7, however, has Yahweh as its grammatical subject — דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶל־אֵיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אֱלִיפָן דִּבֶּר יְהוָה אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אֶל־אֵיּוֹב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־אֱלִיפָן — “after Yahweh [has] said these things to Job [and] he said to Eliphaz”.

#### 4. Context of the Text

##### 4.1 Remote Context

The remote context of Job 40:4-5 and 42:2-6 is the whole Book of Job. The Book of Job has two parts: the prosaic and the poetic sections.<sup>13</sup> The narrative of the

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. L. Alonso SCHÖKEL – J.L. SICRE DIAZ, *Job*, 55-63.

<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew quotations are taken from Bible Works for Windows version 5.0 BHS Hebrew Old Testament (4th edition).

<sup>13</sup> As such there is not a formal division. However, we can find two different kinds of writing, prose and poetry, which make two different sections. The prosaic section comprehends the prologue and the epilogue, that is, the first two chapters 1:1 2:13 and the end of the book from 42:7-17. The poetic section comprehends the chapters in between the prologue and the epilogue, that is, 3:1 42:6. Cf. R.D. MOORE, “The Integrity of Job”, 30-31.

book is featured in both of them.<sup>14</sup> However, there is a difference in the way the arguments are taken in each of these sections. The occasion to the plot is Satan's challenge to God concerning the sincerity of worship.<sup>15</sup> To prove his argument Satan asks to test a man called Job and God accepts the challenge.

The narrative demonstrates the sincerity of Job's religion amid his afflictions. The prosaic Job is a patient fellow. He endures suffering despite all odds, and he is rewarded ultimately for his faithfulness. The poetic Job, however, argues against God for his righteousness.<sup>16</sup> Then, Job's friends enter into the argument to defend God's righteousness against Job's. The book has its climax with God's intervention and indulgence to have a contention with Job.<sup>17</sup> The final intervention of Job is marked by a not-so-patient response.

The main characters involved in this section are God, Job's friends and Job himself. The book presents an anthropological image of God,<sup>18</sup> and it is towards this image of God that both Job and his friends react, though in a different manner. On

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<sup>14</sup> It is evident that the author of the Book of Job left out some arguments such as the place of Satan in the whole story and the role that plays the weakness of the human nature due to the Fall to present his argument in a more striking way. Cf. J. CRENSHAW, "Job", 861.

<sup>15</sup> D. Cox argues that the main point of the book is not about the kind of religion Job has, but the kind of God Job believes in. Cf. D. COX, *Man's Anger and God's Silence*, 119.

<sup>16</sup> Job is righteous in the Judaic sense of the word both because he has kept his part in the relationship with God and because he has shown a complete trust in the Lord for everything has happened. Cf. R.A. KELLY, "Righteousness", 193.

<sup>17</sup> The end of contention in the Ancient World was not marked by the verdict of a judge, but for one of the parties in dispute to recognise the other party was right. The classic example is Israel's relationship with the Lord; every time God argues against them, Israel recognises they are the ones in fault. Cf. Exod 9:27; Josh 7:19-22; Judg 10:10; 1 Sam 12:10; 15.24.30; 2 Sam 12:13; 1 Kgs 8:47; Ps 51:6.

<sup>18</sup> God seems to be a fickle being. He does not bother about playing with the life of humans just to show himself right in front of Satan. The treatment that God afflicts on Job is all the more unfair because Job is said to be righteous by the same God.

the one hand, Job's friends try to defend God by accusing Job.<sup>19</sup> Their theology, marked by the theory of retribution, affirms suffering as a product of sin. Therefore, they advise Job to recognise his sin to renew his relationship with God.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Job defends his righteousness<sup>21</sup> in front not only of his friends, but also God,<sup>22</sup> asking him for a contention.<sup>23</sup> Job wants to encounter God<sup>24</sup> to know the reason for his suffering because his personal experience challenged everything he knows of God.<sup>25</sup> At the end of the story, God must intervene directly to ensure everybody understands who he is.

#### 4.2 Immediate Context

Job 40:4-5 and 42:2-6 have as immediate context Yahweh's speeches (38:2-40:2; 40:6-41:34).<sup>26</sup> The reason for Yahweh's speeches is to go on contention with

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<sup>19</sup> Unlike Job, Job's friends defend God at all costs. However, defending him, they leave out God's personal aspect --the aspect of his relationships. Thus, they do not listen to God and cannot know who God is. Cf. D. BERGANT, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 25; G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 816.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. G. VON RAD, *Wisdom of Israel*, 211-213.

<sup>21</sup> Though there is a clear difference between the prosaic and the poetic Job, both of them present Job as righteous. The prosaic Job is righteous to the point of becoming an example for the whole Israel of patience at enduring sufferings as it is attested by Jas 5:11, but also by the same book. There is enough to review four adjectives used in the prologue: blameless and upright, God-fearing and avoiding wrong-doing to describe the righteousness of Job. Then, there is another way to underscore his righteousness, the numbers used to describe his possessions and his children. Moreover, the fact that he was virtuous was also seen the way he offered sacrifices to make up for any wrongdoing of his family. Cf. D. BERGANT, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 27; A. BRENNER, "Job the Pious? The Characterisation of Job", 301-307. The poetic Job is also righteous as he himself declares (Job 9:15.20-21; 10:7; 12:4; 23:11-12) and even God reassures him (Job 42:8). Cf. J.E. HARTLEY, "Theology of Job", 782. However, A. Magnante sees Job presented as a paradigm of the whole humanity rather than as a person who live in a determined time and place. Cf. A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering?*, 88.

<sup>22</sup> He is very much aware that affirming his righteousness implied to threaten the justice of God. He is an unfair God, if not at all, at least with the reference to his suffering. Cf. J.C.L. GIBSON, *Job*, 236.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Job 9:15-16; 10:1-2; 13:3.18; 21:4; 23:2-7.

<sup>24</sup> Job is quite sure that the one he wants to enter in contention is the only one who can save him. He is confused because his accused is the only one who can acquit him. Cf. G. VON RAD, *Wisdom of Israel*, 215.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. R. GORDIS, *The Book of Job*, 77.85.

<sup>26</sup> Yahweh's speeches are called the interventions of God at the end of the Book of Job. Cf. Job 38:2-40:2; 40:6-42:1 respectively first and second speech. There are some scholars that argue

Job<sup>27</sup> to respond to Job's objections concerning the order of creation and its justice as well as the goodness of God.<sup>28</sup> Yahweh's speeches give a completely different shape to this contention. God refers to creation to solve both of Job's objections;<sup>29</sup> in this way, God does not answer the questions, but instead challenges Job.<sup>30</sup>

This is the purpose of those speeches: to challenge Job and to give new information for Job to consider in his arguments.<sup>31</sup> Now Job, and the reader, can put into context the problem of suffering. While there is certainly an order, it is beyond man's grasp. The relationship with God is possible, but not on human terms.<sup>32</sup> God is free and also made his creation free.<sup>33</sup>

Yahweh's speeches present the origin of the universe, the natural order, the law of the animal world, the value of the animals and the big beasts: behemoth and

whether there are two (D.B. Mac Donald, C. Siegfried, R.H. Pfeiffer, J. Lindblom) or there is only one speech (R.A.F. MacKenzie and C. Westermann.) and the accuracy of the content of them to understand their integrity. Cf. L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL – J.L. SICRE DIAZ, *Job*, 57.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. D. BERGANT, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 27. It is not the first time that in the Bible we see God giving in to a contention with somebody. He does it with Moses (Exod 17:1-17; Num 11:10-15; Deut 1:37; 3:26) and with Jeremiah (12:1-6; 15:10-12; 20:7-13) and with Habakkuk (1:12-25). Cf. G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 778.

<sup>28</sup> O. Keel maintains God tries to make Job respond to each one of these objections in a speech. The first speech presents God as the creator and as Lord over creation. Things are in order and not as Job thinks. The second presents God the goodness of God who always fights the evil powers. V. Kubina adds to the first speech the conception of a plan. Things do not occur at random but guided by a mysterious plan of God. R. Gordis believes the speeches aim at pulling down the anthropocentric vision of the universe of the Job and his friends revealing the creative power of God. Cf. L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL – J.L. SICRE DIAZ, *Job*, 61-62; G. GUTIÉRREZ, *On Job*, 69. In this way, there is a certain parallelism between what Job has been saying and what God now presents to Job. Cf. P.W. SKEHAN, "Job's Final Plea and the Lord's Reply", 51.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. J. CRENSHAW, "Job", 862; J.G. JANZEN, *Job*, 249-250.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. C.A. NEWSON, "The Book of Job", 613. Yahweh uses a challenge to rival genre. This challenge to rival genre is characterised by a challenge-question that is put across not to gain information, but to challenge the object of the question. Thus, what Yahweh pretends is to win over Job and to re-establish their relationship. Cf. H. ROWOLD, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival", 207-211.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. D. COX, *Man's Anger and God's Silence*, 113-114.

<sup>32</sup> Yahweh wants to teach Job that Job's relationship with him, and therefore his religion, has to be based on a filial affection rather than on a contractual relationship where justice comes to the fore. Cf. R.A.F. MACKENZIE, "The Purpose of Yahweh's Speeches in the Book of Job", 440.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. D. COX, *Man's Anger and God's Silence*, 127-128; N.C. HABEL, *The Book of Job*, 65-66.

leviathan.<sup>34</sup> This content of the speeches serves God to show himself as creator, omnipresent, provident, creative and free.<sup>35</sup>

## 5. Analysis of the Text<sup>36</sup>

Job starts his process of conversion responding to God's first speech, but this first response will not be enough to complete it.

40:4 "*Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you*"

The first word "bchold" translates the Hebrew **הִנֵּה** and could mean "behold" and the adversative "if" as in 9:11; 19:7. This can be of much significance to understand the tone in which this verse and the response in general is written. "If I am of small account" is not recognition of littleness but a hypothesis.<sup>37</sup> "Of small account" translates the verb **קָלָתִי**, that means to be light opposed to **יָכָבֵד** that means to be heavy, to have glory, to be important. Thus, this expression is like saying "Look, suppose I am small [as you try to imply in your speech], how can I answer?" Certainly, Job is somewhat sarcastic.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. C. MIGLIETTA, *Perché il dolore?*, 172-174.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. C. MIGLIETTA, *Perché il dolore?*, 180-181.

<sup>36</sup> For the English texts, we will use the Revised Standard Version, unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. J.B. CURTIS, "Job's Response to Yahweh", 507; J.G. JANZEN, *Job*, 243; E.B. SMICK, "Job", 1045.

<sup>38</sup> J.B. CURTIS ("Job's Response to Yahweh", 507) presents this first act of defiance as an answer to Yahweh's first speech. He will maintain the same kind of attitude towards God. However, we have decided for it as the first step of conversion, but not as the way to interpret the whole of Job's responses. We see Job's responses as a process of conversion. Job first tries to stand his ground in front of God — as in this verse; and then progressively will start "changing his mind" — the following verse. The fact that he does not convert after the first of Yahweh's speeches produces, so to say, the second one. It is the second speech that will 'help' Job to reach to "change his mind" and to recognise who God and who he is.

In fact, there are several ways to interpret Job's response. N.C. HABEL ("The Verdict on/of God at the end of Job", 27) presents four different ways "[1] Job completely surrenders to the will of God, repents of his arrogant attitude and stands humble before his God. [2] Job is reconciled to God, coming to an understanding of God's governance of creation and is once more a wise one who fears God. [3] Job's words reflect a comic irony. God's bravado from the whirlwind reflects God's attempt



*"I lay my hand on my mouth"*

It occurs six times in the Bible<sup>39</sup> and we can deduce from them that it is simply keeping silence.<sup>40</sup> The act of being silent is not an act of conversion in itself, but the beginning of the process of conversion.<sup>41</sup> The element of silence takes primacy once more in the development of the narrative of the book. The protagonists have been taking turns to keep silent. It was first Job, then and his friends and then, God. Now, once more, it is Job's turn.<sup>42</sup> This time the act of keeping silent is an act of reverence in front of the completely other. In this contact with the Divine there is not other way but to be in wonder.

*40:5 "I have spoken once, I will not answer; Twice but I will proceed no further"*

It is an expression to mean he has said something, but he will not say anything else. This silence is a silence of reverence and admiration towards the things Job just has heard, as in taking time to assimilate them. It is a silence to listen the Word of God. This understanding is more likely than to believe this silence of somebody who is not able to say anything or simply that who is taking some time to redefine his defence.<sup>43</sup>

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to handle Job's exposing of God's inconsistency. Job mollifies God with his tongue on the cheek confession. [4] Job's speech is his final act of defiance. While Job recognises his human limitations, he rejects a deity who answers human cries of despair with arrogant boasting from the tempest."

<sup>39</sup> See Judg 18:19; Mic 7:16; Prov 30: 32; Job 21:5; 29:9. Cf. J.B. CURTIS, "Job's Response to Yahweh", 507.

<sup>40</sup> "This act is both juridical and wise at the same time. It does not refer to a feeling of disconsolation or of fear in front of somebody stronger. It is not an awareness of a definitive game over. This, however, means the acknowledgement of the primacy of God and his power on nature." G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 779. This is my translation.

<sup>41</sup> J.B.CURTIS ("Job's Response to Yahweh", 507) believes this silence is an act of defiance cause by a revolt against God.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. A. MAGNANTE, *Why suffering?*, 128. It is important to note that Job himself predicted he will be silent at God's encounter because he also thought God would strike him. However, God did not strike him as he thought, but in a different way - he stroke him showing the wonders of his creation. Cf. J.E. HARTLEY, "The Book of Job", 517.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 780.

Job's process of conversion reaches its climax in his second response.<sup>44</sup>

42:2 *"I know that you can do all things,*

The term 'I know',<sup>45</sup> underlines the conviction of God's power, but this power was never at stake. Job recognises the authority and power of God and, at the same time, questions God's goodness and justice in the way God deals with his creatures.<sup>46</sup>

*And that not purpose of thine can be thwarted"*

Job also recognises the plan of God. The plan of God marks the intervention of God in the human history. These interventions are always salvific because are

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<sup>44</sup> N.C. HABEL (*The Book of Job*, 578) presents the following scheme for Job's second response:

Part I

A Acknowledgement (Job's concession)

I know you control all schemes 42:2

B Quotation (Yahweh's Challenge)

Who is this who obscures my design *without* knowledge? 3a

C Announcement (Job's Confession)

Indeed (*lākēn*), I am the one who spoke *without knowledge* 3b-c

Part II

B<sub>1</sub> Quotation (Yahweh's Challenge)

First hear me, then I will ask and you inform me 4

A<sub>1</sub> Acknowledgement (Job's Experience)

I have already *heard*, but not I *see* you 5

C<sub>1</sub> Announcement (Job's Reversal)

Therefore (*'al-kēn*) I withdraw my case and leave my ashes 6

J.B. Curtis has it differently. He puts the final point on Job's recantation of his believing in God: Confession of God's power and wisdom; admission of limited knowledge; invitation to dispute the case; acknowledgement of Yahweh's appearing; and, recantation. Cf. J.B. CURTIS, "Job's Response to Yahweh", 487-511.

<sup>45</sup> J.G. Janzen translates "you know". However, this means the same because it also underlines God's authority. Cf. J.G. JANZEN, *Job*, 251-252.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. J.B. CURTIS, "Job's Response to Yahweh", 508; J.C.L. GIBSON, *Job*, 258; R.E. MURPHY, *The Book of Job*, 99.

made by a God who is provident and just.<sup>47</sup> These plans are kept to the letter and nobody, not even Job, can thwart them because they are done by a free God.<sup>48</sup>

42:3 *"Who is this that hides council without knowledge?  
Therefore I had uttered what I did not understand,  
things too wonderful for me,  
which I did not know."*

Here we have a semi-quotation of Yahweh's speech<sup>49</sup>: the first part of the verse is literal quotation and in the second is Job that makes his Yahweh's word. In this way, Job puts himself in the right position. He cannot understand the mind of God as he has no power to do what God does.<sup>50</sup>

42:4 *"Hear and I will speak;  
I will question you and you declare to me"*

There is another semi-quotation from Yahweh's speech<sup>51</sup> to refer to what has happened within him.<sup>52</sup> Job forgot that the most important thing in a relationship is to be ready to listen and now he is in the contention he was waiting for.<sup>53</sup>

42:5 *"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,  
but now my eyes have seen thee;"*

Job has been asking for a contention. He is not only given a contention, but an encounter with God. This encounter allows a change of knowledge. Job goes

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<sup>47</sup> There are many instances where the Scriptures recognise the plans of God as salvific, just (Prov 12:2; 14:17; 24:8; Ps 10:2.4; 21:12; 37:7; 139:20; Jer 11:15) or juridical against evil (Jer 23:20; 30:24; 51:11). Cf. G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 814; A.A. VIARD P. GRELOT, "Plan of God", 432-433.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. G. GUTIÉRREZ, *On Job*, 84; J.E. HARTLEY, "The Book of Job", 435; H.H. ROWLEY, *The Book of Job*, 265.

<sup>49</sup> Job cites Yahweh's speech (38:2) to, in a way, accuse himself of his superficiality. Cf. J.C.L. GIBSON, *Job*, 259; J.G. JANZEN, *Job*, 252-253; H.H. ROWLEY, *The Book of Job*, 265.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. L. ALONSO SCHÖKEL – J.L. SICRE DIAZ, *Job*, 596; J.E. HARTLEY, "The Book of Job", 536. H.H. ROWLEY, *The Book of Job*, 265. Curtis because of his option to have Job's recantation at the end has to delete such a verse. He believes that this is an addition to Job's final response. Cf. J.B. CURTIS, "Job's Response to Yahweh", 508-509.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. 38:3; 40:7.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. J.G. JANZEN, *Job*, 253.

<sup>53</sup> Yahweh knows well the importance of listening in a relationship. That is the reason the first commandment of the Law was to listen (Deut 6:4). Job, however, did not opt for the relationship but for a judiciary model.

from the theological knowledge or *hearing* to the experience of this God *seeing* him.<sup>54</sup>

42:6 "Therefore I despise myself,  
and repent in dust and ashes."

Commentators do not agree on the meaning of this verse. While some maintain Job's conversion,<sup>55</sup> others find it hard to believe that Job gives up his position throughout the whole book — Job asserts his righteousness. It is most likely that Job reaches the climax of his conversion first recognising the words he spoke were foolish;<sup>56</sup> and then changing his mind the way he tried to deal with things.<sup>57</sup>

There is another detail that causes controversy: the translation of the last part of the verse: **עַל-עֶפֶר וָאֵפֶר**. Some commentators translate it as "sitting on dust and ashes" and see this as a symbol of repentance. Others translate "being but dust and ashes" and see this as a metaphor referring to the human state. We don't believe these translations are quite different because they underline the same reality: Job realises who he is in front of God and repents of his stubbornness in affirming his

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. J.C.L. GIBSON, *Job*, 259.266; J.G. JANZEN, *Job*, 252-253; G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 815. This is not the first time God makes somebody change his faith. He also helped the Hebrews to change their faith from the hearing to the seeing. Cf. Exod 14:13.31.

<sup>55</sup> At the encounter with God everybody realises who he is, this is the insight the book is giving us. It follows the Hebrew tradition that nobody can see God and live (Exod 33:20), at least live in the same way. Isaiah is a clear example of this truth. He was transformed in the meeting of God (Isa 6:5-6. We may say the same of Ezekiel 1:28). Thus, this encounter gives a new knowledge of God, of oneself and of religion, the relationship between God and man. Cf. D. BERGANT, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 33; J.C.L. GIBSON, *Job*, 259.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. J.G. JANZEN, *Job*, 254-255; A. MAGNANTE, *Why suffering?*, 130; R.E. MURPHY, *The Book of Job*, 100; E.B. SMICK, "Job", 1056.

<sup>57</sup> It is good to note that J.B. Curtis presents a completely different point of view. He believes, and that is the whole point of his article, that Job neither converts nor repents on his stand and his words. However, Job continues to have a controversial position with God. Moreover, he recants his belief in God. Cf. J.B. CURTIS, "Job's Response to Yahweh", 487-511.

righteousness. Thus, the full text will read "I repent and change my mind, being but dust and ashes".<sup>58</sup>

## 6. Message of the Text

Job was looking for a relationship with God; that was the core of his struggle.<sup>59</sup> The Lord answers Job's desire and reveals himself. This encounter gives Job a new knowledge of God, and, in the process, he comes to know himself much better.<sup>60</sup> This new knowledge makes possible a new relationship between Job and God. Moreover, it makes Job see his suffering in a different light and react in an unusual manner.

Yahweh's speeches can be considered a theophany, a manifestation of God.<sup>61</sup> It is through them Job encounters Yahweh in a different way. It is not in a contention as Job first wanted.<sup>62</sup> This allowed Job to pass the faith from hearing to seeing; from a theological understanding that makes God in the likeness of man to a radical experience of God in salvation history.<sup>63</sup> It is the plan of God that comes to the fore in this encounter.<sup>64</sup> Job can be sure the God he believes in is a good God.<sup>65</sup> This God is provident and takes care of his creation. He is just, but not limited by

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<sup>58</sup> This is the translation of Murphy that in our point of view is not necessarily more accurate, but catches the meaning of the verse. Cf. R.E. MURPHY, *The Book of Job*, 101.

<sup>59</sup> H.H. ROWLEY, *The Book of Job*, 265.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. D. BERGANT, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 32; J. CRENSHAW, "Job", 859; J.H. EATON, *Job*, 28.

<sup>61</sup> God does not answer the objections raised by Job. He "does not involved himself with the arguments for or against his dominion, but he let himself be seen." L. RAGAZ, "God himself is the answer", 130.

<sup>62</sup> We have seen that Job was asking for a contention. See note 33.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 815.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. G. GLTIÉRREZ, *On Job*, 83; G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 814.

<sup>65</sup> It is one of the objections not only of Job, but all those who are in crisis of faith: "if God wants to take away evil and can't, he is weak; if he can and does not want, he is hostile to man; if he does not want and can't, he is hostile and weak; if he want and can, why is it that there is evil and why is not cancelled by God". G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 73.

justice because he acts freely<sup>66</sup> and, because he loves, he respects the laws and freedom of his creatures, man included.

Job now understands who he is, namely a human being and not God.<sup>67</sup> He was concerned about his personal suffering and his righteousness; however, he is now aware that there is only one who is righteous and makes him righteous. He now recognises that he was only concerned about himself and he forgot the only important thing — God.<sup>68</sup> Though Yahweh did not answer his problem of suffering, the God who is free liberated him even from his own concerns.<sup>69</sup> Job now only remains silent as in contemplation of the mystery of suffering that is part of God's plan.<sup>70</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

Job responds to his suffering, discarding the old understanding of suffering, especially the theory of retribution. The rejection of this explanation is not unimportant: he rejects it because it does not explain what he is suffering. In order to clarify his knowledge of suffering, he calls God for a contention. God surprises Job, and the reader, by submitting in and engaging in a dialogue with Job. God does not explain Job's suffering, but reveals himself to Job. God reveals himself by presenting his Creation and the way he leads with them [who?] — his providence. Thus, Job does not receive a satisfactory explanation for his suffering, but acquires

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<sup>66</sup> Cf. D. BERGANT, *Israel's Wisdom Literature*, 17; G. GUTIÉRREZ, *On Job*, 87. Job progressively understands that God is more than the image we have of him. He is transcendent. He is in the words of Rudolf Otto: *mysterium tremendum*. Cf. J.C.L. GIBSON, *Job*, 239.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. M.H. POPE, *Job*, XXII.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. G. GUTIÉRREZ, *On Job*, 76; R. GORDIS, *The Book of Job*, 491; J.C.L. GIBSON, *Job*, 237.

<sup>69</sup> God once more makes true the Ireneus' saying *Gloria Dei homo vivens et vita hominis visio Dei*. Job could recognise that God was indeed his Redeemer (Job 19:25) and now he can remain silent in his contemplation. Cf. J.C.L. GIBSON, *Job*, 240; G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 815.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. A.R. CERESKO, *Introduction to the Old Testament Wisdom*, 88; R.E. MURPHY, *The Book of Job*, 111; G. RAVASI, *Giobbe*, 780.

new knowledge both of God and of himself. This new knowledge quells his eagerness to know the reason for his suffering. Moreover, Job realises that his questioning does not count anymore because the only thing that counts now is God. It is in front of this God that Job now remains silent in contemplation.

## **Chapter II**

### **Response to the Problem of Suffering in Romans 8:28-30**

#### **1. Introduction**

In this chapter, we analyze Rom 8:28-30 to understand the place suffering has in the life of the Christian. It may seem that the Christian, because of his new status in front of God, does not need to suffer. Christ already saved Christians with His blood, and there is nothing else that should disturb the relationship between them. In this investigation, we attempt to clarify this objection presenting the way Jesus and his disciples relate to suffering and then verify the way in which Paul resolves this apparent dilemma of Christian life: how to reconcile suffering with Christian life.

#### **2. Understanding of Suffering in Jesus and His Disciples**

Jesus challenges the most common Old Testament understanding of suffering, namely, the theory of retribution.<sup>71</sup> Jesus is not happy with suffering; his

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<sup>71</sup> Cf. O.A. PIPER, "Suffering and Evil", 450-451.



ministry shows this. He breaks the connection between suffering and evil,<sup>72</sup> displaying the power of God in favour of the needy. He is ready to heal, to alleviate people's suffering, to enter into a relationship with the outcast.<sup>73</sup> In Jesus, God not only conquers suffering, but also makes himself vulnerable and suffers with human beings. Thus, God gives suffering a new meaning, which is given fully in Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus' death speaks of love because it is prompted by the Father's salvific love (Cf. 2 Cor 5:18; Rom 5:8; 8:3.32) and it is also Jesus' obedient and loving answer to his Father's love (Cf. 1 Cor 15:3; Gal 2:20; Heb 5:8-9). Moreover, Jesus also shows the depth of Jesus' love in the act of dying. Death is such a powerful act because it is final and irrevocable. Thus, Jesus, with his life and his death calls his disciples to follow in his footsteps and to give up their lives for each other (Cf. John 15:13).<sup>74</sup>

Jesus' disciples understood suffering as retributive,<sup>75</sup> but this understanding was challenged by Jesus' life and especially by his death.<sup>76</sup> Consequently, his

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<sup>72</sup> It is important to note that there are several instances when Jesus relates sickness with the evil spirits. He rebukes the evil spirits to cure the ill people. However, this is to underline the ever necessity of conversion for everybody, also for the people who are suffering. Moreover, there are other instances when Jesus tries to dissociate people's suffering from their sins. For example, the man born blind (John 9:1-41) or the death of the Samaritans murdered by Pilate (Luke 13:1-5).

<sup>73</sup> J. Meier presents his perspective on Jesus relation to the people suffering in the Gospel of Matthew. Cf. J. MEIER, *Mathew*, 39-40. However, it would be enough to list the course of ten miracles, though they are more than 10, in the Gospel of Matthew (8:1-4.5-13.14-15.23-27.28-34; 9:1-8.18-19.23-26.20-22.27-31.32-34). E. LaVerdiere presents the meals Jesus has in the Gospel of Luke. He relates them to the Eucharist. However, it is of our interest that when presenting so, he states that the meals are taken with people who are considered outcast in any way. Because of their being outcast, these people, we may say, are suffering. Cf. E. LAVERDIERE, *Dining in the Kingdom of God*, 13-14.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. B.A. AHERN, "The Contemporaneity of Christ's Passion", 138-139; W. KASPER, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 194-197.

<sup>75</sup> Examples of such behaviour are the link between sin and sickness in the story of the man born blind of John 9 and the reaction of James and John towards the Samaritans who did not welcomed Jesus (Luke 9:54-55).

followers had to undergo a change of mind and heart. It is with Jesus' resurrection and with the outpouring of the Spirit that they started the process of assimilating everything that the Master told them about his need to suffer to enter into his glory.<sup>77</sup> Only then did the disciples understand the need to unite their lives with his Master's Paschal Mystery.<sup>78</sup> Then, they preached, because they have had a personal experience, the need to be open to the grace of God in his Spirit to realise this that could not be achieved with their own strength. It was amazing to see them changed and become sensitive to the people's sufferings, as exemplified in the cure of the paralysed man,<sup>79</sup> and it was even more surprising to see them ready to give up their lives as their Master had told them.<sup>80</sup>

### 3. Delimitation of the Text

#### 3.1 *Terminus A Quo*

Romans 8:28-30 is a micro-unit within a larger unit, namely Romans 8:18-39. The first word of verse 28, *Οἴδαμεν* ("we know"), breaks with the preceding verse and serves as an introduction to the subsequent statement. Verse 28 has *πάντα* ("everything") as its grammatical subject, and thus differs from verse 27, which has

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<sup>76</sup> The disciples rejected the idea of a suffering Messiah. Cf. Mark 8:33; 9:32; 10:35-40. Then, they, as any pious Jew, were not at ease with his crucifixion. Cf. Deut 21:33; Mark 15:24. Finally, they were discouraged and could not believe the resurrection. Cf. Luke 24:4-5.19-24.38.

<sup>77</sup> The disciples had to give up the understanding of suffering as retributive and slowly become quiet in front to the mystery of suffering. This, however, did not prevent them from understanding suffering also as educative (Heb 12:5-11) and as an opportunity to show their trust in God (Heb 5:8; Rev 2:10).

<sup>78</sup> Paul presents the life of the Christians as a participation in the sufferings of Christ. The Christian cannot be understood without being united to Christ in order to share everything that Christ is. Thus, the Christian has to continually die to the flesh to rise with Christ to new life. Cf. R.E. EDWARDS, "Suffering", 652; D.L. STRINGER, *Paul and the Romans*, 66.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Luke 10:29-37; Acts 3:1-10; 1 Cor 12:26; Gal 6:2. See also O.A. PIPER, "Suffering and Evil", 453.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. R.E. EDWARDS, "Suffering", 650; D.J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 222.

πνεῦμα (“the Spirit”). Furthermore, πάντα (“everything”) does not only refer to the preceding verse, but to the whole unit (verses 18-27) and its theme of suffering.<sup>81</sup>

### 3.2 *Terminus Ad Quem*

Verse 31 has both a different theme and a different style. Verses 31-39 affirm God’s love as the guarantee for future glory. They convey their message through rhetorical questions. In contrast, verses 29-30 have a unifying theme, presenting the mystery of salvation from God’s point of view through a chain of verbs that describe this mystery, a chain that finishes with verse 30.

## 4. Context of the Text

### 4.1 *Remote Context*

Romans 8:28-30 is part of the doctrinal section of the Letter to the Romans, namely, Romans 1:16–8:39. This doctrinal section is divided in two parts, namely, 1:16–4:25 and 5:1–8:39.<sup>82</sup> Romans 1:16-4:25 presents justification by faith.<sup>83</sup> Romans 5:1-8:39<sup>84</sup> presents the life promised to those justified by faith.<sup>85</sup> This life is

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<sup>81</sup> C.E.B. CRANFIELD, “Romans 8:28”, 204-205.

<sup>82</sup> J.A. FITZMYER (*Romans*, 96-97) presents four different ways to divide this section according to the place of chapter 5: including it as a conclusion to the first part (1); including it as an introduction to the second part (2); cutting it in two and making verses 1-11 the conclusion to the first part and verses 12-21 the introduction to the second (3); making it the link between the two parts and a different part from both of them (4).

<sup>83</sup> E.P. Sanders and A. Schwetzer opt for the same division (chapters 1-4 and 5-9), but under different headings. On the one hand, E.P. Sanders believes Rom 1-4 is a juristic section because it refers to the process of justification and Rom 5-8 is participationist because it refers to the way Christians participate in the divine life. On the other hand, A. Schwetzer believes Rom 1-4 is mystical eschatological because it refers to the way the Christian come to enter mystically into communion with God and Rom 5-8 is forensic because it analyses the way the life of Christian is changed. Cf. N.T. WRIGHT, “New Exodus, New Inheritance”, 33.

<sup>84</sup> D. MOO (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 294) presents an outline in a chiastic form:

A. 5:1-11	assurance of future glory
B. 5:12-21	basis for this assurance in the work of Christ
C. 6:1-23	– the problem of Sin
C’. 7:1-25	– the problem of the Law
B’. 8:1-17	ground of assurance in the work of Christ, mediated by the Spirit
A’. 8:18-39	assurance of future glory

free from death, sin and the law. It is a life in the Spirit<sup>86</sup> which assures a sharing in the salvation brought to us by Christ.<sup>87</sup> Thus, this part explains the new relationship between God and the Christian.<sup>88</sup>

#### 4.2 Immediate Context

Romans 8:28-30 is a micro-unit within a larger unit, namely, Romans 8:18-39.<sup>89</sup> Romans 8:18-30 assures future glory despite the sufferings of the present.<sup>90</sup> Verse 18 announces the theme of the unit.<sup>91</sup> Verses 19-22 present the natural world longing for the future glory. Verses 23-25 say that also humans participate in this longing. Verses 26-27 present the Spirit as the helper to get through this struggle.<sup>92</sup>

However, there are other commentators who present different outlines. For instance, F. Thielman believes Rom 5-8 follows the pattern of Israel's history. Thus, the Christian undergoes as exodus experience from the land of death and slavery (chapter 5) to land of freedom (chapter 8) passing for the Red Sea (chapter 6) and giving of the law (chapter 7). Cf. N.T. WRIGHT, "New Exodus, New Inheritance", 28.

<sup>85</sup> In Rom 5:1-8:39 Paul presents to the Christian the certainty of the hope for salvation, salvation that is granted to the justified. Cf. H. HÜBNER, "Hermeneutics in Romans 7", 207.

<sup>86</sup> God loves us so much that he makes us righteous by the dead of Jesus. It is the assurance of the Father's love that makes possible for us the participation in the life of Jesus through the Spirit. Cf. B. BYRNE, *Romans*, 248; J.A. FITZMYER, *Romans*, 393-394.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. C.K. BARRET, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 103-104; C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 259-261.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. A. GIENILSZ, *Romans 8:18-30*, 40. R.N. Longenecker maintains this part deals with the process of sanctification of the justified. Cf. R.N. LONGENECKER, "The Focus of Romans", 49-69. H. Boers believes K. Barth, R. Bultmann and E. Käsemann put as a theme of the whole section the "existential dimension of the believers relationship to God". H. BOERS, *The Justification of the Gentiles*, 32.

<sup>89</sup> R. BOWEN (*A Guide to Romans*, 110) presents a useful outline for this unit following the three sources of encouragement in suffering: (1) Rom 8:18-25 Future hope as an answer to the creation's and our own groaning; (2) Rom 8:26.27 Present help in the Spirit; (3) Rom 8:28-30 The general summary and the guarantee of hope in God's election. Finally, Rom 8:31-39 a hymn to the faithfulness of God's love.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 405-408; J.A. FITZMYER, *Romans*, 502. B. BYRNE (*Romans*, 253-254) sustains Paul in Rom 8:18-30 tries to confront suffering with the lives of the Christian. Paul tries to present suffering within the wider picture of Christian hope.

<sup>91</sup> "8:18 I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to [or in] us".

<sup>92</sup> Christians are part of the redemptive plan in favour not only of themselves, but of all including the place where they live creation. It is the Spirit that makes this purpose to completion, especially through his support in time of suffering. It is also the Spirit that reveals to us the Love of God that effects salvation. Cf. E. KÄSEMANN, *Commentary on Romans*, 212.247.251; William of Saint Thierry, *Exposition on the Epistle to the Romans*, 3; D.L. STRINGER, *Paul and the Romans*.

Finally, Verses 28-30 summarise the unit, asserting that everything helps to future glory.<sup>93</sup> Verses 31-39 affirm God's love as the guarantee for future glory.<sup>94</sup>

## 5. Analysis of the Text

Paul presents his central assertion with conviction. This conviction is expressed in the Hebrew *Οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι* ("for we know") that precedes the central assertion. Moreover, these Hebrew words (*Οἶδαμεν δὲ ὅτι*) also refer to something that is a common belief, something that any Jew can believe is true.<sup>95</sup> The central assertion is *τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεὸν πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν*.<sup>96</sup> However, the way this assertion is translated and understood presents some difficulties.<sup>97</sup>

The main difficulty is the grammatical subject of the assertion. The subject differs according to the biblical testimonies. B.M. Metzger chooses the shorter reading as the most accurate. This reading takes *πάντα* ("everything") as the subject

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. B. BYRNE, *Romans*, 267; C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 149; E. KÄSEMANN, *Commentary to Romans*, 231. P.A. ACHTEMEIER (*Romans*, 147) places Rom 8:28-30 within the theme of the Spirit and the future. Rom 8 points out to the future reign of God. The inauguration of that reign will start with a day of judgement. However, for those who have been justified, there is not other judgement but salvation. Therefore, Christians can look to the future with confidence because God is in control.

<sup>94</sup> F.F. BRUCE (*The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 168) believes Rom 8:30-39 is a "hymn to the triumph of faith produced by the contemplation of God's saving plan for his people". See also B. BYRNE, *Romans*, 274; C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 434-435; J.A. FITZMYER, *Romans*, 529; E. KÄSEMANN, *Commentary on Romans*, 246; E.H. MALY, *Romans*, 71; D. MOO, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 537. "These verses provide Christians with the assurance that despite whatever suffering and afflictions they may encounter, such things do not mean God has abandoned them. Suffering and affliction are not God's last word as his rising Christ from the death has demonstrated." P. ACHTEMEIER, *Romans*, 150. Moreover, the good news of these verses is that it does not matter much whether Christians are on God's part, but that God himself is in their part. Cf. C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 444; K.H. SCHEKLE, *The Epistle to the Roman*, 138.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 142-143.

<sup>96</sup> "8:28a To those who love God everything works together for their good."

<sup>97</sup> C.E.B. Cranfield presents eight different alternatives to translate verse 28a. The alternatives arise from the way the verb and the subject of the sentence are understood. Cf. C.E.B. CRANFIELD, "Romans 8:28", 206; D. MOO, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 527-528.

of the assertion.<sup>98</sup> However, this choice poses another difficulty. The grammatical subject “everything” contradicts Paul’s understanding of God as the principal cause in Christian life.<sup>99</sup> This objection obliges the scholars to affirm that, though the grammatical subject of the sentence is πάντα, “everything” is the sphere where God helps the Christians.<sup>100</sup>

Thus, we translate πάντα συνεργεῖ εἰς ἀγαθόν as “everything works together for good”.<sup>101</sup> πάντα refers to everything that has been talked about so far in verses 18-27, suffering and the different expressions of longing, that of the creation, man and the Spirit.<sup>102</sup> εἰς ἀγαθόν refers to what will be explicit in the next verses (29-30), the good of the purpose of God — that is salvation.<sup>103</sup>

The object of the action of God is referred to by the clause τοῖς ἀγαπῶσιν τὸν θεόν (“those who love God”).<sup>104</sup> “Those who love God” may also seem an idea foreign to Paul. In Paul’s mind, it is God who loves us first (cf. Rom 5:8).<sup>105</sup> Thus,

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<sup>98</sup> B.M. Metzger chose the shorter reading that has πάντα as the subject instead of the longer reading that has ὁ θεός as the subject. Cf. B.M. METZGER, *A Textual Commentary*, 458.

<sup>99</sup> C.H. Dodd presents this strong objection to translate πάντα as the subject. In his point of view, Paul cannot allow to leave the principal role in the life of the Christians to the presence of certain natural forces (“everything”) instead of the power of God. Cf. A. GIENIUSZ, *Romans 8:18-30*, 255-256.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. J.A. FITZMYER, *Romans*, 522-523; A. GIENIUSZ, *Romans 8:18-30*, 258; D. MOO, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 535; R.H. MOUNCE, *Romans*, 187; J. ZIESLER, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 224-225.

<sup>101</sup> Here Paul goes further than verse 18. Sufferings not only “do not thwart the future glory”, but also “work together” to achieve it. Cf. E. KÄSEMANN, *Commentary to Romans*, 243.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. B. BYRNE, *Romans*, 267; C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 428; D. MOO, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 529.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. E. KÄSEMANN, *Commentary on Romans*, 244; A. GIENIUSZ, *Romans 8:18-30*, 262-265. K. BARTH (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 320-321) sees differently. It is not that things change, he says, but it is our perception of things that change.

<sup>104</sup> K. BARTH (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 318-320) explains this love of God. We love God, he explains, when we pose the question about our identity. There we encounter God and this knowledge arouses our love for him. However, this love is not religion, but a pure gift from God.

<sup>105</sup> The Christians love God because he has loved them first and even the love Christians have for God is also God’s work (Gal 4:9; 1 John 4:10-19; Jer 2:5). Cf. C.K. BARRET, *A Commentary*

in order to qualify this statement, Paul immediately adds κατὰ πρόθεσιν (“according to his purpose”).<sup>106</sup> Therefore, it is not that “everything works for our good” because we love God, but because God loves us first as κλητοῖς οὖσιν (“those [who are] called”) according to his infinite plan of love.<sup>107</sup>

In the following verses (29-30), Paul depicts the infinite plan (πρόθεσιν) of God’s love<sup>108</sup> in a concatenation of five verbs (προέγνω, προώρισεν, ἐκάλεσεν, ἐδικαίωσεν, and ἐδόξασεν)<sup>109</sup> interrupted by an explicit mention of the final goal of this plan συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ (“to be conformed to image of his son”).

ὅτι οὖς προέγνω,  
καὶ προώρισεν  
                    συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ,  
                    εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς·  
οὖς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν·  
καὶ οὖς ἐκάλεσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδικαίωσεν·  
οὖς δὲ ἐδικαίωσεν, τούτους καὶ ἐδόξασεν.

προέγνω (“foreknew”) presents God’s relationship with the believers. In God, there is a connection between knowledge and love. God knows what he loves (Amos

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to the Epistle to the Romans, 136; A. GIENIUSZ, *Romans 8:18-30*, 265-266; E.H. MALY, *Romans*, 69; K.H. SCHALKLE, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 136.

<sup>106</sup> J.C. O’NEILL (*Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 142-143) thinks the presence of the plan of God and its explanation in the following two verses (29-30) are an addition of a later copyist in order to balance man’s freedom with God’s action. E. KÄSEMANN (*Commentary on Romans*, 244) is of the same opinion.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 429; E. KÄSEMANN, *Commentary on Romans*, 243. K. BARTH (*The Epistle to the Romans*, 321) believes that our only certainty is the love of God. This allows seeing his plan and understanding what happens in the world. Moreover, C.K. BARRET (*A Commentary to the Epistle to the Romans*, 170) believes that history is not human-making, but the working out of the plan of God.

<sup>108</sup> “God brings us to the destiny which his foreknowledge and predestination have prepared for us [...] calling us into his service, forgiving our sins and putting us right with him, and, finally, imparting to us something of the divine glory.” F.W. BEARE, “Letter to the Romans”, 118-119.

<sup>109</sup> There are the Hebrew words for “foreknew”, “predestined”, “called”, “justified” and “glorified” respectively. This chain of verbs gives us the framework to understand the plan of God. Cf. B. BYRNE, *Romans*, 268-269.

3:2 and 1 Cor 8:30).<sup>110</sup> προώρισεν (“predestined”) states God’s initiative in the relationship with the believers.<sup>111</sup> God sets his people apart and makes them holy (Exod 19:5-6). He decides for them in a gratuitous election (Deut 7:6-7).<sup>112</sup> God is also the one who calls — ἐκάλεσεν (“called”). He calls in the proclamation of his Word and expects an answer of faith (Rom 15:18; 3:25-26). This call is the beginning of the execution of his plan.<sup>113</sup> To the ones who answer in faith, God makes them righteous — ἐδικαίωσεν (“justified”) and, in this way, he also starts the process of sanctification explained in the previous chapters (Rom 1-4, especially 3:21-26).<sup>114</sup> This process of justification finishes in glorification — ἐδόξασεν (“glorified”). God is faithful to his plan and his promise, and will take to completion the process of glorification that has already started in the life of the Christians.<sup>115</sup> This is the reason Paul uses the aorist (ἐδόξασεν) to expressed this truth.<sup>116</sup>

The final goal of this process is expressed in verse 29, συμμόρφους τῆς εἰκόνης τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ (“to be conformed to the image of his son”).<sup>117</sup> The

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<sup>110</sup> Cf. C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 431; J.A. FITZMYER, *Romans*, 525.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. D. MOO, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 535; J. ZIESLER, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 225-226. Predestination is “God’s intentional and effective work to accomplish the salvation of the world through Christ.” D.L. STRINGER, *Paul and the Romans*, 67.

<sup>112</sup> Cf. C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 432; J.A. FITZMYER, *Romans*, 525; B. BYRNE, *Romans*, 272.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 432; J.A. FITZMYER, *Romans*, 525; B. BYRNE, *Romans*, 273.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. F.F. BRUCE, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 168; C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 433.

<sup>115</sup> Though the whole process of the plan of God leads to glorification, there is only one way to reach there and it is “with Christ”. This “with Christ”, as we will see, implies suffering. Moreover, glory is not a reward for suffering, but it comes from it. Cf. F.F. BRUCE, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 159; O. CHRISTOFFERSSON, *The Earnest Expectation of the Creature*, 145; D. MOO, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 536.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. C.K. BARRET, *A Commentary to the Epistle to the Romans*, 170; B. BYRNE, *Romans*, 273.

<sup>117</sup> “God’s purpose is plain: that we shall be like the Christ.” D.L. STRINGER, *Paul and the Romans*, 66.



Christian is not only predestined and called, but God himself makes the Christian in the image of his son.<sup>118</sup> This image will be completed in the future when the Christian shares fully in everything Jesus is, has and does.<sup>119</sup> The hope of this future completion is reaffirmed in its following statement εἰς τὸ εἶναι αὐτὸν πρωτότοκον ἐν πολλοῖς ἀδελφοῖς. “In order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” is the same affirmation as the conformation to Christ, but from a different point of view — the point of view of the Son. This clause reassures the hope of the Christian. The reality of the Christians’ conformation to Christ is based on Christ’s vocation to be the firstborn, and this is never in doubt.

## 6. Message of the Text

Our text, Rom 8:28-30, is a piece of chapter 8. This location is significant because chapter 8 treats of the new life of the Christian. The new life the Christian has is marked by his new relationship with God. While suffering is still part of this new life, it acquires a new meaning within this new relationship with God. This new relationship is characterised by love. There, love has two ways: God loves the Christian and the Christian loves God.<sup>120</sup> Though this love is reciprocal, it is God that loves first — with a love that redeems and makes righteous. Moreover, God

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<sup>118</sup> For F.M. GUILLMAN (*A Study of Romans 6:5a*, 252) this conformation is a participation in Christ because his image (μορφή as in Phil 2:6) does not refer to the outer appearance, but to Christ’s very being. And the central act of his existence is his Paschal Mystery. It is on the cross that Jesus fully reveals who God is — a God of love who sends his Son to save the world (John 3:16); and, who he himself is — a loving and obedient Son who gives his life till death (1 Cor 15:3; Gal 2:20; Heb 5:8-9). Therefore, the Christian has to participate in this image continuously dying to himself to live with Jesus. Cf. B.A. AHERN, “The Contemporaneity of Christ’s Passion”, 138-139; B. BYRNE, *Romans*, 270; R.H. MOUNCE, *Romans*, 188.

<sup>119</sup> The time for the completion of Christ’s image in us is a topic of discussion. C.E.B. Cranfield maintains that it is a continuous process. E. Käsemann believes it is already completed in baptism, but now we have to join Jesus in his sufferings (Phil 3:10.21). Cf. F.M. GUILLMAN, *A Study of Romans 6:5a*, 253-254.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. B.A. AHERN, “The Contemporaneity of Christ’s Passion”, 147.

gives the capacity to love, makes the Christian able to love him. This new relationship also brings a new understanding. The Christian gets a glimpse of the richness and the depth of the plan of God. He sees that this is a plan of love in his favour — God did not make his plan in spite of him, but thinking of him. This new knowledge is fruit of the Spirit — the Spirit teaches the Christian from within.<sup>121</sup>

Moreover, the Spirit helps the Christian to be aware that in this plan, his salvation is not the fruit of his own work, but that of God.<sup>122</sup> God's plan of love has its goal in the Christian "conformity to Christ". This conformation is also fruit of the Spirit that unites us so intimately to Jesus and makes us share in Jesus' own being. Thus, the Christian shares with Jesus everything he is, does and has, namely, his being the Son, his Paschal Mystery and his glory.<sup>123</sup> There the Christian encounters the new meaning to his sufferings. He shares with Jesus suffering and death in order to also share his glory. Therefore, the Christian knows that everything, suffering included, not only "cannot hinder the future glory" (Rom 8:18), but "helps" ("work together" as in Rom 8:28) the future glory to come. Moreover, God not only allows him to suffer, but suffers with him because he is within him through the Spirit. Finally, the Spirit unites the Christian to Jesus in such a manner that leads the plan of God to its final end, for Jesus "to be the first born among many brothers" (Rom 8:29).

## 7. Conclusion

Rom 8:28-30 discards any easy solution to suffering as present in Christian life. It does not undersign the theory of the retribution or any other purpose that can

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<sup>121</sup> Cf. A. GIENIUSZ, *Romans 8:18:30*, 282.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. A. BOWEN, *A Guide to Romans*, 118.

<sup>123</sup> Cf. B.A. AHERN, "The Contemporaneity of Christ's Passion", 146.

make suffering “understandable”. Yet, there is still in Christian life a place for suffering. This suffering, however, does not hide our relationship with God; on the contrary, it helps the Christian achieve final communion with God — salvation/glory. The Christian reaches this insight under the power of the Spirit that not only affords him a glimpse of the plan of God and understand that this plan is one of love, but who dwells within them to suffer with them. Moreover, this plan of love has as its final goal the Christian conformation to Christ — also a work of the Spirit that unites the Christian intimately with Christ. This conformation starts now with “the fellowship of Christ’s suffering” (Phil 3:10) to share, at the end, his final victory (Rom 8:29). This assurance of the final victory leads the Christian to already celebrate their victory in Jesus Christ and to sing a hymn of confidence to the love of God (Rom 8:31-39).

## **Chapter III**

### **Towards a Christian Understanding of Suffering**

#### **1. Introduction**

Suffering threatened the relationship between God and Job. Christians have similar experiences as Job had when suffering comes their way. Job and Christians travelled different ways to overcome this threat and maintain their relationship with God. In this chapter, we compare these different ways to identify a Christian understanding of suffering and the place suffering has in a relationship with God.

#### **2. Relationship between the Responses of Job and Paul**

Throughout the Book of Job we witness Job's struggle to defend his righteousness. Moreover, from the outset of the book to the end, God, as well as Satan, affirm Job's righteousness. Yet, Job finds himself suffering. This may not cause any significant problem to the modern reader, but in that time, suffering was deeply connected to sin. This deep link between suffering comes to the forth in the speeches of Job's friends. This is rejected by Job. Job's rejection of the theory of retribution was not due to any theoretical enterprise, but to his personal experience

of suffering. This experience pushed Job to look for an explanation for his suffering different from the theory of retribution.<sup>124</sup>

Christians, described in the Letter to the Romans, experience the same situation. Though Christians know they are sinners as anybody else (Cf. Rom 1-2), they also know they have been redeemed by the power of Christ (Cf. Rom 5:8-9). Moreover, Christ has carried all the sins upon himself to liberate people born under the law of sin (Cf. Rom 5:19; 6:20) and has given us a share in his divine love (Cf. Rom 5:17). Yet, the Christian still suffers.<sup>125</sup>

The situation of suffering causes Job not only to reaffirm his righteousness, but also to ask for a contention with God. God is the one responsible for the order of the world, and he is supposed to “give each one what his conduct deserves” (Cf. Jer 3:23; 50:7); however, with Job, this is not the case. Thus, Job wants God to reassure him that this suffering was not because of his conduct/sin.<sup>126</sup> God manifests himself, but does not answer Job’s objections; God reveals himself and challenges Job to grasp who he is. Explaining the life of Christians, Romans 8 also clarifies suffering.<sup>127</sup> However, unlike in Job’s case, God does not just present himself, but enters into the lives of Christians and enlightens them from within to understand his plan. Moreover, being within Christians, God suffers together with them.

In the Book of Job, God presents himself as a good God who creates everything good and creates it for man. He also presents the way he deals with his creation. He is provident, that is, he cares for his creation. However, this care is not

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<sup>124</sup> Cf. E.R. ACHEMEIER, “Righteousness in the Old Testament”, 81; M.H. POPE, “The Book of Job”, 924.

<sup>125</sup> Cf. C.E.B. CRANFIELD, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 225.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. J.J. SCULLION, “Righteous in the Old Testament”, 730.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. J.A. FITZMYER, *Romans*, 393-394.

overpowering; he leaves nature to his own laws and his creatures with his freedom to accept or to reject his love.<sup>128</sup> The Spirit, in the Letter to the Romans, gives us a further insight into the divine life. The plan of God does not happen by chance. There is a law that is behind it. This law is love. Love is freedom to decide for somebody. Thus, love in God is the freedom God has to decide over and over again for human beings.<sup>129</sup>

On encountering God, Job discovers who he is. He thought of himself as righteous, but now he understands that he is righteous not because of himself but because God is making him so. The Christian discovers something even deeper. It is not only God who makes him righteous, but he is calling him to be like God. This is the final goal of God's loving plan: "to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Rom 8:29). This great goal surely surpasses the natural force of Christians, but that is not a problem for them to worry about because the achievement of this goal is the work of God himself, of the Spirit. It is the Spirit that makes us so intimately united to Christ that we share his own life. The climax of Jesus' life is his death on the cross, when he offers himself in love to his Father. Then, the Christian is called to do the same in order to be like him and by sharing Christ's sufferings, may also have a share in his glory (Phil 3:10-11).<sup>130</sup>

Before the greatness of God, Job remains in silent contemplation. God overwhelms him to the point that he drops his question on suffering. This question does not matter much before the greatness of God. The Christian, on the other hand, does not remain silent. Sure of the completion of the plan of God that has now

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<sup>128</sup> Cf. J. CRENSHAW, "The Book of Job", 862; J.E. HARTLEY, "Theology of Job", 788.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. J. LAMBRECHT - R.W. THOMPSON, *Justification by Faith*, 65.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. B.A. AHERN, "The Contemporaneity of Christ's Passion", 138-139.

started, he sings the love of God that does not abandon his faithful but suffers and shares God's own glory with him (Cf. Rom 8:31-39).<sup>131</sup>

### 3. Novelty of the Christian Understanding of Suffering

Paul<sup>132</sup> conceives Christian life as the intimate union of the Christian to Christ. This union is a work of the Spirit that unites us so intimately with Christ as to share his own being (Cf. Rom 8:29). This union is not a metaphor; it is something real (Cf. 1 Cor 12: 12-27; Rom 12:5): when the Christian lives, it is Christ who is living and acting in him (Cf. Gal 2:20). Furthermore, it is "the Spirit that inspires the Christian to live the life of love that Christ lived". Christ's life has its climax in the Paschal Mystery. It is on the cross that Jesus offers a perfect act of worship to God. This worship consists in the surrender of his life in obedient love (1 Cor 5:7; 11:24-25; Rom 3:25), therefore, the Christian life is the living of the Paschal Mystery. Thus, the Christian, united in the Spirit with Christ, can offer an act of worship to God the Father uniting his sufferings with those of Christ (Phil 3:10). In other words, the Christian can reproduce in himself the Paschal Mystery of Christ when he dies to himself and to his selfish desires to be ready to rise with Christ and to live with him a life of love in service to others.

The novelty of the Christian way of dealing with suffering is the way Christ dealt with suffering on the cross, that is, in love. Suffering, that to every human being speaks of evil, when taken with love can achieve the best of human aspiration -- - salvation.<sup>133</sup> This is the way the Father chose to redeem human beings. The

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<sup>131</sup> Cf. A. GEINIUSZ, *Romans 8:18-39*, 284; H.H. ROWLEY, *The Book of Job*, 253.

<sup>132</sup> I am indebted A. Lacomara for many of the ideas put down under this heading. These ideas are taken from his lectures on Pauline Literature at Tangaza College in 2003.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Salvifici Doloris*, n. 26.

reason for this choice remains a mystery to us as it also belongs to the mystery of the divine love. However, one thing is sure, God has changed the meaning and value of suffering by taking part in it and transforming it from within.<sup>134</sup> Thus, the answer Christians have to persistent problem of suffering is not tackled from a theoretical point of view, but from the cross, “from the heart of [Christ] own suffering”.<sup>135</sup>

Suffering, understood this way, has a particular connection with revelation. Suffering is at the heart of the Christian revelation of a God who loves and cares so much as to get involved with human beings.<sup>136</sup> God is involved with human beings even in their struggling with suffering. God, in Jesus Christ, chose to be vulnerable in his love to the point of suffering. However, he does not suffer for a lack of being, but for an overflowing of being and love. Thus, “God does not divinise suffering, he redeems it”.<sup>137</sup>

#### 4. Conclusion

The Christian response to the problem of suffering far surpasses the response given by Job. This new and better response is not due to the Christian himself, but to the superabundance of meaning that Jesus brought with his revelation. God not only makes righteous and comes to encounter his faithful, but also comes to be within him. This indwelling of God helps the Christian not only to have a glimpse of God and to grasp his loving plan, but also to become like him. However, to become like God, we have to share his life and the Paschal Mystery of Jesus.

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<sup>134</sup> Cf. N. FOGLIACCO, *The God of all Consolation*, 57.

<sup>135</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Salvifici Doloris*, n. 26.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. W. KASPER, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 162-163.

<sup>137</sup> W. KASPER, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 197.



It is in his Paschal Mystery, especially in the cross, that Jesus Christ reveals to the Christian the meaning of suffering. Suffering taken with love gives life because it is through the suffering of the cross that Christ gains salvation for all humankind. Thus, Christ gives the answer to the problem of suffering not theoretically but from the cross. He shows how much God is concerned with human suffering that he comes to share it with them. Finally, God shows his love in giving up his Son on the cross in order to save human beings from the final damnation that is the perpetuation of suffering (being without him). In this way, he also marks an end to all suffering in the future, to which he invites all. For this reason, when faced with suffering, the Christian cannot remain silent, but sings the love of God.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

We started this work aiming at a deeper understanding of suffering. Our objective was to identify how a Christian may understand suffering. To this end, we examined two passages in the Christian Scriptures and from them discerned the way they cast light on the problem of suffering. Then, we compared the two findings and went on to underline the typical Christian elements in the understanding of suffering.

In the first chapter, we realised that Job did not conform with the answers that the people of his time gave to the problem of suffering. It was his personal experience that challenged this common understanding. He questioned God about his personal situation of suffering and the meaning this could have. To his surprise, God did not give an answer to the problem of his personal suffering, but revealed himself to Job. Faced with this particular revelation, Job gets a new insight into who God is and, at the same time, discovers his own identity. This double discovery helps him to concentrate on what is important — God — and to drop any question about his personal situation, suffering included. Before the goodness and majesty of God, he remains silent in contemplation.

The second chapter shows us how Paul in Rom: 8:28-30 helps the Christian to understand the Christian's own suffering. Suffering could have been a threat to the Christian relationship with God. The Christian, however, gets to know that suffering does not hinder this relation, but helps it. The Christian receives this new

knowledge from the Spirit that lives within him and suffers with him. But that is not all — the Spirit also gives the Christian a glimpse of the loving plan of God, and it is the same Spirit that allows him to achieve the goal of this plan.

The third chapter goes even further in this description of the role of the Spirit in taking this final goal to its end. The final goal of the plan of God is the conformation of the Christian to Christ. This conformation makes us part of Christ's very being. The Paschal Mystery is the core of the revelation of Christ and of God. This revelation is possible because of Jesus' acceptance of the cross in love. On the cross, he transforms suffering from an evil to be avoided to an instrument of salvation. The way suffering and salvation relate to each other is a mystery. This is the mystery that both Job and the Christian encounter in their daily dealing with their suffering.

Therefore, the final word for suffering is love: the love shown by God, who steps into human world of suffering sending his Son to suffer, and thus to save us from damnation — the eternal suffering. This love shown in suffering still remains a mystery, but from the cross speaks to the Christian. The Christian can now find meaning in his own suffering and through the Spirit unite himself to Christ's suffering as an acceptable sacrifice of praise to God the Father (Cf. Rom 12:1; Heb 13:15).

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