

IS DISABILITY A CHALLENGE OR A DIVINE BLESSING?

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ABSTRACT. This article is both an attempt to analyse disability, as a precise aspect of suffering, and also a manner of exploring it. A starting point of the essay is represented by the idea that in the past not only disease was the reason for a person to be discriminated but also other elements such as: the belonging to another race or religion, the gender differences etc. Confronting disability generates the necessity of counselling. For a good relation of the counsellors with the counselled this writing presents the psycho-perceptive stages of the disability and their correct approach as well as the necessity for the counselled persons to be informed on the possibility of employment and promoted for their integration into jobs demanded on the labour market. After the comparative analysis of the three major monotheistic religions we sum up by asserting that Christianity is the only religion that can give suffering the value of a blessing.

Keywords: counselling, counselled, persons with disabilities, psycho-perceptive stages, discrimination

1. The historical perception of the disability and of the differences among individuals

Both for the people who undergo it and for their families, suffering has always represented a reality that urged them to discover it, to make it clearer to themselves and to pass through the entire itinerary from its visible negative facets to understanding the mysteries this reality hides.

The disability, perceived as a real aspect of the suffering, has its own peculiarities. According to the law: "The people with disabilities are those who, because of certain physical, mental or sensory conditions, lack the abilities to perform normal daily activities, needing support measures in order to recover, integrate and be socially included."¹

We emphasize the fact that, in time, two manners of behaviour were known with regard to these individuals:

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¹ Law no. 448/2006, *Regarding the social integration of the persons with disabilities.*

- either they were not even acknowledged the right to live, an example of the sort being given by the Spartan society where the “unsuccessful” children were thrown off the Taiget cliff;
- or they were expelled from societies, being treated as slaves, the “talking tools” that their families or the people who took care of them were allowed to sell or ill-treat them without being criminally liable.

We want to emphasize that in time illnesses were not the only reasons for someone to be discriminated but there were also the racial and the religious differences towards a majority population; in the contemporary period the presented elements are accepted and even promoted as illustrations of the idea of unity within diversity of the humanity.

With regard to all life experiences, even with the one of the disability, there are two different views: “The conviction that a person’s abilities can’t be changed – the *rigid mentality* – makes you prove them all the time. If your intelligence, personality and morality are predetermined, then all you have to do is to prove that you have them in plenty. You simply cannot let be seen or felt that you could run out of one of these fundamental aspects.”²

A different view is represented by the *flexible mentality* “which asserts the possibility that, after much hard work, we could improve our fundamental abilities. Although people are preeminently different – regarding their innate abilities and gifts, interests or tempers, everyone can change and evolve through effort and knowledge.”³

Without seeing disability as a problem, we must specify that it generates difficulties both for the people involved and for those who are nearly related to them. Therefore, they need counselling.

The concept of counselling defines two slightly different realities:

- the support relationship – in which a specialist named counsellor offers support during a certain number of meetings to a person referred to as an counselled person through the support psychotherapy, with a view to surpass the problems and the existential crises;
- *the usual counselling* – seen as an interaction between people in which the support isn’t necessarily given by an expert in psychology but by other persons essential in the counselled person’s life, their only motivation being the wish to help their fellow creature in difficulty.

There are many examples of counselling: one of these is the one called Relationship – Understanding – Changing (RUC). Look at its description: depending

² Carol S. Dweck, *The mentality of the winner. A new psychology of the success* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche Publishing House, 2012), 15.

³ C.S. Dweck, *The mentality of the winner*, 16.

on the stages of the example, the two factors involved in counselling have to perform a given task, this task being essential for every moment of the counselling.

The author of the example explains it by stages, for instance:

„The example of counselling Relationship – Understanding – Changing(RUC)

Stage 1	Relationship
The main task	To begin a relation of co-operation
Stage 2	Understanding
The main task	To clarify and expand the understanding of the problem-situation, both on the part of the counsellor and of the patient's
Stage 3	Changing
The main task	To assist the patient in changing, so that the problem-situation be approached more efficiently than it was in the past.” ⁴

The approach of the disability by a person who undergoes this experience is greatly influenced by:

- *the social environment* in which this person lives, which can be urban or rural and
- *the society's perception of the disability* – which is understood both as a limiting reality and a man's right which mustn't generate differentiations imposed by society among persons.

This fact is stressed by the following consideration: “The acknowledgement of the diversity of the people's characteristics makes us reject the notions of normal or abnormal as a standard in which a person could be integrated. The disability is a man's right which shouldn't lead to unequal treatment or discrimination among individuals.”⁵

2. The attitude towards disability depending on the sick person's religious belief

Except for the aspects mentioned before, which can leave their mark on the perception of the disability, the religious belief of a person with disabilities can influence him through the view of the world, life and the Divinity's role in the believers' lives, which is presented to His believers.

Thus, if the infirmity occurs in a Buddhist's or a Hindu's life, believers of a religion which states that even the existence is marked by futility, suffering will be understood as an extra confirmation of the universe's and man's ephemerality

⁴ Richard Nelson-Jones, *The book of counselling* (Bucharest: Trei Publishing House, 2009), 66.

⁵ Jean-Claude Larchet, *God doesn't want man to suffer* (Bucharest: Sofia Publishing House, 2008), 28.

and as one of the last stages that must be beneficially surpassed; it is thought that human nature is the last avatar which is crossed by a soul sent into the universe, in order to perfect itself and to be able to go back to its initial union with the impersonal divinity called Brahmin, thus reaching the state of nirvana.

When the person with disabilities is a Muslim, according to the Islamic rules which require a total submission to Allah, he won't ask rhetorical questions regarding his disability but he will accept it without asking himself about the reason of its appearance, not because his human nature wouldn't urge him through this torment but because Allah is presented as a divinity that rewards or punishes its believers according to their attitude towards the circumstances of the telluric life.

If a certain individual is a Mosaic, his view of the disease will be tributary to the opinion that infirmity is a punishment because, in this religious creed, Yahweh is described as a divinity that loves the righteous and hates the sinners.

In order to be triumphant in the fight against the vicissitudes of life, we must fight a spiritual battle no matter whether we have visible crosses, like suffering, or clerical ones represented by the permanent try to overcome the temptations from the world, body and devil.

Talking about the unseen war, which must be fought in order to come to perfection, the Bible, through the voice of the Apostle Paul, advises us: "...Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (To the Ephesians 6, 13-17).

3. The social opinion about the persons with disabilities in Romania

In our country the opinion about the persons with disabilities and the urge to involve them socially are still tributary to the old prejudices of the folk conscience, according to which, a physical or somatic disability immediately triggers a mental one.

This entirely incorrect outlook must be severely condemned.

We emphasize that, although in medicine as the field of study of the human body and of treating and preventing the possible diseases, it is asserted that disability mostly occurs as an influence upon a body system's functioning, which is generated by the diminution of its capacities to get the brain commands,

this fact is not equal to the neurological or mental diseases; the first affect the nervous system, each of them having specific physical expressions ,and the last diminish the rational ability, blocking the intelligence of the affected persons on a coefficient corresponding to a certain age, which is usually inferior to the physical one.

However, we notice that, with most persons with disabilities, there isn't any correlation between the physical disease and a hypothetical mental disease.

We sadly notice, without complying with the tendency to praise other countries' outlook according to which persons with disabilities have been socially involved for many years, that by the communist policies, Romania promoted the idea that the persons who form the analysed category had to be socially marginalised because their incapacity to perform certain activities was equal to the total impossibility to accomplish anything.

A first step towards correcting this error is the drafting and promulgation in 2006 of the Law 448 *regarding the social integration of the persons with disabilities*, which allows their social integration; we emphasize that, although the piece of legislation mentioned before stipulates and allows the employment of the persons with disabilities, all the professionals working with the members of this category must see them as being common people and support a campaign to integrate them into the labour market, convincing the possible employers not to be reserved towards this idea and at the same time, they must inform their beneficiaries on the rights stipulated by Law.

We notice that, although there are programmes and projects which prepare the persons mentioned before for certain jobs, in point of the economic aspect, the initiators are required to make a correlation between the professions demanded for on the labour market and the preparatory programmes for employment because otherwise, their direct beneficiaries run the risk of permanently being condemned to professional lack of integration.

The idea regarding the total uselessness of the person with disabilities has been preserved in the collective mentality, that's why in certain areas of our country (especially at the countryside) certain ideas occur: for instance these persons are socially useless, they are but a burden for their families and personifications of a divine curse upon them.

For these reasons, according to the ideas circulating in many villages, people with disabilities stay indoors, their schooling in mass institutions isn't promoted and the opinion that they will never be able to equal the accomplishments of those around them – because of their disability – is inoculated to them.

In order to resist these incorrect ideas, we as counsellors should analyse them together with our assisted person, to help them be aware that the attitudes mentioned before are prejudices generated by the social mentality and that they mustn't be influenced by them because they have direct access to the knowledge of their own disease as a life experience. At the same time, the counsellors (who can be priests, doctors, social workers or psychologists) must carry on a group therapy with the families of the assisted persons in order to help them see the fact that the person with disability in their family is but a contrast between the shape of helplessness and a mentally normal person, therefore he must be looked after and also helped to be part of the community.

The person with disability must be given an impulse to separate himself from the false views and they must explain to him that each society has a collective mentality about no matter what life experience, depending on the manner in which many generations looked upon the analysed situation and that the challenge of suffering doesn't mean that God keeps away from the person who undergoes it but God wishes to help the person get spiritually stronger.

By illustrating this fact, it is stated: "God never wishes man to suffer and this can be clearly seen in the fact that He neither created suffering ... nor put it into His creation.

Suffering is unknown to what God gave to man and to the other creatures through His divine plan, the way it is shown from genesis until eternity."⁶

The fact that everything God created is entirely good and doesn't have any trace of evil in it is clearly uttered by the Book of Genesis where, about each thing, once created, it is said: "And God saw that it was good; (Genesis, 1,4,8.10); and at the end, of all together, He says: God saw all that he had made, and it was very good; thus, to say that God is the author of all evils is a heresy."

The person with disability must be told that in heaven, because of his perfection, man wasn't familiar with suffering and its emergence is a consequence of the human soul's weakening at the moment when our forefathers, following the tempter's advice, chose to try to become like Divinity, without making any personal effort, breaking God's first Commandment.

At the same time, we must stress that the existence of the disease in the physical world is not a divine revenge, neither for the original sin, nor upon the people who suffer from it, but it represents God's challenge for a certain person to perfect oneself through his obedience and close relation with the Divinity from the personal point of view, beginning with the point in which the submission communion towards God was broken by the Adamic sin.

⁶ Jean-Claude Larchet, *God doesn't want man to suffer*, 13, 25.

4. The description of the disability's effects as a life experience and of its psycho-perceptive stages

As an experience that can occur in a person's existence, disability has a large number of specific features which influence the person who passes through it.

For a better interaction of the counsellors with their assisted persons with disabilities, we make mention of the psycho-perceptive stages of disability, also describing them in short.

Noticing the existence of disability

During this first stage the person concerned notices the physical difference between him and the others; this can cause different kinds of behaviour such as the physical isolation, the wish of breaking the temporary communication with other people, the isolation from the social life if the person got the disability after an industrial accident or another situation with consequences in the community.

A good specialist who interrelates with people with disabilities in his work is able to help a person at this stage, proving that he has the capacity of ignoring the appearances, to finally discover that the individual's personality is more complex than his appearance.

For a good assistance of a person in this stage, the counsellor must cultivate an attitude of psychological affection (by which we mean a close relation between the counsellor and the counselled, which should make the latter be sure that he can show his feelings to the specialist without being criticised) and of empathy by which we understand "the mental ability of the therapist to put himself mentally in the patient's position, in order to look at his situation the way the patient does."⁷

This stage is more visible with the persons who got their disability during their lives, but it also appears with children no matter whether the disease is congenital or not. The therapist and the persons' families must know that the child with disabilities will also wait for explanations of this disability from the people around him.

From the clerical point of view, the characteristics of this stage are the following:

- *the intense search for healing* and the person's psychological impossibility to believe that he will be able to accept his disability.

⁷ D. Irvin, and M.D. Yahom, *The gift of psychotherapy* (Bucharest: Vellant Publishing House, 2011), 32.

- *the pursuit of the meaning of disability* – is characterized by rhetorical questions such as:

Which is the purpose of my disability?

Why is this happening to me?

How do people around me see my disease?

Am I a burden for my family?

The attitude recommended for the specialist who advises a person at this stage is that of explaining that his agitation is normal and that, despite appearances, he isn't defined by the disability as helplessness, but he is the owner of an additional experience unlike the other people around him. At the same time, the specialist will emphasize that this torment will disappear when the beneficiary doesn't perceive his disability as a barrier anymore, but in it he will see an aspect of human diversity.

We strongly recommend to the counsellor not to give the following answers:

"I thought you wanted us to discuss specific characteristics of your disease?"

"Life only can answer your questions!"

At the same time, the therapist must co-operate with the counselled person's family in order to explain to them the fact that disability is not a punishment and that they must be a supportive group for the beneficiary, not only physically but also psychologically, avoiding to tell the beneficiary to change his prayers in a request of healing from God.

We also mention that, although the orthodoxy pleads for searching for the physical healing and for treating the disease, too much travelling far and wide with the suffering person to lots of doctors, clergymen and psychologists can cause wrong ideas: the fact that the suffering person is but a mere experimental material for doctors; the thought that he is just one of the many counselled persons whose intelligence quotient is determined by psychologists and whose thinking they try to shape; the appearance of a state of anxiety when certain clergymen tell the beneficiary that he will heal after a strictly mentioned period of time, or only at a certain age, especially if the time mentioned passes without any healing.

The stage of feeling like being abandoned by Divinity and of the fight with Divinity

If the previous stages are completed without any healing, the person with disabilities reaches the most severe moment of the disease. If the person goes through this moment successfully or not, this will be seen in his trying to keep near God or away from Him.

The characteristics of this stage are the impatience the person also showed in the previous stages and, from the spiritual point of view, a certain inner conflict caused by the inadequacy the person notices between the spiritual level he has already reached and the one he would like to reach, as well as rhetorical questions asked from God, for example:

“Oh, God, when will my suffering end?”

“What do you want to tell me by this suffering?”

“When will you come into my life and heal me?”

Concomitantly, the tendency of an emotional fight with God occurs, caused by His not real refusal of putting an end to this situation or of answering the questions the person asks Him. To successfully pass through this stage is to keep in touch with a specialist, especially with one's father confessor. However, whether the specialist is a clergyman or a layman, he will have to explain the beneficiary that long suffering doesn't mean a divine abandon but God's challenge to the man to perfect oneself in order to get a bigger reward.

The stage of accepting suffering

This is the one in which disability is no longer a discriminating element but an additional experience which the person who endures it wants to place at the society's service as he is searching for a job. The person must be informed on all the legal possibilities concerning his employment.

5. The perception of suffering as a divine blessing

Unlike all other great religions where suffering is either seen as a punishment for one's sins (in Mosaism) or an additional hardship of the human avatar (in the Asian beliefs), in the Christian religion it has the shape of an additional blessing upon the individual who experiences it.

The example of the blessing signification of suffering is given by the fact that the Saviour Himself used it by accepting the limited human condition and especially by His crucifixion. By all His acts, He emptied the disease or any other limitation of their tragic and dramatic meanings, annihilating their negativity.

The new meaning the Christian religion gives to hardships revealed itself through Christ's help for everyone who demanded it, whether they asked for help as contemporaries of His Embodiment or did it as Christian believers after His Ascension.

Therefore, it is stressed that, despite God's preserving suffering during history, it doesn't appear as a punishment but as a therapeutic and pedagogical means through which Divinity calls man to refer differently to It, to his own life and to the torment he endures.

Through suffering (whether it is visible or not) a person becomes more receptive to the other people's experience and to other aspects, such as:

- that, by the limitation induced by his situation, God wants to give him a personal message;
- a greater attention to the other people's trouble;
- the strong need of the individual to change his suffering into a means by which he can help people, whether they have a disability or not.

Although all the religious systems accept ideas such as the birth of suffering from sin, the fact that the person who experiences it is spiritually assisted by God (even if this is done passively like in Islamism and Mosaism, beliefs where Yahweh or Allah is presented as a divinity which gives man the experience of the disease and then waits to see how it will be endured), we notice that, in the religions mentioned before, God limits the accompaniment of the believer on the suffering's path to the stage of mere observation, waiting for him to continue going up to the sky, through suffering.

Only in the Christian religion does the Trinity God prove able to be aware of the fact that the spiritual infirmity itself, caused by the generally human fallibility, makes man unable to come to perfection without His help.

This fact makes the Holy Trinity share His love with man, deciding, after the original sin, that one of the divine persons go down into history in order to reveal to man the real path to perfection.

The kenosis and Christ's crucifixion are two absolutely new pieces of news brought by Christianity into the world religions picture because till the emergence of the analysed faith no one ever thought of the possibility that God could descend into history, stating that history doesn't comprise Him and the founders of other religions didn't accept the idea that Divinity could suffer Itself, in order to expiate for the men's sins.

Thus, we mention that, although disability firstly occurs as a limiting reality, it challenges the person who goes through this experience to observe himself, to be aware that, with His help, he could better analyse his inner world and that even the need for help is but a call to cultivate virtues like humbleness and the love for other people.

Therefore, if to the person with disabilities they cultivate the idea that he is a simple creature, endowed with more experience than the people around him and that suffering itself is not a punishment, then this person will see it as a blessing, an attitude based on the fact that his relation with God evolves during his disability, and his fellow men usually become the recipients of his love.

The cross – the apogee of the path from suffering to resurrection

We emphasize that in Christianity the idea of suffering seen in the metaphor of the Cross is widely spread; we have to mention that the analysed religion is the only one which covers this object with a sacred value, taking into consideration that it appears in triple valence:

- the first significance taken from the Gospels is that of a death object which had to be carried to the execution place;
- the second is that of an altar of Christ's sacrifice;
- the third valence is that of an instrument of destroying the domination of death over people.

Making a historical flashback we can state without fail that the original relation between God and man started again on Golgotha because: "...if the essential acts of communication are fulfilled through words, the most important actions through which God communicates Himself to the man are fulfilled in silence... Thus, we discover the roles of the Three-in-one persons in the world history. Due to the fact that God – the Father is the source of existence in the Holy Trinity and has conveyed to humanity the perfect revelation through His Son, we can say that the Son is God – the Word, and God – the Father is the Silence."⁸

In Christianity the sacredness of the Cross is led to absolute in that the Saviour demands to both the apostles and all Christians to get rid of the selfish part of the self, to take their Cross and follow Him; this aspect makes us notice that for Christians the suffering represented by the metaphor of the Cross is not a punishment, but the beginning of a path at the end of which there is the divine blessing waiting for the authentic believer. However, he mustn't become the prisoner of an idea inherited from Mosaism according to which suffering is but a punishment.

6. The understanding of suffering as a personal cross - means of fulfilling an ascent of the believer on the scale of virtues

This stage of understanding suffering only appears in Christianity and derives from the fact that in this religion every hardship is seen as a stage to an eternal happy goal.

This stage has a few subdivisions.

The attitude towards suffering, following the Saviour's example

At this stage the person who goes through a hardship, whether this is physically visible or not, must see his experience as having a benefic purpose,

⁸ George Remete, *Knowledge through silence* (Alba Iulia: Reîntregirea Publishing House, 2004), 57.

thus accepting it with an equanimity resembling that with which Christ accepted His Cross.

In the individual's soul, who experiences a difficult situation (especially through a disability), the firm belief that God looks after all His creatures especially people, must be formed and cultivated. That's why the individual should be aware that, through the experience he undergoes, God wanted to come closer to him or to accelerate his spiritual progress.

If this idea is formed and preserved in the person with disabilities' soul, both by his family and by the specialists he interrelates with, this person won't feel abandoned anymore by God in the suffering he undergoes. We notice that the feeling of not being abandoned by Divinity occurs with all persons who treat this stage correctly, whether they are adults or children.

Concomitantly, the first part of the final stage of perception of the disability will trigger the image of God – the companion, in the same way as for the Saviour, that angel that appeared as an answer to His prayer from the Garden of Gethsemane, represented the materialization of the divine presence of God – the Father, who conveyed His message of encouragement to him, of which he understood that he was spiritually accompanied towards Golgotha.

Assuming one's suffering as a personal cross

We know from the evangelists' reports that Christ had to carry His Cross to the place of punishment. With the suffering person, this aspect is partly the same as the psychological stage of accepting suffering, where the individual doesn't question his situation anymore, but unlike the mentioned stage, it brings about a greater acceptance of the duration of his disease, even if this experience lasted his whole life.

By this behaviour the concerned person tries to imitate the Saviour, seeing in His attitude the carrying of his own spiritual cross.

From the clerical point of view, this stage brings about the image of God – the provoker who urges man to go ahead towards Him, in and through virtue, in order for Him to reward the person with a happy eternity in His company, at the end of his life. The condition for obtaining this reward is to go through this stage properly.

The individual crucifixion, means of totally seeing suffering as a cross to be carried

If through His spiking on the Golgotha's Cross, Christ fulfilled the objective salvation, then for the Christian, the crucifixion implies the acceptance of this salvation, which begins at the same time with the first stage of the spiritual life represented by the purification of passion; the unique difference at this stage

between the crucifixion on Golgotha and the individual one, consists of the fact that, if the first was made by a divine-human person and implicitly impeccable, the Christian gives up the sins towards which he is inclined, wishing to please God and thus to become worthy of the sacrifice made by the Saviour for humanity and personally for him.

The Holy Fathers tell us in their writings that the Son of God wasn't spiked on the cross by nails and spikes, but by His love for people. Similarly, any difficult experience, suffering included, must be accepted by the Christian with love, which should be the answer to the divine attitude.

For his own crucifixion, four behaviours are recommended to the Christian which, according to what the patristical authors guarantee us, permanently keep near God the person who uses them. These behaviours are *the meditation to the Universal Judgment, the thought of one's own death, the meditation to the eternal joy of Eden and the thinking of the hell's torment*.

The possible existence of a disability makes this self-crucifixion easier because, if the concerned individual understands the signification of the cross, he will have a correct attitude towards it; he will unveil its mysteries, without remaining the prisoner of the idea that for him this is just an endless undecipherable torment.

We notice that the crucifixion on Golgotha implied the most sacred sacrifice, which changed history giving it a transcendental meaning. In the case of a person with disabilities, to assume his own sacrifice means not only the acceptance of disability but also the correct understanding of the signification of cross of his suffering.

We mention that, although human fallibility is a universal experience, man must overcome it in order to obtain the spiritual resurrection; the people around the person with disabilities don't have the right to depreciate in his perception the significance of the holiest Christian symbol.

As an illustration of this error, we notice that many of the people around the suffering person tend to tell him that God has put a cross on his shoulders. Concomitantly, they don't seem to be aware that any difficulty (not only a disease) represents a hardship, that's why they prove unable to explain themselves the finality of their own hardships and they don't even succeed in revealing the meaning of the altar Cross to the person with disabilities, on which they must sacrifice, following Christ's example.

We emphasize that an incorrect approach of this explanation, in the suffering person's opinion, will either generate an attitude where suffering is nonsensical (which leads to a quasi-protestant approach where the cross is but a Christian symbol, without being worshipped), or will make the individual feel like a person who is permanently tormented physically and emotionally which triggers an attitude typical of the Catholic world (where the Cross is especially honoured because Christ suffered and died on It).

We mention that a correct attitude towards the cult of the cross is expressed in a hymn sung in the Passion Week in which the Church, addressing Christ, proclaims that It venerates *His Cross* and praises and glorifies *His Holy Resurrection*.

We remark that only the connection between the Cross and the Resurrection is correct from a dogmatic point of view and that orthodoxy proves to be the only religion which preserves a natural cult of the cross, emphasizing its role as an instrument used by Christ and His followers on the path to His resurrection.

The perception of suffering varies with each individual; if he stays blocked in the phase of rebelling against God or the hardship seems absurd to him, it will go on being a cross to carry but it won't reach its goal of soteriological instrument.

This fact is confirmed in the Gospels by mentioning the brigand's attitude who was crucified on the Saviour's left side. We can assert that the attitude the person has towards the experienced hardship and especially towards suffering determines the manner in which it will keep him near or away from God.

We also stress that the Saviour's kenosis must be reflected into the Christian's life, with the only difference that in His case the kenosis act implied the descent into the human condition and the nondisclosure of the plenitude of His powers, with humans it implies giving up the regrets the person has when thinking of the successes a hardship or a disease prevents him from reaching.

Concomitantly, with the help of his family and especially of his father confessor, the individual will have to be helped understand that it would have been very likely that his hypothetical successes generated the self-inoculation of a certain pride because man generally tends to believe that he has accomplished something because of his qualities, whereas the hardship or disability challenges him to enjoy every benefic aspect of his life and of his own good qualities as being divine gifts.

Understanding clearly the quality of cross as suffering will lead the person with disabilities to a total love towards Divinity and his fellow men, whom he will want to serve because for him they become spiritually transparent, seeing in them Christ's face devoting Itself to them, from the clerical point of view.

Noticing that every person, whether he is healthy or not, is urged to follow Christ's example, it is mentioned that: "...the moment when we see God in our fellow man, when just a bit of the divine grace favours us with the love God Himself feels for His entire creation, of the many paths unfolding in front of us, we will discover ourselves looking for that which will make it easier for us to give generously a part of our fortune, of our time, of our efforts, of our being. Thus, whether we are healthy or not... we will arrive to feel at the very depths of our souls that the best will come to us only when we serve God, thus serving our fellow man."⁹

⁹ Mother Rafaela, *How to perfect oneself in God* (Alexandria: Sophia Publishing House, 2009), 88.

From the clerical point of view, passing properly through the stage of the perception of the disease or of the hardship as personal crucifixions brings about a feeling of gratitude towards God and the awareness that the person going through this stage must sacrifice himself spiritually, accepting his suffering, then later he will rejoice at seeing that the sacrifice he has made gave birth in his soul to the ability to place himself in the divine Providence's care, entrusting his own fate to it, the same way in which Christ entrusted his soul to His Divine Father when he was crucified.

We notice that this behaviour will lead to the change of the human soul in an entity capable of clearing itself of sin and of attracting the grace, and through keeping a permanent dialogue with God, through prayers, of spreading around him a great love towards God and his fellow men.

However, all these feelings won't make the individual descend from his spiritual cross, despite life's hardships, following the Saviour's example who didn't yield to the Pharisees' summoning cries, who told Him before His death on the cross that they would believe in Him if He descended from It.

Christ realized that for those who asked for this action, His descent from the Cross would have been a simple spectacular act, which wouldn't have only led to the christianization of those who used to challenge Him but would have also compromised the act of salvation and implicitly the Cross wouldn't have changed into the unique Altar in history on which the High priest of the universe sacrificed Himself.

According to the Holy Fathers, this is the proper attitude that every Christian must have towards the Cross, both seen as an aim of the cult and as an image of the most important stage of his path to the spiritual Resurrection.

The person who has come to understand the symbol of the cross will reach a new dimension of the divine-human relations, changing his life into a sacrifice and at the same time initiating an example of his relationship with the Demiurge and with those around him. The new thing about the relationship that the Christian who evolved from the clerical point of view initiates with God and with his fellow men has as standard the cross as an object; this kind of man will always think of its vertical line, from which he will understand that the axis of his life must be the perfect theandric balance, and meditating on the horizontal part of the cross he will think again of his relation with his fellow men, so that this relation be inspired by his connection with God.

The last phase of this stage is to emphasize the signification of the Cross as a dominant characteristic over the world's ephemerality. After the person has gone through all the phases mentioned before, he notices with great joy that this enriched his soul so much as he could see both the universe as a palace of God's and himself as a dweller in it. Concomitantly, the individual will notice that his grace evolution changed him into a missionary, whose

essential preoccupation is to convey to the world the love reflected into his soul by that person who, at christening, through the godfather's voice, declared him his own Emperor and God.

Although now the believer hates the sins and naturally cultivates the virtues that in the past he strived to obtain, his love illustrates the beginning of coming into the stage of the illumination and at the same time of his spiritual resurrection which will be perfected in the Eden happiness.

His relation with the spiritual world and with his fellow men is just a reflection of the Divinity's absolute love because the most eloquent proof of the correct theandric balance was given by the Saviour through His crucifixion on the Cross in the middle of Golgotha, where he suffered an innocent death, hugging with His spiked hands all those who wanted to accept His wisdom and giving His high priest's blessing to the whole world through which He proved His great love.

On the basis that, firstly according to God, the Cross was an instrument of destroying death and a means of finding one's way of spiritual resurrection, we notice that the Christian religion is the only one asserting the eternal Resurrection and denying the vainness of the telluric life.

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