

# ***Passion, Pasxo, Pathos, & Pyroos***

## **The problem of Suffering**

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***Passion, pasxo, pathos, and pyroos***, are four words in the Holy Scripture, meaning '**suffering**', which are derived from the original Latin and Greek texts, respectively.

And as we approach the Holy week, commemorating the 'Passion of Christ', in remembrance of **His suffering**, including His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane and His ignominious death on the Cross of Calvary, He was indeed "a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, ... Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows, ... But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed", *Isa. 53:3-5* \*. It is, therefore, quite apt and timely to consider and meditate upon this awful subject: The problem of suffering.

Given the historical, and the present, horrors of war, the evil that human beings are capable of doing to one another, and the current worldwide SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, which has thus far reportedly affected more than half a billion people and claimed the life of more than 6.2 Million victims, the following questions are quite legitimate: Why is there so much suffering in the world? And why it appears that often 'good' people suffer and the 'wicked', who deserve to suffer, often thrive? And why the likes of Pol Pot and Putin, Hitler and Hussain, and all the other evil men of this world seem to prosper, even if only for a while? Where is He, the loving and merciful, powerful and Almighty God in all this misery?

I don't pretend to have any easy answers, but it is my intention to share

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\* All the Biblical "quotations" are taken from the King James Bible – **KJB**, aka the Authorised Version

with you in the following meditation a few thoughts on the subject, but I must confess it is too broad and complex to be able to cover it in a limited space. Nevertheless, for the studious amongst us I heartily recommend the books by my favourite writer, C. S. Lewis, the Christian apologetic and classic author on suffering, in particular those entitled: '*A Grief observed*' and '*The Problem of Pain*', which were written after his beloved wife, Joy, suffered a painful death from Cancer. I also recommend Dietrich Bonhoeffer's book: '*The Cost of Discipleship*', for he himself suffered and was hanged at the ugly hands of the *Führer*, in Nazi Germany, and finally the treatise by the Jewish Rabbi Harold S. Kushner: '*When bad Things Happen to Good People*', written when it became known that his son was afflicted with a terminal illness. All of whom have put their own **suffering** in the proper perspective and are very helpful to make some sense of what seems quite senseless.

The many aspects of the subject of **suffering**, are covered in the Holy Scriptures and are addressed by the Prophets of the Old Testament: the foremost amongst them was Job, in what is said to be the oldest of the Wisdom Books, also by Jeremiah, who is *aka the Weeping Prophet*, and by Isaiah, *aka the Fifth Evangelist*, who prophesied about the "*Man of Sorrows*", and in the New Testament by the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself *the Suffering Servant*, in '*The Holy Gospels*', by the Apostle Paul, especially in his '*Epistles to the Romans and to the Philippians*', but most notably by the Apostle Peter, especially in his '*First Epistle*', which is rightly denominated '*The Epistle of Suffering*', for in this short book the four derivatives of the expression of 'suffering', as depicted in the above Title, are used interchangeably, and are recorded on 21 occasions, which deserve further elaborations, as follows:

### ***Passion***. An Intrinsic Suffering

**Passion** comes from the Latin *passus*, past participle of *pati*: meaning to suffer intensely, which is often capitalised as in *Passion*, when it is applied typically to the vicarious suffering of Christ, to represent His experience in the period between the night of the Last Supper, especially the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, one of His own 12 disciples, who ate out of His plate, and then delivered him to His enemies with a hypocritical kiss, His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane, the thrice denial of Simon Peter, one in His closest inner circle, and culminating in the unimaginable sufferings on the Cross.

Our best and recurring annual experience, at this time of the year, is attending the performance of J. S. Bach's 1727 '**St. Matthew Passion**' at the Birmingham Symphony Hall, narrating the final few days of the life of the Lord Jesus, as recorded in the Gospel According to St. Matthew, **chapters 26 & 27**, and this year is sung in the original composition, i.e. in German. *Par excellence*, my favourite piece of music and song, which is widely regarded as the greatest masterpiece of Baroque Sacred Music.

The Lord's **Passion** tells of the **internal** or mental anguish and spiritual conflict, which He poignantly expressed in the Garden of Gethsemane, when "He saith to His disciples: My Soul is exceedingly sorrowful even unto death, ... And He fell on His face, and *three times* prayed, saying: O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt", **Matt 26:39, 42 & 44**. A **Passion** which is concluded with that piercing cry from the Cross: "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" **Matt. 27:46**.

This was the turmoil of an innocent victim struggling with the separation from God, His Father, but that was done, of course, not for His own sin, but in our stead "For He hath made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin offering for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him", **2 Cor 5:21**.

In like manner, this **internal** passion and anguish, should characterise the conscientious Christian believer, a suffering which we might endure as we ought to "lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, as we run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him **endured** the Cross, despising the shame", **Heb 12:1&2**. This suffering was typified in the almost autobiographical religious experience of St. Paul, which he clearly expressed in his *Epistle to the Romans*: "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So, then, with the mind I myself serve the Law of God; but with the flesh, the law of sin", **Rom. 7:24 & 25**. Hence the first reference to suffering in the *First Epistle of Peter* is that of the Christian Believer experiencing a similar **internal** conflict: "if need be, ye are in **heaviness**, or **passion**, through manifold temptations", **1 Pet. 1:6**.

## ***Pasxo:*** The Extraneous Suffering

***Pasxo***, is the original Greek term which also means ***suffering***, or more accurately 'I tolerate'. In contrast with the aforementioned intrinsic mental and spiritual ***passion***, ***pasxo*** is a physical suffering to be endured from an ***external*** source, or something from without, in other words 'to suffer evil'. It has a long historical origin in Hellenistic and Jewish cultures, which predates the writing of the New testament in general and St. Peter's first Epistle, *circa* A.D. 65, in particular. It is repeatedly adopted in this ancient Hellenistic sense of experiencing an ***external*** suffering, which typically applied to the five wounds of Christ, the buffeting of His cheeks, the nails in His hands and His feet, the crown of thorns on His gracious head, and the piercing of side His side.

On the way to Emmaus, on the resurrection day, the Lord Jesus joined the 2 disciples who were very sad, downcast, and perplexed about all what happened in Jerusalem: "how the chief priests and the rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him". ***Luke 24:20***. Crucifixion is, of course, the most cruel, painful, and intolerable barbaric Roman method of punishment, and hence Jesus "beginning from Moses and all the Prophets, expounded unto them, in all the Scriptures, the things concerning Himself: Ought not Christ to have ***suffered*** these things, and to enter into His glory?... Thus it is written: it behooved Christ to ***suffer***", ***Luke 24:26, 27 & 46***.

As Christians, in following the footsteps of Christ, we do not expect to be subjected to a similar extent of His physical suffering, notwithstanding the many Christians, over the ages past, who endured unspeakable suffering and martyrdom, and some still do in the Communist and Muslim world, even crucified, which they considered as a privilege, as it were, saying: "As it is written, for thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter", ***Rom 8:36*** – which is a direct quotation from ***Ps. 44:22***. "Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, ***suffered*** outside the gate. Let us go forth, therefore, unto Him outside the camp, bearing His reproach", ***Heb. 13:12&13***. Hence the exhortation of Peter: "Forasmuch, then, as Christ hath ***suffered*** for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind; for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin", ***1 Pet 4:1***.

## ***Pathos:*** Alive & Active Suffering

***Pathos***, is another term of Greek origin meaning suffering, it is closely associated with the term *passion*, of Latin origin, but goes further to signify the actual experience through suffering, it is not something to be passively experienced but it is an intense action to be actively endured. As Christians, we are 'called to suffer' in this world, as witnesses for Christ, and we expect the fierce antipathy and rejection from the ungodly, for Jesus said: "If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up the cross, and follow me" **Matt 16:24**. It is never easy to live as Christians, indeed, as Paul had once said "if in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable", **1 Cor 15:19**, "but *we* rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's suffering, that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy", **1 Pet 4:13**.

We might even suffer, as He did, false accusations and subjected to the wrongful appearance before human courts to face rough justice: "If ye be reproached for the Name of Christ, happy are ye: for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you, ... But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet, if *any man* suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on His behalf", **1 Pet 4:14-16**.

Likewise, we ought to be passionate in the active sharing or even to embrace the suffering of others, especially fellow Christians, and materially and in prayers support them, as this expression of sympathy or empathy evokes pity and compassion: "wherefore, let them that suffer according to the Will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him, ... as unto a faithful Creator", **1 Pet 4:19**.

***Pathos*** is also the root of the word *pathology* i.e. the study of diseases and the real manifestation of illness, or the deviation from propriety or from an assumed normal state of structure and function. And here is the difficulty of accepting the suffering caused by painful and life limiting diseases, e.g. Cancer and neuro-debilitating conditions, among other terminal conditions, and why does God allow it? Remember it was the 'fall' and not the Divine will and "for this cause, many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep, i.e. they die". **1 Cor 11:30**.

## ***Pyroos:*** A Fiery Suffering

***Pyroos***, is the final of the four original words of **suffering**, it is of Greek origin and may be translated to fiery, which refers to fire and heat. It is also related to the word '*pyrexia*' or fever in medical terminology. In the early Christian era, persecution by burning at the stakes was common, especially under the rule of the evil Roman Emperor Nero in the first century, or the Emperor Valerian in the third, the most notable example was Saint Lawrence the martyr in A.D. 258 who famously said to his executioners while roasting on a gridiron: "I'm well done on this side. Turn me over".

***Pyroos***, also applies to the refining process of metals, and this metaphor is used in connection with the purification of the followers of Christ from any imperfections and in this sense the suffering proves the genuineness of faith, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ", **1 Pet 1:7**. Akin to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the Book of Daniel, who when threatened to be thrown into the burning fiery furnace, which the cruel and irate King Nebuchadnezzar ordered that it should be heated seven times more than it was usually heated, their faith carried them through having declared: "If it be so, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of thine hands, O King", **Dan 3:9 - 28**, and so God did, and their faith was not confounded.

Let us address the problem of suffering:

Having concluded our research in the original Latin and Greek words which define **suffering**, however, even as committed Christian believers we cannot deny that sometimes we have a particularly difficult task to understand the true meaning of suffering and are unable to articulate a convincing answer as to why there is so much suffering in the world.

Discussing the problem of **suffering** is probably unfathomable, it is so difficult and complex, so much so that on the one hand, some choose to avoid this issue altogether, but on the other hand many generations of Philosophers, Theologians, Sociologists, humanists, Psychologists and even Eschatologists attempted, but failed, to make a sensible argument for why

there is so much suffering in the World and why does the Almighty and Omnipotent God, who is also said to be loving and merciful, allow it to continue? For they dismiss the root cause of all the misery, namely the sinfulness of humankind. Notwithstanding, herewith are some thoughts within the Christian framework, under the following 7 items:

1. Let me, at the outset, plead with you that if and when you or yours are suffering any anguish or hardship, be it physical or mental, not to take your anger and despair out on God, for that was the complex of Job of old and his three philosophical friends, who at first became angry with God, to no avail, until they came to the realisation that He was not to blame!

For, in the beginning, at the conclusion of the creation, "God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good, *indeed perfect*", **Gen. 1:31**. In His original plan, it was not the will of God that anyone in the world should suffer. Sadly, humankind was beguiled by the sneaky Devil and plunged into disobedience to God's moral law, and as a consequence of the 'fall', the world was turned upside down. The serpent was cursed, and enmity was placed between humankind and the deceiving evil spirits, and God had no choice but to decree that "he, *Satan*, shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. Unto the woman He said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow, ... And unto Adam He said: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; ... In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return", **Gen 3:14-19**, and clearly the Scripture tells us that: "the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord", **Rom. 6:23**.

2. Henceforth, the *imperfect* world in which we now live is full of suffering, pain, and death, which we humans have brought upon ourselves as a consequence of our immorality and living in sin, "for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world", **1 John 2:16**. It is agreed by many philosophers, theologians and free-thinkers that pain, suffering, and death are not only the result of our forebears' 'fall', but is also because of the continued 'falling' of humankind: "As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one", **Rom. 3:10- 18 & Ps 14:1-3**, for Jesus said to the accusers of the

woman caught in adultery: "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone, ... And they being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one", *John 8:3-11*.

③ It is undoubtedly soul-searching to try to comprehend why 'bad things happen to good people', more especially in the backdrop of a firm belief that God is good, and that He cares and is Almighty and He is hence able to alleviate suffering, yet He often does not! And so C. S. Lewis argued that: "If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures happy, and if God were Almighty, He would be able to do what He wished for". It might, therefore, appear irreconcilable that as His creatures seem unhappy by their cruel lot and circumstances, "God either lacks goodness or power or even both"! He then pursues his argument that God allows people to experience pain and suffering in order to realise that all is not well with the world, and that we are in ourselves totally inadequate, so that the only solution is to turn back to God.

④ The reaction to suffering varies from the extremes of anger and despair on the one hand, but on the other develop great beauty and strength of character and of spirit, it therefore should not be eradicated as it balances the evil in the world. Always remember that God Himself suffered the loss and death of His beloved, only begotten, Son, through which He identifies with our suffering, and in like manner through our suffering He makes it possible for us to identify with Him, and personally participate in His suffering: "For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him but also to suffer for His sake", *Phil 1:29*. It is in fact the means to know God better, and in the words of Nicolas Wolterstorff, philosopher and theologian at Yale University, in his book *Lament for a Son*: "It is our suffering which most reveals the Man of Sorrows, that through our tears we see the tears of God", at the Cross of Calvary.

⑤ Jesus Christ, The Son of God, set an example to humanity, as He identifies Himself by His wounds after His resurrection when He invited Thomas, one of the twelve, saying: "reach here thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach here thy hand, and thrust it into my side; and be not faithless, but believing", *John 20:27*, also at His Second coming, when His wounds will still be revealed: "Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him", *Rev. 1:7*.

6. The present world was never meant "to possess our hearts", for if it is all well, the general tendency is to forget the author of our being, and if all is suffering the words of Agur, recorded in the Supplemental Book of Proverbs, are quite poignant but reflects the reality of the unbelieving humankind: "Remove far from me vanity and lies; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain", *Prov. 30:8&9*.

7. It is often said "no pain no gain", indeed, suffering and joy are not opposites, like pain and pleasure and that same Epistle, First Peter, though denominated The Epistle of Suffering, however, it should likewise be rightly called 'The Epistle of Hope, Joy and Glory', indicating that for the believers in Christ these experiences are interconnected.

For us as believers, our real treasure is in Christ: "For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come", *Heb. 13:14*. In which city "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away", *Rev. 21:4*.

Finally, my dear friends I wish you and all yours a very Happy Easter, and may "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee, The Lord make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee Peace", *Num. 6: 24 - 26*.

*Joseph T. K. Marzouk*

Sunday, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Let us bless and praise Him, with the words of one of my favourite Hymns by Philip P. Bliss (1838 - 1876), based on the depiction in Isaiah 53 as the "Man of Sorrows" and the 'suffering servant', and "It is finished" or *consumatum est*, the 6<sup>th</sup> cry of Christ on the Cross of Calvary in John 19:30 :

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1. "Man of sorrows" – what a Name  
For the Son of God, who came  
Ruined sinners to reclaim:  
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!
2. Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned He stood,  
Sealed my pardon with His blood:  
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!
3. Guilty, vile, and helpless we;  
Spotless Lamb of God was He,  
"Full atonement", can it be?  
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!
4. "Lifted up" was He to die;  
"It is Finished" was His cry;  
Now in Heaven exalted high:  
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!
5. When He comes, our glorious King,  
All His ransomed home to bring,  
Then anew this song we'll sing:  
Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

**Amen, Amen & Amen**