

"Suffering must serve for conversion, that is, for the rebuilding of goodness in the subject, who can recognize the divine mercy in this call to repentance. The purpose of penance is to overcome evil, which under different forms lies dormant in man. Its purpose is also to strengthen goodness both in man himself and in his relationships with others and especially with God." Bl. John Paul II, Salvici Doloris

In more homely terms, C.S. Lewis echoes this:

"While what we call 'our own life' remains agreeable we will not surrender it to Him. What then can God do in our own interests but make 'our own life' less agreeable to us and take away the sources of false happiness (emphasis added)? It is just here, where God's providence seems at first to be most cruel, that the Divine humility...deserves most praise." C.S. Lewis, The Problem of Pain

On a personal note, I can testify to this: it was through suffering that I came to a Twelve-Step Program and thence to the Catholic Church.

As said in Salvici Doloris, Christ's love for us saves us from that most extreme suffering, an eternity without God, damnation. We are called therefore to participate in the suffering of the Passion, to "offer it up" continually and happily. When I recite the Fourth Sorrowful Mystery, I preface it with a prayer, offering up my sins, faults and failures that they might make the Cross less burdensome, for the Passion exists always, not just at an instant in time. St. Teresa, in the quote given above, acknowledged that suffering is a form of prayer.

Suffering is a necessary consequence of Free Will. If we are not automatons, constrained to do good only, then we must have the capacity to do evil and thereby to suffer from evil done by others. And even with inanimate non-sentient entities, God so chooses a framework of physical laws that will ultimately be for our good, but that may also entail natural catastrophe. Voltaire, when he gloated over the deaths of tens of thousands in the Lisbon earthquake (to contradict Leibniz's best of all possible worlds), did not consider that many of those dead would be eventually in heaven. It is by the vision of an eternal paradise that we are enabled to endure earthly suffering.

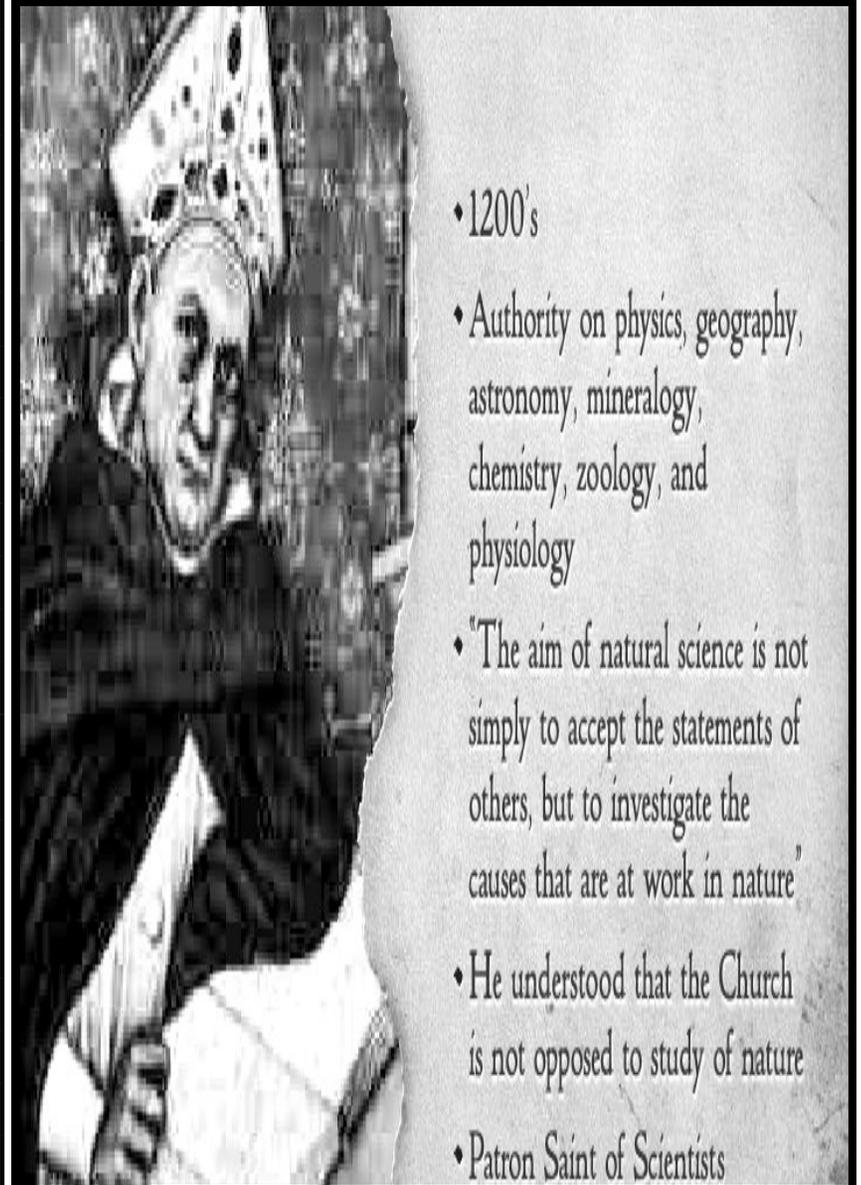
"In the Cross He showed us how to bear suffering. In His resurrection He showed us what we are to hope for." St. Augustine, On the Creed 9

\*Note: The notation Catholic|Jewish has a special meaning for me; a conditional probability is denoted as  $P(B|A)$ , that is the probability of event B given that event A occurs.

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## ***Catholic Physics - Reflections of a Catholic Scientist - Part 21 Suffering--A Catholic|Jewish Perspective***



- ◆ 1200's
- ◆ Authority on physics, geography, astronomy, mineralogy, chemistry, zoology, and physiology
- ◆ "The aim of natural science is not simply to accept the statements of others, but to investigate the causes that are at work in nature"
- ◆ He understood that the Church is not opposed to study of nature
- ◆ Patron Saint of Scientists

## ***Suffering--A Catholic/Jewish Perspective\****

"Whether we will or not, we must suffer...There are two ways of suffering — to suffer with love, and to suffer without love. The saints suffered everything with joy, patience, and perseverance, because they loved. As for us, we suffer with anger, vexation, and weariness, because we do not love. If we loved God, we should love crosses, we should wish for them, we should take pleasure in them." St. John Vianney, Catechism on Suffering

"One must not think that a person who is suffering is not praying. He is offering up his sufferings to God, and many a time he is praying much more truly than one who goes away by himself and meditates his head off, and, if he has squeezed out a few tears, thinks that is prayer."--St. Teresa of Avila

"Our people have experienced suffering in its many forms, as a nation as well as individually. Every so often, someone suggests a reason for suffering. This is presumptuous, because while there may be various reasons for suffering, they are largely unknown to us." Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski, *The Mystery of Suffering*

Lent soon will be over, and Good Friday, which celebrates the Passion of Our Lord, will be upon us. A comment on Catholic Answers Forum to the effect that Christians and Jews have different perspectives on suffering has given me cause to ponder. Is this true, and if so, what are the differences and what are the similarities? I'll have to add that I was a cultural, not a religious Jew, so that some of my knowledge was acquired after my conversion to Catholicism (and partially through my wife, a cradle Catholic and historian of all things Judaica).

Let's start off by considering the differences. The most important, I believe, is the notion (not accepted by all Jewish faithful) stated in Rabbi Dr. Twerski's quote above, and much earlier in the book of Job: the reason for suffering is mysterious, because we cannot know the mind of G-d. To this must be added historical evidence that "Schverzer sein a Yid" (Yiddish for "It is hard to be a Jew"). Even in the happiest of occasions, a Jewish wedding, the groom smashes the glass cup under his feet as a commemoration of the destruction of the Second Temple. Historical testimony to Jewish suffering is given by the persecutions and massacres culminating in the Holocaust--indeed, the terms "ghetto", "pogrom", "holocaust" have gained a usage for more universal suffering than just Jewish. I refer readers to an article by Marc Krell, *Suffering and the Problem of Evil*, which gives a much better account of the history of Jewish suffering and the several theodicies engendered in response than I could in this brief post.

One point I will add to his article: no explanation other than that given in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31), namely, that the arms of Abraham await those who have greatly suffered in their earthly life, can possibly suffice to justify God's allowing the Holocaust to occur. In fact there is a strain of Jewish Talmudic teaching that does credit heaven (as a Garden of Eden) as recompense for earthly suffering:

"Rabbi Ya'akov taught: This world is compared to an ante-chamber that leads to Olam Ha-Ba, (the World-to-Come)" (Pirkei Avot 4:21). That is, while a righteous person might suffer in this lifetime, he or she will certainly be rewarded in the next world, and that reward will be much greater. In fact, in some cases, the rabbis claim that the righteous are made to suffer in this world so that their reward will be that much greater in the next (Leviticus Rabbah 27:1)." (See *Heaven and Hell in Jewish Tradition*)

This compensation theodicy and the notion of suffering found in the writings of Deutero-Isaiah, the hymns on The Suffering Servant, are links, a commonality between the Jewish and Catholic concepts of suffering:

"Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 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. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. ... for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken... Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin... by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities." Isaiah 53:3-11 (KJV)

A theodicy proposed by the Medieval sage, rebbe Rashi, after the massacres of the Crusades, held that the Jews, not Jesus, suffered for the sins of the world. To the extent that all of us to a degree suffer for the sins of the world, that may be true, but it omits a very important part of the suffering of Jesus: it was by this that He procured our salvation, and thus fulfilled the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah.

And therein is one great difference between Jewish and Catholic interpretations of suffering. To discuss others I'm going to rely on the thoughts of Bl. John Paul II in his Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* and of C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*. One view of suffering in the Old Testament was as a punishment for sins, but this explanation is only partially successful, and recognized thus in Job. In *Salvifici Doloris*, John Paul acknowledges the punishment aspect of suffering, but adds another dimension: