

III Suffering.

One of the mysteries of life is the fact of human suffering. It started, according to the history of man as portrayed in Genesis, with the first human beings created by God and it continues from day to day and from century to century. Every human being, in some or other way, experiences suffering in some or other form - some much less, other much more. Why does this happen? Why?

In general the members of the human race accept and agree that if a person has done some kind of wrong, such a person has to face the consequences and be prepared to suffer for the wrong or the pain inflicted on others. This ~~attitude~~ ^{attitude} ~~entirely~~ ^{presupposes} a moral principle that man's sense of justice ^{requires} ~~is made~~ ^{that} some form of retribution to right the wrong. But where no wrong has been done or consciously intended to be done or when a person or a community suffers innocently because of the wrong that others have done then we are faced with agonising questions which many times remain unanswered throughout life. // And especially for those of us who believe in the existence and rule of a being, benevolent God and Father the problem of such suffering becomes irresolvable and at times almost unbearable.

And when we now turn to Christ to see whether He has an answer for our problem we are even more puzzled and confused. Because here we meet a one human being portrayed by Himself as the Son of Man and by Scripture as the Son of God, born into this world in order to redeem this world and experiencing in every respect the same suffering and pain as all other human beings but with this important difference that in certain respects his suffering was much more intense, much more severe, much deeper than any suffering that any body else has ever experienced in this world.

Just ~~think~~ ^{reflect} for a moment on the physical suffering He had to endure: the pains of hunger during his 40 days fasting in the wilderness, the scourges inflicted on his body by the soldiers, the crown of thorns brutally forced into the skin of his head, the terrible weight of the wooden cross to bear, the excruciating pains of the crucifixion, the burning, suffocating thirst on the cross.

I do not wish to imply that there have not been in human history millions of people who have not also suffered similar physical pain & agony - and some of them (of measured or even much longer periods - all that I'm saying is that Christ had his full complement of physical suf-

fering which He has endured with millions of his fellow men!

But human suffering has two other important dimensions - emotional & spiritual suffering, and the measure to which certain people suffer in these 2 respects determines the real nature & depth of suffering! Have you ever thought seriously about the extent and depth of Christ's emotional suffering? How deeply he felt for the hungry, the down-trodden, the rejected, the widowed, the sick, the crippled, the blind, the deaf? How His whole being suffered day after day as He was confronted with human greed, covance, selfishness, arrogance and pride, hypocrisy, callousness, brutality? Have we ever thought seriously about His spiritual suffering as He grappled, struggled with the unsolved issues of human sin, human suffering (including His own), of the nature and the power of evil, of the Kingdom of God and its establishment ^{in order to} ~~to~~ ^{conquer} ~~the~~ Kingdom of darkness? ^{and the mystery of} ~~the~~ all these unsolved questions culminating in His deepest, most fearful agony of soul and being when He calls out in His dying moments: My God, My God, why have You abandoned me? Which leads us to ask: Has there ever been a human being on earth who, in every respect, has suffered as much as Christ did?

What strikes us much more is the fact that Christ never gave a logical, rational answer or explanation in his preaching or teaching to the phenomenon of human suffering. What He did do, was to clarify the relationship between sin and human suffering in John 9 where he was asked: Rabbi who sinned, this man or his parents? And how answered (John 9: 3-5):

② But what he ^{also} did ~~do~~ was to proceed identifying Man's with the sin and the suffering of all people around him, voluntarily taking it upon and into himself and in this way releasing them from the burden of their guilt and ~~redempting~~ ^{liberating} them from the evil which would otherwise have destroyed them. ^{And you say that} ~~He brings~~ home to us the truth that without love for you fellow-man ~~is~~ a person is not willing to suffer voluntarily for one's neighbour. ~~And~~ ~~therefore~~ It is only when I love sincerely that I am willing to suffer voluntarily. Which also implies that when a person or community is not concerned about the plight or suffering of others around them it is because love is deficient or lacking!