

## MORTIFICATION AND SUFFERING. THE ASCETICS AND THE MYSTICS OF SAINT PAUL

**Constantin MIHAI**

“Constantin Brâncoveanu” University, Rm. Vâlcea  
costimihai1977@yahoo.fr

**Abstract:** This study attempts to reconsider the issue of mortification or suffering starting from the thesis of Metropolitan Nicolae Mladin, *L'Ascèse et la mystique de Saint Paul*. Our approach focuses on the central concept of ascese. This is the materialization of baptism is the extension of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in conscious life: asceticism is the abandonment of the old man (mortification) in favor of that renewed in Christ (imitatio Christi). In fact, the ascetic mortification and physical and spiritual pain are the concrete expression of the sacramental and mystical death. The meaning ascetic (Academic) of suffering, which is essential for Christians, revolves around the love for the cross is the supreme form of negation of self (mortification). Martyrage is the development of asceticism. Our study also intends to identify the spiritual meaning of suffering as an expression of two types: human and divine order. The suffering becomes the sign, the event, the externalization of the ontological participation

**Keywords:** ascetics, mystics, St. Paul, imitatio Christi.

The thesis of the metropolitan Nicolae Mladin, *Ascetics and the mystics of Saint Paul* is representative, at least, for two essential points: 1. the presence of the *objective* mystics inside the New Testament, respectively the explicit biblical inspiration of the Church mystics; 2. the sacramental and baptismal-Eucharistical basis (*objective*) of the ascetical effort (subjective) of the Christian mystic. This is what Louis Bouyer will argue for good proving the fact that in the patristics *the mystics* is not always the adjective of the inner experience of the human being, but the adjective of the *mystery* which is Christ and whose experience is offered in the Holy Bible and in the mysteries of the Church. We shall not forget that the Saint Paul the apostle and the paulinism constituted along the Church history and the European culture the object of violent contestations and distortions. When the history of the paulinism reception is written, it will be one of the most instructive chapters of the history of mentalities. Too *Greek* for ones, too *Jew* for others, the one who wanted “to

make all things to all men, that he might by all means to save some” (*I Corinthians* 9, 22), Saint Paul was harshly exalted or blasphemed. If Marcion (the 2<sup>nd</sup> century) or the reformers (the 17<sup>th</sup> century) saw Saint Paul as the only person who understood the real essence of the Gospel as the revelation of the true God, a Gnostic God or *the individualist justification of the human being* by faith alone not through good deeds, the contemporaries Jews of the Apostle – who saw Saint Paul as Antichrist – to the Moderns (Bolinbrocke, Lagarde, Chamberlain, Nietzsche, Rosenberg) and the protestant theologians (Bousset, Reizenstein, Bultmann) saw him as the great falsifier and seducer of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. *Deus qualem Paulus creavit Dei negatio*, proclaimed pathetically Nietzsche, in *Der Antichrist* (1888). The paulinical meaning is related to the indissoluble joint between the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, between our life and death as *living through dying*, the marvellous title of the meditation of Douglas Dales on the specificity of what it might be called: *the spiritual experience of St. Paul*.

There is no Christianity without Jesus Christ and His Resurrection; there is no Resurrection without Cross, and Jesus Christ, crucified and resurrected lives through the Church, His mystical Body. Through Baptism, Eucharistie and the ascetical and mystical life, the Church offers directly to each of us the participation to the central *mystery* of the death and the Resurrection of Christ. Inside the Church, through the Saint Mysteries and the mystics, the life of Christ becomes our life and “our life is hid with Christ in God” (*Colossians* 3, 3-4).

### **1. Ascetics and mystical life**

The Christian life does not end to the mysterious regions of the divine presence and human being. Thus, we could talk about a dedublation of the personality, a distribution of the human being in many compartments that distinguish essentially each other and don't communicate: after his inner nature, the being is holy and after his external life, he is under the slavery of the Adamic sin. The duality between human being and action, between nature and manifestation, between ontological aspect and psychological one of the Christian life would be an anomaly, because the action must suit with the nature. Each nature has a proper work: *operatio sequitur esse*. The Christian life tends to be an actualisation of the being, by the achievements of the all possibilities included in it<sup>1</sup>.

The ontological renewal requires an ethical and ascetical one. The mystical fact requires a moral improvement, representing the guarantee of the moral pretention<sup>2</sup>. The renewal of the moral life is not a simple advice, but a

---

<sup>1</sup> Nicolae Mladin, *Asceza și mistica paulină* (The Ascetics and the mystics of St. Paul), Sibiu, Deisis, 1996, p. 121-122.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Wilhelm Weber, *Christusmystik Eine religions-psychologische Darstellung der paulinischen Christusfrömmigkeit*, Leipzig, Hinrichs, 1924, 45, apud Nicolae Mladin, *Asceza...*, 123: the ethical must agree with God's will; the ascetical intensifies the

duty; it's the natural obligation resulted from the new human being, from the divine energies inner person. It's not about *non posse peccare*, but *posse non peccare*: by the mystical union with Christ the human being is not put in the impossibility to sin, but he has the possibility not to the sin, in order to overcome the temptations and to carry out a sacred life. The ascetical life is not the consequence, the transformation, the development of the divine powers received through the mystical union: it's the expression of the mystical union with Christ. The ontological substantiates the ethical; the mystics is the foundation of the Christian ascetics. That's why the Christian ethics is a mystical one; her sources can be found not only in the human being, but in the person united with Christ.

The ascetics is not only a renunciation or mortification, but it implies also the need of the renewal into Christ. The mortification becomes possible by the consolidation of the virtue in order to achieve it. It's only a process based upon the positive effort on the mortification as the life is superior to death. The ascetics permanentizes therefore the death and the baptismal resurrection

We have died to sin; how could we go on living in it? You cannot have forgotten that all of us, when we were baptised into Christ Jesus, were baptised into his death. So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life... So by our baptism into his death we were buried with him, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glorious power, we too should begin living a new life... Instead, give yourselves to God, as people brought to life from the dead, and give every part of your bodies to God to be instruments of uprightness<sup>3</sup>.

The relationship between the ontological and psychological aspect that we tried to reveal it, the relationship between the sacramental mystical union and the ascetics can be reflected upon the parallelism between the *indicative* and the *imperative*<sup>4</sup>. It seems that we are in the middle of a contradiction that Saint Paul couldn't avoid it: or *our former self was crucified with him, so that the self which belonged to sin should be destroyed and we should be freed from the slavery of sin*<sup>5</sup> or our former self is still alive and then the mortification action is justified ; the new being, who is in Christ is or a reality and then it's useless the command *since every one of you that has been baptised has been clothed in Christ*<sup>6</sup>, or the new being is not a reality and then the command is valid. Thus, some ones eliminated the *indicative* (the mystical reality), keeping the

---

ethical by the aspiration for the perfection: it's the supreme consistency in comparison with the death and the resurrection of Christ.

<sup>3</sup> St. Paul, *Romans* 6,2-13.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Leon Bouvet, *L'Ascèse dans Saint Paul*, 11-112.

<sup>5</sup> St. Paul, *Romans* 6, 6.

<sup>6</sup> St. Paul, *Galatians*, 3, 27.

*imperative* (the ethical and ascetical effort), the others have chosen the *indicative* instead of the *imperative*. The both solutions are unilateral. Saint Paul states both the *indicative* and the *imperative*: it's a paradoxical statement. The both of them are valid: the *indicative* for the sacramental and mystical field and the *imperative* for the ethical and ascetical field. The mystical relationship becomes an ascetical one because the sacramental and mystical union does not destroy the human personality, offering the opportunity for her manifestation and fulfilment. The *indicative* is the foundation of the *imperative* and the mystics is the root of the ascetics. *Since we are living by the Spirit, let our behaviour be guided by the Spirit*<sup>7</sup> represents, according to the Pauline conception, the synthesis of the relationship between the objective mystical union and the Christian life<sup>8</sup>. Or in other formula: the being does not go on living *the empty-headed life that the gentiles live*, but he must go on living worthy of Christ, of God, of saints, meaning worthy of the baptismal state so that he remains *faultless and pure, unspoilt children of God surrounded by a deceitful and underhand brood, shining out among them like bright stars in the world*<sup>9</sup>. The mystical union does not dissolve the human person, offering her the power of the supreme fulfilment and calling to the responsibility of her creation in a Christian personality that is the image of Christ reflected in the century.

The mystical union is the cause, the source of the duty and ascetical work. But this is not the only relationship between the mystics and ascetics: the ascetical effort develops and deepens the mystical life of Christ inner being. Any ascetical effort is the organic development of the grain of the supernatural life implanted inner being through the baptism. The Pauline ascetics appears therefore as a factor of mystical development<sup>10</sup>.

The sacramental mystical union is the cause of the ascetics: there is no ascetics without it; the mystical life is the aim of the ascetics: the ascetics deepens the union with Christ, opening the ways of the total spiritualization through the powers of grace. The mystics is the foundation and the goal, the source and the purpose of the ascetical action. In deed, the mystical life does not appear at the end of the way: then she can manifest completely; she interweaves with the ascetics along the whole process of spiritualization, supporting the ascetical effort. It's like an organic process: union with Christ gives to the being the power of becoming like Him and the resemblance to Christ intensifies the union with Him. Our assimilation to Christ configures the profile of the Christian by a supreme ascetical effort so we can truly say: *yet it is no longer I, but Christ living in me*.

---

<sup>7</sup> St. Paul, *Galatians*, 5, 25.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Nicolae Mladin, *Asceza și mistica paulină*, 128.

<sup>9</sup> St. Paul, *Philippians*, 2,15.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Leon Bouvet, *L'Ascèse dans Saint Paul*, 172.

So, the ascetics leads naturally to the mystical experience: the sacramental union becomes conscious, being experienced on the top of a perfect life for Christ. This is the condition of the mystical experience, even if her cause is the grace. The unity between ascetics and mystics is reflected also on the Christian life: Christ lives in our being and becomes the inner principle of our existence, but He lives also outside our being as a pattern to imitate – especially the historical hypostasis of Christ<sup>11</sup>. The historical life of Christ is the perfect materialization of the divine holiness. *Imitatio Christi*, the fulfilment of His commandments is the only way (ascetical way) to materialize and develop the grace by which the being participates to the life of Christ.

*Take me as your pattern, just as I take Christ for mine*<sup>12</sup>. To imitate Saint Paul is to imitate Christ, because Paul lives in Christ. To imitate the saints – we can take them as our pattern – is equivalent, after all, to imitate Christ, whose Image is reflected in the saints. To imitate Christ is not to reproduce His exterior aspect or gestures; to imitate Christ is not a simple external mask, but is the spiritual identification with Him. In fact, imitate Christ is the identification with His spiritual qualities. *Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus*<sup>13</sup> becomes the major rule to imitate Christ. The inner modelling on Christ has as consequence the external manifestation in the image of Christ, in His spirit. This union in spirit with Jesus Christ offers the opportunity to develop in an indefinite multiplicity of forms the image of Christ: we are only the reflections of the grace of the same image of Christ. Therefore, Christ is present not only mystically in every Christian, but also ethically and ascetically: once as a vital principle, another time as a pattern. So, Christ lives mystically in our selves in order to imitate Him; by this act of imitation, the mystical presence of Christ more complete. The mystical presence of the source and the aim of the ascetical presence: both of them round off the human person in the image and in the likeness of Jesus Christ<sup>14</sup>.

## **2. The instruments of mortification**

The Pauline logic does not pretend the human death or the destruction of the body; on the contrary, she asks the being – body and soul – to die to sin. In other words, the being must keep and consolidate the baptismal purity: the *child* must grow to the state of a *perfect man* in the likeness of Jesus Christ, without losing his immaculacy. Thus, the vigorous immaculacy, protected as a great treasure, is an immaculacy in the image of Jesus Christ. This is the meaning of

---

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Jean Dupperay, *Le Christ dans la vie chrétienne d'après Saint Paul*, pp. 132-143; Pierre Pourrat, *La spiritualité chrétienne*, I, pp. 44-46.

<sup>12</sup> St. Paul, I *Corinthians* 11,1.

<sup>13</sup> St. Paul, *Philippians* 2,5.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolae Mladin, *Asceza...*, 131.

the ascetics, of the mortification<sup>15</sup>. Naturally, the permanence of the baptismal immaculacy results from the extension of the new life, through the prayer and the practice of the virtues; that is the positive side on which lays stress on in the Pauline ascetics.

The mortification implies a permanent struggle against the sin, a struggle that never ends in this life. This struggle is not against the body or the soul – against the human nature – but it is a struggle against the evil that troubled and still wants to trouble the order of nature made by God and restored by grace: it is the struggle for the transfiguration of the whole being who must become as Jesus Christ. That's why the Christian is compared to a soldier: he is the soldier of Christ, armed with the instruments of justice in order to fight against the enemies of his salvation. The Christian becomes an athlete, the athlete of Christ<sup>16</sup>. Further more, during antiquity, the athletes were subdued, before the contest, to a severe treatment consisting of some food – except meat, wine. The athlete had to be controlled himself from food, living in a perfect chastity and sleeping in a hard bed. Instead, the athlete of Christ has as goal the unwithering wreath of the eternal happiness, using the same discipline of self-control. In order to express more obviously the severe the severe feature of the mortification, Paul the apostle uses also the image of boxing:

Every athlete concentrates completely on training, and this is to win a wreath that will wither, whereas ours will never wither. So that is how I run, not without a clear goal; and how I box, not wasting blows on air. I punish my body and bring it under control, to avoid any risk that, having acted as herald for others, I myself may be disqualified<sup>17</sup>.

This discipline concerns also the soul: the ascetic is an athlete who acts in a struggle, training his psycho-physical forces to grow according to the stature of Christ. His enemies are the *devil*, the *world* and the *flesh*. Satan tempts the Christian and may take advantage of any lack of self-control to put him to the test; He works also directly through world and by flesh. The world enslaved to sin wants to deceive the being by false teachings, full of vanity, by the corruption of the moral life. The flesh is not the body anymore, but his the entire being, as was made by the sin. The body, once an instrument of death, must be an instrument of life. The baptism made him the member of Christ who will

---

<sup>15</sup> Paul the apostle knows also the case of falling into sin after the baptism; that's why he recommends repentance and a period of testing (punishment) cf. *II Corinthians* 2,6-7; 12,21. Then, the mortification has as goal the recovering of the baptismal purity. Saint Paul takes into consideration the consistent Christian, focused upon the permanence and the development of the baptismal purity.

<sup>16</sup> St. Paul, *I Corinthians* 9,24-27.

<sup>17</sup> St. Paul, *I Corinthians* 9,25-27.

resurrect him for the life to come. Instrument of sanctity, the body *as a living sacrifice must be dedicated to God*.

Concerning the instruments of mortification, Paul the apostle lays stress on the spiritual change, without neglecting the bodily ascetics as an *optional mediator: physical exercise is useful enough, but the usefulness of religion is unlimited, since it holds out promise both for life here and now and for the life to come*<sup>18</sup>. So, there is also a spiritual detachment towards the ascetical practices: every one is free to choose the proper way. Any practice is not obligatory and universal: all of them are optional and depend on certain situations. The soul is the one that counts; that's why the bodily ascetics is necessary. To remove it would be against the Pauline conception.

So, first of all, there is the private connection to Christ. The essential tone for the Christian in his struggle is the joy<sup>19</sup>. Second of all, the instrument of mortification is the *vigil*, the attention, the permanent effort of the will, guided by an awake conscious and a clear mind. It is about the vigil on senses, on thoughts, on imagination and on passions in order to eliminate the shadow of sin; in fact, it is about the conversion of all of them to Christ. John Chrysostom talks about the purification of the senses through a permanent renewal, a permanent death. The vigil on the self love in order to eliminate the selfishness and the vanity is the way of access to the love into Christ, that is the proper work of the new being, the spiritual one: the sacrificed love<sup>20</sup>.

The Pauline ascetics is universal, accessible and obligatory for every body, because she consists on a will effort<sup>21</sup>. Even though, Paul the apostle does not eliminate the bodily ascetics from the ascetical practices, but she has a secondary value. Among these ascetical practices, we must mention the *fast* and the *sexual abstinence*. Both of them, along with the prayer assure the opportunity to intensify the union to Christ; the Christocentric orientation confer them the whole meaning. There is no invariable form that is obligatory for all: the zeal and the capacity will design their variable boundaries. To all of them we can add the voluntary exceptional mortifications that Paul the apostle seems to practice, without forcing anyone to achieve them or without informing us about it: he treats his body as a boxer his opponent. Some exegetes affirm that it's about the apostolic sufferings and efforts. In fact, it is impossible for us to

---

<sup>18</sup> St. Paul, *I Timothy*, 4,8.

<sup>19</sup> St. Paul, *Philippians* 4, 4-7.

<sup>20</sup> John Chrysostom, *Comentariu la Romani* (homily. XXI) (Commentaries on Romans), 349-350, 351-355.

<sup>21</sup> Leon Bouvet, *L'Ascèse dans Saint Paul*, p. 174: "the spirituality of the Paul the apostle leads the being over the external ascetics ... it is essential to achieve the spiritual detachment from the material things (my translation). See also St. Paul, I Corinthians 7,31: "and those who are involved with the world as though they were people not engrossed in it. Because this world as we know it is passing away".

know, even to suspect what would be the voluntary exceptional mortifications. But an *ascetical exercise* is for sure: the suffering.

Paul the apostle, the great poet of love is also the unsurpassed singer of suffering<sup>22</sup>. Suffering models the virtue and the life; suffering is the joy source, because she is the instrument of the spiritual renewal, creating the new being: Though this outer human nature of ours may be falling into decay, at the same time our inner human nature is renewed day by day: The temporary, light burden of our hardships is earning us for ever an utterly incomparable, eternal weight of glory<sup>23</sup>.

The ascetical (pedagogical) aim of the suffering is valid for all the Christians. And the highest self-denial (mortification) is the love of the cross: this is the supreme ascetics. That's why the martyrdom is the perfection of the ascetics. But suffering has also other deeper meanings that lead to the mystery of the mystical union to Christ<sup>24</sup>.

### 3. The mystical meaning of the suffering

The Christian existence is suffering: in an overwhelming manner for Paul the apostle<sup>25</sup> and in a variable manner for the other Christians. *To be in Christ*, to be Christian or to suffer for Christ are inseparable *modi vivendi*: *to be in Christ* implies essentially the suffering. The reality of the suffering in the Christian existence supposes different interpretations: the suffering as a human general experience whom the Christian confers a pedagogical and mystical meaning; the suffering as a *primum movens* for any new conception. Both interpretations seem to float on the surface. The interpretation that begins from the objective relationship between the Adamic existence and the Christian one can offer a new perspective on these topics<sup>26</sup>. The expression of the tension between these two types of existence is the suffering. Further more, the cross – the suffering of Christ – is the power that melts the former order in order to make room to the new order. The Adamic existence was overcome, making possible the reality of the resurrection. The intensity of the suffering is a visible sign of the intensity of the communion with Christ: the cross is the destiny of all the saints, of all who want to belong to Jesus Christ. Who really wants to live in the plan of Christ,

---

<sup>22</sup> St. Paul, *Romans* 5, 3-5: “let us exult, too, in our hardships, understanding that hardship develops perseverance, and perseverance develops a tested character, something that gives us hope, and a hope which will not let us down, because the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given to us”.

<sup>23</sup> St. Paul, *II Corinthians* 4, 16-17.

<sup>24</sup> Nicolae Mladin, *Asceza ...*, pp. 147-151.

<sup>25</sup> John Chrysostom, *Commentaries on II Corinthians (Homily XXV)*, p. 300-301: “The martyr dies once for all: but that blessed saint in his one body and one soul endured so many perils as were enough to disturb even a soul of adamant; and what things all the saints together have suffered in so many bodies, those all he himself endured in one”.

<sup>26</sup> Nicolae Mladin, *Asceza ...*, p. 155.



must accept the suffering. It's like a sort of extension of the Christ sufferings in history – because Christ Himself suffers in His members. The Church in present age is more the Church of the suffering, humility and persecutions than the Church of the transfigurations: it is the Body of Christ slapped by all the basenesses, whipped by all the calumnies, teared to pieces by all the persecutions, nailed to the cross of all the pains. As the Christians are the members of this Body: *how could live the members without suffering when they are the members of a sacred head crowing with thorns?*<sup>27</sup>.

Thus, the suffering is not only the expression of the tension between the Adamic existence (*in body, world, sin, death*) and the existence into Christ, but also the sign, the manifestation, the exteriorization of the ontological participation to the passion and death of Jesus Christ. Without the participation to the cross of Jesus Christ, our suffering would be useless. In fact, the being participates to the death of Christ through the power of baptism; to be in communion with Christ implies to be in communion with His passion, to be included mystically to His death. This *mystical identity* with Christ, the Suffering finds – in the plan of the conscious living – the direct objective expression in our proper sufferings for Christ. So, the suffering is the natural consequence of our baptism into the death of Christ<sup>28</sup>. The suffering means the mystical communion with Christ, with His passion. Since the baptism the seal of death was imprinted on the Christian:

It is the state of being death... as if the death of historical Christ has manifested in His body (being). The suffering and the prison don't come from people strictly speaking, but from Christ... Because the one who is in communion with Christ and His passion must undertake also the prison (sufferings)<sup>29</sup>.

The suffering is not an external imitation of Christ, but it is a participation to Christ on the basis of the inner unity with Him. The community in suffering with Jesus Christ, experienced mystically through the baptism, must incarnate and show her effects. That's why, Saint Paul showing the wounds of his apostolate, writes: *let no one trouble me; I carry branded on my body the marks of Jesus*<sup>30</sup>. The sublime expression of the co-resurrection in Christ is the

---

<sup>27</sup> Friederich Jürgensmeier, *Der mystische Leib Christi als Grundprinzip der Aszetik. Aufbau des religiösen Lebens und Sterbens aus dem Corpus Christi mysticum*, 214, apud Nicolae Mladin, *Asceza...*, p. 156.

<sup>28</sup> See St. Paul, *I Corinthians* 15,31: "in Christ Jesus our Lord, that I face death every day" or *II Corinthians* 4,10: "always we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our body".

<sup>29</sup> Johannes Schneider, *Die Passionmystik des Paulus. Ihr Wesen, Ihr Hintergrund und ihre Nachwirkungen*, 52-53, apud Nicolae Mladin, *Asceza...*, p. 157.

<sup>30</sup> St. Paul, *Galatians* 6, 17. This is the text on which substantiates the phenomenon of stigmata in the eastern mystics (Orthodox) and especially the western mystics (Catholic).

martyrdom: the death of Christ in our selves is the supreme act of union with Him. The suffering and the martyrdom have a feature more *objective*; the being must not search for them, but he must accept and bear them with happiness, because they don't come from our selves, but from Christ.

Communion in death is related to the communion in life; the extension of the communion in death is also the extension of the communion in life with Christ. Death and life are inseparable aspects of the Christian existence: *always we carry with us in our body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus, too, may be visible in our body*<sup>31</sup>. The communion of death is the condition and the premise of the communion in life. But the life of Jesus reveals since then: the mortal body becomes the place of the revelation of the divine living. Even if this life is still secret in her essence, she is visible by the fact that Paul the apostle is victorious from all the sufferings, *though this outer human nature of ours may be falling into decay, at the same time our inner human nature is renewed day by day*<sup>32</sup>. As a matter of fact, the existence of Paul the apostle is paradoxical such as the existence of any Christian:

But we hold this treasure in pots of earthenware, so that the immensity of the power is God's and not our own. We are subjected to every kind of hardship, but never distressed; we see no way out but we never despair; we are pursued but never cut off; knocked down, but still have some life in us... in times of honour or disgrace, blame or praise; taken for impostors and yet we are genuine; unknown and yet we are acknowledged; dying, and yet here we are, alive; scourged but not executed; in pain yet always full of joy; poor and yet making many people rich; having nothing, and yet owning everything<sup>33</sup>.

The sufferings of one member belong also to the Head – Christ and to the Body – The Church. Paul the apostle does not ever confer to his suffering a saviour effect such as the sufferings of Christ; his sufferings help not only himself, but also the whole Church, as a result of a communion with passion of Christ. If the Church represents the fulfilment of Christ, the sufferings of the Church can be the fulfilment of the passion of Christ.

### **Conclusion**

The human suffering for the Church Triumphant proves the community-ecclesial character of the Christian actions. That's why the mortification and the

---

The signs of the nails and javelin appear on the hands, legs and rib of the mystic, and bleed, being accompanied by physical and spiritual huge pains. It's the expression of the mystical identification with Christ Resurrected. Paul the apostle doesn't talk about all of these, but about the traces of the apostolic sufferings or of those related to Christian existence, superior to mystical stigmata.

<sup>31</sup> St. Paul, *II Corinthians* 4, 10.

<sup>32</sup> St. Paul, *II Corinthians* 4, 16.

<sup>33</sup> St. Paul, *II Corinthians* 4, 7-9; 6, 8-10.

sufferings are included in the vital law regarding the body of Christ. We can understand now why the martyrdom is the perfection of the supreme fulfilment: the martyrdom is not only the highest communion in death with Christ, but also the highest communion in life with Him. The blood of the martyrs is the seed for the Christians, the seed of life for the Christ Church. The martyr is the ascetic and the mystic at the same time. He incarnates the unity between ascetics and mystics, between life and death. He is the greatest ascetic because he gets out of the life of body for Christ and he is also the mystic because he achieves entirely the ecstasy: the union with God. The martyr is the supreme expression of the death and life in Christ, of our participation to the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

From this point of view, the mortification and the sufferings are the expression of the human participation to the crucifixion and the death of Jesus Christ. The mortification implies an active effort to transpose the death of Christ in the common life, while the suffering is the passive effort to grave the signs of Jesus in our human being. In keeping with the Nicolae Mladin's theory, the mortification is the *subjective* expression and the suffering is the *objective* one, both being orientated to the mystical and ascetic existence. The suffering communion is the power communion and the death communion is the resurrection one.

