

# WHY MUST I SUFFER?

By F. J. REMLER, C. M.

## Second Reason

### *Expiation of Public and National Sins*

**T**HE second reason why you must suffer, especially in times of general calamities, is this: *As a member of society and a citizen of your country you must unite with the rest in making the atonement and reparation which Divine Justice requires for the public and national sins committed in the community in which you live.*

By public and national sins we understand certain sins of a graver nature which are committed on so large a scale and by so many persons in a community, be it a city, or a province, or an entire nation, that they are attributed to the community as a body and not merely to this or that individual. Sins of this kind are: Apostasy from the faith, irreligion and forgetfulness of God; godless education of the young; profanation of God's holy Name, cursing, blasphemy and perjury; the desecration of the Lord's day; immodest and scandalous fashions; immoral art, literature and amusements; divorce and adultery sanctioned by iniquitous state laws; dishonesty, injustice and oppression of the poor; murder and race-suicide; and finally, those wild orgies of gross immorality and unrestrained license which periodically disgrace public festivities and celebrations, or occur in connection with balls, dances, banquets and the like.

God is exceedingly patient and long-suffering and does not willingly inflict general chastisements, however richly they may be deserved by a community. He rather desires that His offending children seek His pardon by means of a timely repentance and conversion. He waited a hundred years before He sent the deluge which He had commissioned Noe to announce; He allowed forty years to elapse between the prediction made by our Lord of the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the fulfillment of that prediction by the Romans in the year 70; and He spared the city of Nineve altogether because its inhabitants immediately left off sinning and hastened to do penance at the preaching of Jonas.

God acts in this way still. He often waits a long time before He inflicts on sinful cities and nations those more extensive chastisements which their multiplied iniquities call for. He desires to spare them and therefore tries first in every possible way to recall them to a sense of their duty and a timely repentance and conversion. But if in spite of these delays they obstinately refuse to enter into themselves and to leave off sinning; if they continue in their wickedness, sometimes even to the extent of sinning more boldly because their evil deeds are not punished at once, then the hour must come in which the measure of their iniquity is filled to overflowing. That hour will mark the beginning of some general visitation which will fall heavily on the guilty community as a just punish-

ment of its long continued transgressions of God's holy law,—destructive floods or storms, conflagrations, earthquakes; seasons of scarcity and famine; epidemics and pestilences; and especially the horrors of rebellions and revolutions, and of civil and international wars. Divine Justice makes use of these evils for the punishment and correction of a sinful people much the same as a wise father uses the rod for the chastisement and betterment of a wayward child.

Nor is it always necessary that God send such chastisement for the public sins as He sent the deluge or the destruction of Jerusalem. There are many sins which contain in themselves the seeds of future public suffering just as the acorn contains the gigantic oak. If such sins prevail for a sufficiently long time, unchecked and unrepented of, they are bound to produce such conditions in the social order as make certain calamities unavoidable. Take for example the sin of *godless education*, that is, education of youth without religion. Where such a system has been adopted, the necessary results must be the following: After two or three generations the knowledge of God will disappear more or less completely from the people; the sense of right and wrong will be lost; good will be called evil, and evil good; there will be no respect for the moral law; the depravity of youth will grow worse and worse; dishonesty and corruption will prevail in business, in the courts, in the legislature, and in the government itself; taxes will be misappropriated or disappear in the pockets of "grafters"; heavy expenses will be necessary to maintain the growing number of asylums, juvenile courts, reform-schools and prisons; there will be no security to honor, property and life; the relations between capital and labor will be strained to the breaking point so that violence and bloodshed will become inevitable; family life will be disrupted by adultery, divorce and free love; national rivalries, jealousies and hatreds, provoked by commercial greed, grow more and more intense, until they lead to international wars with their unspeakable misery to millions. Nations that sow the whirlwind must reap the storm.

Public and national sins must be expiated in this world for the very simple reason that they can not be expiated in the next. In the world to come families, cities, provinces and nations will have no continuance of corporate existence. There men and women will exist merely as individuals, without being united by those social, civil, political and national bonds which are necessary in this life for the welfare and preservation of the human race. In eternity, they will individually enjoy the fruits of their life on earth—the good will possess the kingdom of God in heaven, while the wicked shall suffer for their evil deeds in the unquenchable fire of hell. But as public sins require public expiation, and as this expiation can not be made in this next life, it is clear that it must be made on this side of the grave.

### Why Must the Innocent Suffer?

A question which proves a sore temptation to many persons whose faith is weak and unenlightened suggests itself in this connection: Why is it that the good and virtuous are not exempt at such times, but compelled to suffer like the rest? If God is just, how can He allow the innocent to be afflicted with the guilty?

There are several reasons why God permits the good to suffer in times of public chastisement:

1. It is but right and just that the good should lend a willing hand in offering to God the atonement made necessary by public sins, because in normal times they enjoy in common with their fellow-citizens the blessings of peace, tranquillity, national prosperity. Their temporal interests are in common, both in times of prosperity and in times of affliction.

2. Those who are innocent of actually taking part in public sins are not for that reason always wholly free from guilt in the sight of God. Very often they are guilty of these sins in an indirect manner—accessory to them, as it is called. Thus they may have connived at some form of immorality; they may not have protested against it; they may have neglected to use their authority, or influence, or right to vote, to hinder its introduction, or to procure its removal when already introduced, and all this from indifference, human respect, fear of persecution, or loss of business and similar unworthy reasons.

3. The sufferings endured by the good have a much greater atoning value than those endured by the wicked. Hence the more good persons there are to join in making the required atonement, the more quickly will it be made. Besides, God is easily moved, out of consideration for the sufferings of the good, to greatly mitigate His punishments, even to cancel them altogether.

4. The sight of the good suffering for sins which they did not commit is apt to promote the conversion and salvation of the wicked, by vividly reminding them of the more rigorous chastisements inflicted for sin in the next life. If sin is punished so severely upon the good here on earth, how much more severely will it be punished upon unrepentant sinners in eternity!

5. Such sufferings afford the good an opportunity or making full atonement for their personal sins. For there is no one so holy and so confirmed in grace that he has not committed some sins, such at least as are venial. "Even the just man shall fall seven times," i. e., frequently. But it is an unchanging law that every sin, even the smallest, must be fully expiated either here or hereafter in purgatory. But expiation made here is vastly more profitable than that which is made after death.

6. The patient endurance of undeserved sufferings makes the good resemble Jesus Christ, who, though perfectly innocent, took upon Himself the task of making atonement for our sins and thereby opening heaven to us. If He had not made this atonement, we could not be saved. Besides, innocent sufferings enable the good to reach the highest degrees of grace and virtue here, which will produce for them a correspondingly high degree of endless glory in the kingdom of heaven.

(To be continued)

### AN AUTUMN REVERIE

While strolling around my garden  
Fast falling to decay,  
A feeling of sadness tempers  
The peace of an autumn day.

For only in scattered places  
Are brilliant colors seen,  
And brown that is dull and dingy  
Displaces the summer's green.

The seeds have ripened and fallen;  
But comfort is in the thought  
That out of their ugly substance  
Shall beauty again be wrought.

For after the autumn is winter,  
And after winter the spring.  
And spring shall bring the awak'ning  
Of every lovely thing.

But weeds are in my garden  
If I uproot them not,  
They'll rob of all its beauty  
This one-time beauty spot.

All life is like a garden,  
Our actions are the seeds  
Of rare and lovely flowers  
Or course and ugly weeds.

But ere the seeds are planted,  
The soil we must prepare  
With fervent prayers for dressing  
And unremitting care.

Then sun of right intention  
And dew of contrite tear  
Can make each earthly garden  
A Paradise appear.

—Annette S. Driscoll.