



# Understanding the Catholic Notion of Redemptive Suffering in a Contemporary Context

HIU-TUNG YUEN 

The Chinese University of Hong Kong, dorisjlm12@gmail.com

**Abstract:** Although the Catholic Church nowadays still officially values the ideas of self-sacrifice and the redemptive nature of suffering, academically, there exists a tendency to adapt these ideas to modern values. With the advancement of medical technology, the pursuit of health predominates the mindset of modern people and the practice of redemptive suffering turns out to be an outdated or even ridiculous idea. At the societal level, it is a problem concerning the incompatibility between Catholic dogmas and secular values. At the individual level, it is a question of believing these “empirically unbelievable” religious doctrines without being in a curious form of schizophrenia and insincerity. This paper attempts to examine the difficulties in understanding the Catholic notion of redemptive suffering in the twenty-first century. We attempt to demonstrate that the unintelligibility of this notion lies not in the idea of the willing sacrifice of a person for another human being; rather, it is more concerned with the content and way of suffering, as well as the explanation offered for it. We then suggest that taking the “supernatural Catholic worldview” seriously is an important condition to attain a deeper understanding of the notion of redemptive suffering. Lastly, we will examine whether the notion lacks contemporary significance by looking into some cases in the Catholic communities nowadays.

**Keywords:** redemptive suffering, Catholicism, human suffering, devotional practice, salvation, spirituality

That Jesus died on the cross for the salvation of humankind is a basic belief accepted in every major Christian tradition. But for Catholics, Christ’s salvific or redemptive suffering extends also to every Christian insofar as he or she willingly offers up his or her suffering in union with the Passion of Christ. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), it is stated that “‘the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery’ is offered to all men. He calls his disciples to ‘take up [their] cross and follow [him],’ for ‘Christ also suffered for [us], leaving [us] an example so that [we] should follow in his steps.’ In fact Jesus desires to associate with his redeeming sacrifice those who were to be its first beneficiaries.”<sup>1</sup> Such a notion of redemptive suffering, with its emphasis on the partnership of Christians, if taken seriously, would at once put Catholicism in a bizarre position in contemporary society. The reason is clear, because contrary to the conventional worldview,

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 618.

suffering is viewed not as an impediment to one's living, but as something valuable for the salvation of souls.

In the Holy Year of Redemption, Pope John Paul II addressed the Catholic meaning of human suffering with special emphasis on the redemptive nature of suffering in his apostolic letter, *Salvifici Doloris*.<sup>2</sup> In the letter, the Pope, puts forth a profound analysis of redemptive suffering, with an emphasis on urging Catholics to approach or face human suffering in terms of its redemptive nature. In the history of the Catholic Church, there has been quite a number of believers who have imitated Christ and practiced redemptive suffering throughout their lives. A question may be raised at this point: How is it possible that suffering, particularly innocent suffering, is not viewed as evidence against the existence of an omnipotent and all-loving God but rather a positive way to overcome evil and human adversity?

In fact, the problem concerning the difficulty in making sense of redemptive suffering in relation to everyday life arises mainly in the modern era. Before the Reformation, Christians generally considered self-sacrifice an important principle guiding their way of living, and the Church was seen "as a community of suffering, sacrifice and grace."<sup>3</sup> Although the Catholic Church nowadays still officially values the ideas of self-sacrifice and the redemptive nature of suffering, in the relevant theological discourse, as well as in everyday religious practice, there is a tendency to try to modify these ideas to fit the values and ways of modern life, especially after the Second Vatican Council.

Along with the advancement of modern medical technology, the pursuit of health becomes a predominant idea in our time, and suffering, illness and bodily defects are symptoms or signs of failure in human life.<sup>4</sup> As such, the Catholic conception of human suffering, particularly the practice of redemptive suffering, becomes an outdated or even ridiculous idea. Some feminists, such as Joanne Carlson Brown and Rebecca Parker, claim that to give human suffering a salvific meaning is nothing more than a way to glorify suffering and an exploitation of the oppressed.<sup>5</sup>

Besides the above-mentioned medical viewpoint, there is another factor that makes it difficult to understand the concept of redemptive suffering. It pertains to the attitude towards taking the supernatural or sacred elements of religion seriously in everyday life. The Western secularization process in modern social development is very much a process in which people are gradually getting rid of the influence of

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<sup>2</sup> John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*.

<sup>3</sup> For further discussion of this issue, see Amato, *Victims and Values*, ch. 3.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of the modern medical viewpoint on human suffering, see the following works: Cassell, "Suffering and Human Dignity," 15–30; Thibault, "Activating the Resources of the Soul," 245–253; and Shuman – Meador, *Heal Thyself*.

<sup>5</sup> Brown – Parker, "For God," 2.

the supernatural or sacred aspects of religion on people's lives.<sup>6</sup> The same happens in the relevant academic field. From the early development of sociological theorizing to the present-day religious studies, one of the main goals is to adopt an objective perspective to explain the sacred aspect of religious phenomena in secular terms.<sup>7</sup> As such, the supernatural, transcendental or sacred elements of Christianity have been greatly undermined or eliminated.<sup>8</sup> It is in this sense that the practice of redemptive suffering, which encourages Catholics to offer their suffering for known and unknown beneficiaries, is being questioned.

This paper attempts to examine the problem and difficulties in understanding the Catholic notion of redemptive suffering in the contemporary world. To start, we will go through some relevant scholarly works about redemptive suffering, in an attempt to highlight some major research approaches to this topic in the related academic field. After this, we will move on to the difficulties in understanding redemptive suffering in the present-day world. We argue that the unintelligibility of this notion lies not in the idea of the willing sacrifice of a person for another human being; rather, it is more concerned with the content and way of suffering, as well as the explanation offered for it. We will then proceed to outlining the historical development of this Catholic notion and suggest that taking the "supernatural Catholic worldview" seriously is an important factor in attaining a deeper understanding of redemptive suffering. In the conclusion, we will examine whether it is still possible for contemporary Catholics to make sense of the redemptive nature of human suffering.

## 1. Review of the Concept of Redemptive Suffering in the Related Academic Field

In almost all the major Christian traditions, it is generally agreed that the salvation of human beings is both a gift from God and the task of human beings. They mainly differ in the balance of these two aspects.<sup>9</sup> Both Protestants and Catholics accept the view that the salvation of souls through Jesus' death on the cross, being a magnificent grace from God, is the foundational belief of Christianity. However, their

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Taylor offers an original and insightful discussion of this secularization process in his book, *A Secular Age*.

<sup>7</sup> For further discussion of this issue, see the following works: Wiebe, "Religious Studies," 98–124; Kitagawa, "The History of Religions," 121–143; Berger, *The Sacred Canopy*.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Borella (*The Sense*, 23–30) has given an incisive analysis on the loss of Christian faith under the influence of modernism.

<sup>9</sup> For further elaboration on this issue, see Olson, *The Mosaic*, ch. 12.

different understandings of the salvation doctrine in part give rise to diversity within the Christian community concerning the interpretation of redemptive suffering.

Simply put, for many Protestant churches, justification of the sinner is a once and for all process. When one believes in God and is baptized under the authority of the Church, one could be saved by Christ and gain eternal life after death. The redemption of Christ is wholly and entirely a gift of God's grace that cannot be earned.<sup>10</sup> But for a Catholic, the process of conversion of human beings lasts a lifetime. This means that the salvation of soul requires the baptized person to participate in the Catholic liturgy and be perseverant in abiding by the commandments of God during his or her whole life. In this sense, the sacrament of Baptism is regarded as an initiation of the life-long work of sanctification of the believer.<sup>11</sup> Catholics believe that human beings could join in the redemption work of God and, as such, attain the salvation of their own and others' souls on earth and in purgatory. In other words, in Catholicism, the notion of redemptive suffering is not confined to the crucifixion of Jesus, but can also be applied to the suffering of ordinary Christians.<sup>12</sup> This means that one can share the redemptive value of Christ's suffering by offering one's suffering up to God in a willing or even joyful manner.<sup>13</sup> Cardinal Avery Dulles explains that such a joyful manner is considered the most sublime Christian response to human suffering, as Catholics "suffer with joy because affliction brings them into closer union with their crucified Lord, and enables them to participate in the expiatory sufferings that he accepted for the redemption of the world."<sup>14</sup> In this sense, suffering becomes something positive, embraced by true followers of Christ.

In his book, *Saved from Sacrifice. A Theology of the Cross*, S. Mark Heim further points out that for many people, redemptive suffering is "entirely objectionable, a dark brew of self-abnegation, violence, and abuse. They contend that belief in the redemptive power of Jesus' death amounts to a masochistic idealization of suffering. Saved by blood, Christians are charter bound to glorify sacrifice and to encourage the oppressed to embrace their misery 'in imitation of Christ.'"<sup>15</sup> For many people nowadays, this seems to be a tailor-made criticism for the notion of redemptive suffering. To uphold such an idea of sacrifice may give people the feeling of absurdity because it is irreconcilable with contemporary value beliefs, such as the ideas of

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<sup>10</sup> Olson, *The Mosaic*, 282–284.

<sup>11</sup> For further elaboration on this point, see Hahn, "Come to the Father," 75–76.

<sup>12</sup> For many of the Protestants, on the other hand, the notion of redemptive suffering is applied to the Passion of Christ only. For further discussion of this issue, see VandenBerg, "Redemptive Suffering," 394–411; and Lebacqz, "Redemptive Suffering Redeemed," 262–274.

<sup>13</sup> The offering of pain and suffering as devotion to God has been a long tradition in Catholicism. For details, see the following works: Mowbray, *Pain and Suffering*, ch. 3; Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 22–25; and O'Connell, "The Roman Catholic Tradition," 121.

<sup>14</sup> Dulles, "Divine Providence," 334.

<sup>15</sup> Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*, 3. Indeed, Heim here only expresses the feminist objection to the notion of redemptive suffering.

autonomy and self-fulfillment.<sup>16</sup> Further, this also elicits and intensifies the perennial question concerning the incompatibility between human suffering and the existence of an omnibenevolent God in Christianity.

Compared to other theological topics, academic literature on this subject matter is relatively thin, even within the Catholic academic circle. In what follows, we shall briefly review some relevant academic writings so as to highlight some major research approaches to the concept of redemptive suffering.

One research route, widely, perhaps implicitly, taken by Protestant scholars, aims at confining the issue of redemptive suffering solely to the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In her paper “Redemptive Suffering: Christ’s Alone,” Mary Vandenberg exemplifies this position well.<sup>17</sup> With her detailed analysis of the definition of “redemption” presented in the Bible, Vandenberg claims that there is no evidence in the Scriptures that human suffering is redemptive in nature. Redemption can only be accomplished by God, and thus redemptive suffering is only applicable to the situation of Christ. To Vandenberg, any other correlation of this concept with human suffering will only lead to improper acceptance of unjust suffering. On the other hand, some scholars attempt to employ the notion of redemptive suffering, including both the suffering of Christ and that of the human kind, to answer the Christian problem of evil and suffering at the philosophical and conceptual level.

In her paper “The Problem of Evil,” Eleonore Stump has developed a theodicy of redemptive suffering through a series of rigorous logical arguments.<sup>18</sup> Stump criticizes the classic approaches to the problem of evil offered by Alvin Plantinga, Richard Swinburne, and John Hick.<sup>19</sup> She argues that these approaches cannot provide a satisfactory answer to the existence of many underserved sufferings. Stump then endeavors to solve the problem through her analysis of three Christian beliefs, with a conclusion that part of the redemptive values of human suffering lies in people’s union with God in heaven.<sup>20</sup> In her analysis of the Old Testament story of the two brothers, Cain and Abel (Gen 4:1–16), Stump points out that the problem of evil and suffering is, in fact, God’s choice between spiritual loss (Cain’s soul) and physical loss (Abel’s body) of human beings.<sup>21</sup> Of the two options, at least in the story, the spiritual

<sup>16</sup> For further discussion of the academic debate and observation on this topic, see the following works: McGrath, *The Twilight of Atheism*, 145–149, 183–185; Dworkin, *Life’s Dominion*; and Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief*.

<sup>17</sup> Vandenberg, “Redemptive Suffering,” 394–411.

<sup>18</sup> Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 392–423. Although Stump does not directly mention the term “redemptive suffering” in her paper, her explanation offered for the existence of moral evil and natural evil does exhibit the features of the redemptive function of human suffering.

<sup>19</sup> A concise review of the three scholars’ approaches to the problem of evil can be found in Stump’s paper, “The Problem of Evil,” 393–397.

<sup>20</sup> The three Christian beliefs are (1) Adam fell; (2) natural evil entered the world as a result of Adam’s fall; (3) after death, depending on their state at the time of their death, either (a) human beings go to heaven or (b) they go to hell. See Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 398, 415–418.

<sup>21</sup> Stump, “The Problem of Evil,” 413–415.

gain of human souls outweighed the physical loss of the sufferer;<sup>22</sup> thus, underserved suffering becomes a possible path leading to the redemption of sinners. Stump then maintains that human suffering can only be made sense of when it is explained in terms of its redemptive nature.

Similarly to Stump, Marilyn McCord Adams also sees the notion of redemptive suffering as an effective approach for Christians to face the problem of evil. Adams' analysis in the paper "Redemptive Suffering: A Christian Approach to the Problem of Evil" is also analytical and conceptual in nature.<sup>23</sup> Adams proposes a "Martyrdom Model" as the paradigm of redemptive suffering.<sup>24</sup> She explains that in the face of the rejection from the hard-hearted sinners, God has employed a costly approach, the death of the martyrs, to redeem more souls. In the suffering of the martyrs, Adams believes that not only the sufferer benefited, but both the onlookers and the persecutors also received redemption. It is in this sense that the redemptive nature of human suffering is revealed.

Both Stump and Adams attempt to deal with the incompatibility problem between suffering and the existence of an all-loving Christian God at the conceptual level. However, regardless of the credibility of their arguments, insofar as horrendous, especially innocent suffering is concerned, for many people, it is the real frustration at the existential level that matters. This point has been nicely narrated by Fyodor Dostoevsky in his great novel, *The Brothers Karamazov*. Ivan Karamazov, one of the major characters in the story, raises the existential question about the inducement of goodness at the expense of others' suffering or innocent suffering.<sup>25</sup> Ivan's major questions are: in what sense an omnipotent and all-loving God could justify his plan of allowing sufferings, especially gratuitous sufferings, in this world? How could one accept his or her existence in a world that was redeemed, for example, through the horrendous suffering of an innocent child?

For people like Ivan, no matter how great the goodness being induced from the existence of evil and suffering, it cannot compensate for the suffering that is taking place right at the present moment. As suggested by Brian Hebblethwaite, Ivan "was not concerned about the consistency of a set of ideas which Christians project upon the universe. He was genuinely angry with the Christian God."<sup>26</sup> The situation is unintelligible to Ivan exactly because it is not characterized as insane or masochistic.

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<sup>22</sup> Stump ("The Problem of Evil," 410–411) explains this point with reference to the following Christian belief: "[O]n Christian doctrine death is not the ultimate evil or even the ultimate end, but rather a transition between one form of life and another. From a Christian point of view, the thing to be avoided at all costs is not dying, but dying badly; what concerns the Christian about death is not that it occurs but that the timing and mode of death be such as to constitute the best means of ensuring that state of soul which will bring a person to eternal union with God."

<sup>23</sup> Adams, "Redemptive Suffering," 248–267.

<sup>24</sup> Adams, "Redemptive Suffering," 257–261.

<sup>25</sup> Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book 5, chs. 4 and 5.

<sup>26</sup> Hebblethwaite, *Evil*, 13.

It is unintelligible because the suffering is allowed by an all-loving and all-mighty God. To these people, the pain and torture in human suffering outweigh any goodness induced by the act of offering suffering for the purpose of redemption.

The foregoing analysis demonstrates an important point about the meaning of the Catholic notion of redemptive suffering. On the other hand, to some scholars, perhaps, the conception of redemptive suffering can only be rendered intelligible through adjusting its meaning to the empirical world. In his paper “Redemptive Suffering and Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh,” Ronald Russell attempts to use the notion of redemptive suffering as a way to respond to human suffering in the context of modern medical ethics, hospice care, and the issue of euthanasia.<sup>27</sup> For Russell, the redemptive aspect or meaning of suffering is to be understood in terms of the “experience to educate or improve the sufferer.”<sup>28</sup> He uses the biblical analysis of “Paul’s thorn in the flesh” to show that Paul has gained spiritual improvement in the trial of his “thorn” (2 Cor 12:7–10) This means that Paul’s experience with suffering from the thorn was redemptive in that “it brought divine education or improvement to him.”<sup>29</sup> Russell considers the traditional Church teaching of the redemptive function of human suffering for the souls in purgatory as an “ancient Church theology.” He then further points out that such a traditional definition of the notion may undermine the acute situation of the sufferer at the experiential level.<sup>30</sup> It is quite clear that Russell dismisses the mystical or supernatural aspect of redemptive suffering in his discussion.

Another scholar, William J. O’Malley, in his book *Redemptive Suffering. Understanding Suffering, Living with It, Growing through It*, addresses the notion of redemptive suffering in an everyday context.<sup>31</sup> The discussion in this book is carried out almost wholly from a mundane perspective or on the basis of some common sense knowledge of suffering, leaving aside the supernatural aspect of the issue in Catholicism. Although the author is a Jesuit, he does not take many of the official teachings of the Catholic Church into account. For example, he expresses a tone of disbelief in the doctrine of original sin and takes the idea of the atonement of Jesus on the cross for the salvation of souls rather lightly.<sup>32</sup>

In both Russell and O’Malley’s works, their efforts are mainly aimed at reinterpreting the notion or practice of redemptive suffering in a way that is compatible with the modern way of living at the expense of its supernatural attributes. However, these attributes can hardly be ignored as long as our discussion is set within

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<sup>27</sup> Russell, “Redemptive Suffering,” 559–570.

<sup>28</sup> Russell, “Redemptive Suffering,” 568.

<sup>29</sup> Russell, “Redemptive Suffering,” 569.

<sup>30</sup> Russell, “Redemptive Suffering,” 562–563.

<sup>31</sup> O’Malley, *Redemptive Suffering*.

<sup>32</sup> O’Malley, *Redemptive Suffering*, 20, 35.

the Catholic tradition. The exclusion of supernatural elements may distort the full meaning of redemptive suffering in the Catholic faith.

We see that in the long history of the Catholic Church, the act of redemptive suffering takes place in the life of actual historical and contemporary figures. There has been quite a number of believers who practiced redemptive suffering and believed that it may lead to the redemption of other human beings, including people in this world and those in the purgatory. This will be the main focus of the last section.

## 2. The Difficulties in Understanding Redemptive Suffering

Let us consider a real case that took place in modern times in America. Audrey Santo (1984–2007), a Catholic girl, at the age of three, had a swimming pool accident at home. Since then, she remained in a coma and a number of miracles allegedly happened in her home. Her case attracted wide attention in America, and her supporters consider her a “victim soul.”<sup>33</sup> In her analysis on the relation between Catholicism and disability, Christine James explains that “the victim soul is a person who believes that he or she suffers as Christ suffered for others, and as such, he or she gains closeness to Christ as the supreme victim, and his or her suffering renews the redemption that Christ’s suffering secured for the faithful.”<sup>34</sup> To many Catholics, James continues, “the connection between the idea of victim souls as redemptive figures and saints as intercessory figures is still very much a part of Catholic thought, orthodox or not.”<sup>35</sup> However, a reviewer of the biography of Audrey Santo writes: “This was the book that finally made me decide to leave the Catholic Church once and for all. How any intelligent human being can have the slightest respect for a God that supposedly gets kicks out of the senseless suffering of a child is beyond me .... This book is a prime example of the utter morbidity and diseased spirituality of any religion that feeds off guilt, shame and sado-masochistic impulse.”<sup>36</sup>

It is hard to bring forth any empirical evidence or conceptual arguments to defend the act of redemptive suffering against this kind of criticism or response. If we take a closer look at the issue, we can see that it is not about the “truthfulness” of the matter, but about the “reasonableness” of acting as such. What is the “rationale” behind this act? Is the “rationale” reasonable? Can we explain redemptive suffering

<sup>33</sup> For a succinct discussion of Audrey Santo’s case, see Kane, “She offered herself up,” 80–119. For further detail, see Petrisko, *In God’s Hands*; and also the film, *Audrey’s Life. Voice of a Silent Soul*, directed by John Clote Alabama: EWTN 1996).

<sup>34</sup> James, “Catholicism and Disability,” 173.

<sup>35</sup> James, “Catholicism and Disability,” 174.

<sup>36</sup> “Troy from California,” online reviewer of *In God’s Hands* for <http://www.amazon.com>, 1999. This quotation is borrowed from Kane, “She offered herself up,” 89.

in a reasonable way with reference to concrete human existence or experience? A reasonable explanation here does not necessarily intended to convince people to believe in redemptive suffering. Rather, it is an attempt to show the rationale behind the practice of redemptive suffering and thus help to articulate it more clearly in relation to everyday human experience or activity.

It is true that in real life there are situations in which a person willingly suffers for the sake of another person. One good example is a mother praying to the Buddha to heal her son at the cost of her own life or any other suffering. However, the unintelligibility of the Catholic notion of redemptive suffering lies not in the idea of the willing sacrifice of a person for another human being. Rather, it is more concerned with the content and way of suffering, as well as the explanation offered for it. The question is whether it makes sense for an omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent God to allow the offering of suffering for the redemption of souls.

In order to clarify the problem in question, we shall delineate three levels of redemptive suffering in Catholicism. First, suffering can redeem the sufferer's own soul. To some extent, this level of suffering may be understood as a way to purify the sufferer's soul so as to obtain salvation in some sense.<sup>37</sup> The second level involves suffering for other people, for examples, suffering for one's family member, one's country or even for the whole world. It is seen as an attainment of a higher stage in Catholic spirituality in that one is able to sacrifice oneself for the sake of others. For both the first and the second levels, people generally have no problem making sense of the situation with reference to other religious traditions or social and moral norms. The issue in question lies mainly at the third level, the unique religious practice and belief in Catholicism. This level includes suffering for the salvation of people, either known or unknown to the sufferer, who are on earth, in the purgatory or who have not even been born yet.

As noted, if it is a situation involving the sacrifice of oneself for a relative or one's country, people may find it easier to understand the reasonableness of the action, irrespective of whether they agree with it or not. In other words, it is a reasonable act to sacrifice oneself for others with visible consequences, such as the removal of physical or mental pain, or saving a person's life or one's country. But in the case of the third level of redemptive suffering described above, it also includes suffering for

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<sup>37</sup> In Catholicism, the purgative stage presents a continual warfare of the Christian within oneself. It is called a "warfare" because for those with the intention or motivation towards holiness, they will need to fight against human inclination to commit sin throughout the entire lifetime. This is an initial stage when a Christian begins his or her way to spiritual perfection. According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 2015), "the way of perfection passes by way of the Cross. There is no holiness without renunciation and spiritual battle. Spiritual progress entails the asceticism and modification that gradually lead to living in the peace and joy of the Beatitudes." In the Catholic spiritual tradition, the purgative stage is a preparation period in which the soul of the individual is required to be purified before entering the illuminative and unitive stages. For further discussion of the spiritual tradition in Catholicism, see Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*.

the purpose of saving souls in the afterlife. Furthermore, the sufferer mostly knows nothing about the consequences of his or her sacrifice in a concrete sense.

Apart from the difficulty to make sense of the third level of redemption mentioned above, the unintelligibility of the situation is intensified with regard to its form and way of suffering. In Catholicism, almost any kind of suffering offered to God possesses a salvific function. From a mosquito bite or a minor cold to severe suffering such as terminal illness or the sudden death of a loved one, all this can be used for the redemption of souls. Of all these sufferings, the most incomprehensible and at the same time the severest is perhaps the one which exemplifies Christ's Passion in a lifelong duration. In the history of the Catholic Church, there has been quite a number of people who demonstrated the practice of redemptive suffering in such a way. In some cases, the sufferer may suffer severely in a rather pointless or senseless ways in the eyes of the world.<sup>38</sup> Audrey's suffering demonstrates this last point well. Consider the following passage by Joseph A. Amato:

Christianity [Catholicism] went beyond representing Christ as a sacrificial scapegoat who atones for wrongs. Instead, it invited its believers, who chose not to defend his friends like John the Baptist, his followers like Peter and Paul, or even himself from injustice, humiliation, and death. Defiant of so much that constitutes human nature, Christianity called its believers to abandon the identities and values they had accumulated through their own pain, labour, suffering, and sacrifice and to join themselves to the single redeeming sacrifice of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

This passage succinctly presents the anti-modern characteristics of the practice of redemptive suffering. It is almost in total conflict with contemporary value beliefs such as the principle of self-determination, pluralism and individualism. Modern society highly values pluralism; it cherishes the development of individual identity in accordance with one's natural disposition and growth after birth. But this form of Catholicism asks its believers to forfeit their individual rights, to align their individual identity to that of Christ, and to seek suffering instead of pleasure. What is the significance of locating this notion of redemptive suffering in the contemporary social context? In what way can Catholics nowadays make sense of it in connection with their daily and religious lives?

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<sup>38</sup> In his book, for example, Orsi (*Between Heaven and Earth*, 126) succinctly describes the suffering of a late nineteenth century American Saint, Gemma Galgani (1878–1903): “What was important to her devout—and to Gemma herself—was not merely the pain itself, for all their obvious fascination with Gemma's blood, but that this suffering was for others. Gemma was a ‘victim soul.’ ... The blood that poured down Gemma's face, the pain in her head and side, the anxiety of demonic attacks, were all signs of Gemma's generous and capacious love.”

<sup>39</sup> Amato, *Victims and Values*, 43.

In his book *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor raises an important question: “Why was it virtually impossible not to believe in God in, say, 1500 in our Western Society, while in 2000 many of us find this not only easy, but even inescapable?”<sup>40</sup> Taylor explains that the modern world’s “condition of belief” is greatly different from that of the premodern world.<sup>41</sup> Similar in some way to Taylor’s line of reasoning, we shall in what follows outline some conditions of the modern world which constitute the difficulties to understand the concept of redemptive suffering.

After the Second Vatican Council, many Catholics, especially theologians, believed that the so-called reconciliation between Catholicism and modern social values was becoming an attempt to adapt or adjust Catholicism to the norms of modern society.<sup>42</sup> Such an attempt, as shown in past decades, inevitably tends to undermine the supernatural, transcendental or sacred elements of Catholicism.<sup>43</sup> Contemporary values such as pluralism and the principle of self-determination are gradually being used as standards for assessing the value and significance of doctrines in contemporary society. Here, supernatural elements are being replaced with empirical references.

The question raised by Rudolf Bultmann in the mid-twentieth century already clearly demonstrated this difficulty: “Can Christian preaching expect modern man to accept the mythical view of the world as true? To do so ... could have only one result—a curious form of schizophrenia and insincerity. It would mean accepting a view of the world in our faith and religion which we should deny in our everyday life.”<sup>44</sup> Unlike that of the pre-modern times, everyday life of contemporary Catholics has nearly nothing to do with the intervention of God or of angels and demons. The supernatural realm withdraws from the front stage. The original sin, for many theologians and scholars, only denotes a would-be or hypothetical existential situation to explain the evilness of human nature, without actual or real meaning.<sup>45</sup> And the same applies to the practice of redemptive suffering. To many people, those supernatural explanations, such as the avoidance of eternal suffering in hell or the salvation of

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<sup>40</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

<sup>41</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 28.

<sup>42</sup> Though not writing from a Catholic perspective, Margaret R. Miles, in her work *The Image of Practice of Holiness*, warns the reader about the danger of practicing classic Christian devotional manuals in contemporary society. She claims that many authors of these manuals focused too much on the spiritual aspect of human existence. Miles considers it is important to reinterpret the central themes of these teachings so as to adapt them to the contemporary way of living. For a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the situation of the modern Catholic Church, see McCarthy, *The Catholic Tradition*. For a succinct discussion on Vatican Council II, see Bellitto, *Renewing Christianity*, ch. 5.

<sup>43</sup> For further discussion of this issue, refer to the following works: Bellitto, *Renewing Christianity*, 207–210. See also Komonchak, “Interpreting the Council,” 17–36 and Menozzi, “Opposition to the Council,” 325–348.

<sup>44</sup> Bultmann, “New Testament,” 3–4.

<sup>45</sup> For examples, see McFarland, *In Adam’s Fall* and O’Malley, *Redemptive Suffering*, 20–23.

the souls in purgatory, no longer appear to be reasonable explanations for the practice of redemptive suffering.

This pattern of faith or, let us say, the belief of Christianity, conceived in the above sense, as Jean Borella puts it, becomes just one kind of ideology available for people to choose from because of the need for a principle to justify normative principles or practices nowadays. In this “Christianity ideology,” the identity of a Catholic or Christian is only “defined as the minimal aggregate of beliefs necessary for the moral support of those undertakings imposed by the universal fraternal struggle.”<sup>46</sup> Catholicism understood as such has made “the sense of the supernatural” disappear from the human heart. But it is exactly this “sense,” claims Borella, that “from the beginning of time kept faithful vigil in our immortal souls, awaiting its illumination by a divine revelation, that sense thanks to which the supernatural could make sense, that eye which looked with unwearied hope for a ‘beyond’ of heaven and earth, ... It is this which is dead, overwhelmed by the din of engine noise and crushed beneath the pall of urban concrete.”<sup>47</sup>

The above demonstrates the dilemma of contemporary Catholicism. At the societal level, it is concerned with the incompatibility between Catholic dogmas and modern social values. At the individual level, it is about believing these “empirically unbelievable” religious doctrines and supernatural claims without being in a curious form of schizophrenia and insincerity. The issue at stake lies not in the “content of the truth itself,” but the “faith that these truths demand.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, it is faith that may help a Catholic resolve the apparent contradiction between the supernatural Catholic worldview and the “fact” or “reality” of mundane affairs in a secular world. This holds true for the matter of redemptive suffering. But unfortunately, “faith” can hardly be established or developed through mere theoretical discourse. Insofar as Catholicism is concerned, faith can only be obtained through providential intervention and the co-operation of the individual person. For Catholicism, this so-called “co-operation,” to a large extent, consists in the person’s virtuous practices of imitating Christ, especially through sharing in Christ’s suffering. But the emphasis on rational thinking at the expense of the sense of the supernatural in religion, and the negative attitude towards suffering are two generally accepted ideas in our time. This largely explains the difficulties in understanding redemptive suffering in contemporary Catholicism.

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<sup>46</sup> Borella, *The Sense*, 1.

<sup>47</sup> Borella, *The Sense*, 26.

<sup>48</sup> Borella, *The Sense*, 6.

### 3. Making Sense of Redemptive Suffering in Catholicism: Past and Present

In his article “On Worldviews,” James Olthuis has given the following succinct description of the structure and function of worldviews:

A worldview (or vision of life) is a framework or set of fundamental beliefs through which we view the world and our calling and future in it. This vision need not be fully articulated: it may be so internalized that it goes largely unquestioned ... Nevertheless, this vision is a channel for the ultimate beliefs which give direction and meaning to life. It is the integrative and interpretative framework by which order and disorder are judged; it is the standard by which reality is managed and pursued; it is the set of hinges on which all our everyday thinking and doing turns.<sup>49</sup>

The notion of a worldview so defined serves “both descriptive and prescriptive functions.”<sup>50</sup> It is descriptive in that it consists of a set of fundamental beliefs that possess truth value, although they are hardly verifiable in an empirical way. Prescriptively, it is not just a way of understanding reality but also a way of living and making value judgements. At the descriptive level, the Catholic worldview contains a rich account of the creation, organization and development of the world, with the central theme of the fall of humanity and the redemption brought forth by Christ. At the prescriptive level, it comprises the rules and commands that guide human behavior; and it is in this respect that the act of redemptive suffering is considered as an important way for human beings to gain back salvation.

Simply put, there are three important themes that greatly distinguish the worldview of Catholicism from that of the other world religious traditions. These are: first, the sin of Adam destroyed the innocence and purity inherent in human nature; second, this original sin was then passed on to all mankind, and thus human beings lost the state of innocence and are inclined to sin; third, Satan’s seduction led to the fall of man, and henceforth he, together with other fallen angels, lays down serious obstacles to block man’s way back to God. All this conveys an important message in Christianity – that it is very difficult for human beings to fight against sin and attain perfection in this world. It appears that for Christians, many of the events that took place in the Bible and human history, for example, the intervention of Yahweh in Israel history, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and later Christians bringing forth different types of spiritual practice, have one important purpose: to teach human beings how to live a genuine Christian life.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Olthuis, “On Worldviews,” 29.

<sup>50</sup> This is the comment on Olthuis’ description given by David K. Naugle (*Worldview*, 349).

<sup>51</sup> Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 2–3.

In the history of the Catholic Church, this worldview, together with the conception of redemptive suffering, has been an important element in the formation of the identity of a Catholic. This has been vividly demonstrated in the Church history through the lives of a number of Catholics, especially those considered saints. One major purpose of this paper is to attempt to demonstrate certain essential conditions for understanding redemptive suffering. We assume that one must engage with some proper practice in order to grasp the meaning of this notion. This is the crucial question. It raises an important point concerning the foundation of practice in making sense of redemptive suffering. However, it should be cautioned that the concept of practice here is to be understood in a rather broad sense. It includes: the proper life practice such as that carried out by Catholic saints; some sort of sympathetic attitude towards the practice of redemptive suffering; or just some kind of imagination with a basic understanding of the relevant religious tradition required for the reader. In other words, “practice” here refers to a broad sphere of human activity, ranging from everyday life to moral spiritual participation.

In what follows, we shall outline the historical development of the notion of redemptive suffering in Catholicism. Then, we will examine a few examples concerning the practice and understanding of the notion among lay Catholics in the present day. Through these examples, we shall observe how a deep faith in the Catholic worldview and a serious attitude towards one’s religious life may enhance one’s understanding of the redemptive nature of human suffering.

James Hitchcock, in his book *History of the Catholic Church. From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium*, provides a concise description of how the suffering of Christ became a distinctive feature of Christianity. He writes, “[p]art of the genius of Christianity was that it did not shrink from the horrible way in which Jesus’ public life ended but actually placed it at the very center of the faith. The symbol of the cross did not become ubiquitous for several centuries, but St. Paul already boasted that, even though the cross was an obstacle to nonbelievers, ‘We preach Christ, and Him crucified.’”<sup>52</sup> This passage clearly demonstrates the unique characteristics of the element of suffering in Christianity. It also shows that the “horrible” death of Jesus on the cross represents an important point of orientation for future Christians to carry on their lives and sustain their faith. In the New Testament, Jesus mentioned his sacrifice many times and stressed that taking up one’s cross every day should be the goal of his followers.<sup>53</sup> By saying this, Jesus foretold the fierce persecution that would befall his followers after his death and in the coming centuries. The sacrifice

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<sup>52</sup> Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic Church*, 23.

<sup>53</sup> Jesus revealed his suffering three times: The first time refers to Matt 16:21–23; Mark 8:31–33; Luke 9:22; the second time refers to Matt 17:22–23; Mark 9:30–32; Luke 9:44–45; and for the third time, see Matt 20:17–19; Mark 10:32–34; Luke 18:31–34. On the point of carrying one’s cross as Christian responsibility, see Matt 10:38; Mark 8:34 and Luke 14:27.

of the Christian martyrs then became the foundation of Christianity and it is also in this sense that the redemptive nature of human suffering is revealed.<sup>54</sup>

In the first few centuries of the Church's development, the Church Fathers further extended the meaning of martyrdom from the instance of shedding one's blood to a lifelong practice of asceticism and monasticism. St. Clement of Alexandria claimed that "we call martyrdom perfection, not because the man comes to the end of his life as others, but because he has exhibited the perfect work of love."<sup>55</sup> St. Anthony of the Desert, a pioneer of hermit life, developed ways of suffering for Christ by abandoning himself to live and pray in the harsh desert environment. Put differently, this is to be regarded as a kind of "lifelong martyrdom" and "a continuation of the traditional martyrdom," in which Christians endure great dryness and achieve perfection by alienating themselves from the mundane world.<sup>56</sup> At this stage, Christians no longer sought immediate death from their persecutors, but instead, they came to an understanding of the kind of lifelong martyrdom in striving for perfection and the devotion of oneself to God and His Church.<sup>57</sup>

With the rapid development of civilization and the expansion of the Church, the understanding of redemptive suffering and its relation to the genuine Christian life became much more subtle and internalized in the Middle Ages.<sup>58</sup> For example, St. Bernard of Clairvaux placed great emphasis on how to love God. He insisted that Christians can only achieve perfection and learn how to love God by imitating the life of Christ.<sup>59</sup> In doing so, one must be prepared for enduring severe suffering throughout their life. In the thirteenth century, St. Francis of Assisi offered a new kind of Catholic spirituality for the Christians of his time. His way to suffer for Christ through living an austere life of poverty and humility became the paradigm of the Catholic saint at that time.<sup>60</sup> To a medieval Catholic, almost any kind of suffering and despair could have had a certain salvific meaning in the ultimate or eternal end.<sup>61</sup> It is also in this sense that suffering no longer remains a misery in the human world. For even trivial pains, such as papercuts or insect bites, could be dedicated to the salvation of souls.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic Church*, 50–53, 55. In fact, it should be noted that the idea of redemptive suffering has already been introduced in the Old Testament. The Book of Isaiah mentioned the concept of a "suffering servant" in "The Fourth Song of the Suffering Servant." (Isa 53:2–12). Josef Ton has lucidly explained this point in his book *Suffering*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Clemens Alexandrinus, *Stromata* IV, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Hitchcock, *History of the Catholic Church*, 74.

<sup>57</sup> Amato, *Victims and Values*, 47.

<sup>58</sup> Amato, *Victims and Values*, 56.

<sup>59</sup> Aumann, *Christian Spirituality*, 97. For St. Bernard of Clairvaux's teaching of Christian love, see his works: *On Loving God (De Diligendo Deo)* and *Sermons on Song of Song (Sermones super Cantica Cantorum)*.

<sup>60</sup> Weinstein – Bell, *Saints and Society*, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Amato, *Victims and Values*, 56. For a detailed analysis of the medieval conception of human suffering, see Mowbray, *Pain and Suffering*, ch. 3.

<sup>62</sup> Mowbray, *Pain and Suffering*, 72–79.

During the Reformation period, Protestants challenged the Catholic teaching stating that the Church over-emphasized the influence of human effort on the redemption of souls.<sup>63</sup> However, it is also right at that time that many Catholics, including Ignatius of Loyola, Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, chose to stay in the corrupted religious orders in an attempt to renew the Church as well as to uphold the apostolic tradition.<sup>64</sup> These Catholic reformers noticed that suffering was inevitable in Christian spiritual growth, and thus the spirit of suffering was again promulgated as one prominent feature within those newly formed religious orders. For example, the Discalced Carmelites in Spain, one of the leading new religious orders formed from the old order of Carmelites, advocated that suffering, self-denial and poverty were essential elements of cloistered life in addition to the strict discipline of prayer.<sup>65</sup>

The term “victim soul” originated in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The concept of “victim soul” is in fact closely connected to the notion of redemptive suffering. Paula M. Kane explains that the term is described in various religious writings and spiritual works as a way to “plead with God to make reparation for the suffering of others, the victim soul voluntarily embraces and receives pain.”<sup>66</sup> And the act of obedient submission of the sufferer coincides with Christ’s complete obedience to God in His Passion.<sup>67</sup> In the 1900s, the concept of a victim soul was further formulated and promoted in the Catholic Church. Different religious orders, such as the Benedictines, Jesuits, Franciscans and Passionists, began to promote the concept among their clergy and religious.<sup>68</sup> In the year 1928, Pope Pius XI issued *Miserentissimus Redemptor* to endorse victim spirituality in relation to the theology of reparation and Sacred Heart Devotion. In fact, throughout the twentieth-century, victim spirituality understood as above was widely developed in the European and U.S. Catholic parishes.<sup>69</sup> Many Catholics believe that some human beings are selected as the victim souls whose sufferings are considered “co-redemption with Christ.”<sup>70</sup>

In 1984, the Holy Year of Redemption, John Paul II addressed the meaning of human suffering along with the Catholic tradition in his apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris*.<sup>71</sup> Plantinga praises the Pope’s letter for being “a profound meditation on

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<sup>63</sup> Amato, *Victims and Values*, 58. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, refer to Pelikan’s work, *The Christian Tradition*, chs. 1 and 3.

<sup>64</sup> For further discussion of the counter-reformation, see Bireley, *The Refashioning*, ch. 2; and Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal*.

<sup>65</sup> Payne, *The Carmelite Tradition*, xxi–xxxiii.

<sup>66</sup> Kane, “She offered herself up,” 83.

<sup>67</sup> For further discussion of this point, see Maguire – Mulhern, “Reparation,” 128–130.

<sup>68</sup> Kane, “She offered herself up,” 84–85.

<sup>69</sup> Kane, “She offered herself up,” 86. For a detailed examination of the culture of suffering in American Catholicism, refer to Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*.

<sup>70</sup> Kane, “She offered herself up,” 85.

<sup>71</sup> For the review on this work, see Echeverria, “The Gospel,” 111–147.

suffering and a powerful effort to discern its meaning from a Christian perspective.”<sup>72</sup> John Paul’s discussion goes further beyond theoretical and conceptual analysis; he is able to provide a vivid narrative of the redemptive nature of suffering within the context of the Sacred Scripture. In addition to the common explanation of suffering in Christianity, such as relating it to evilness and punishment, John Paul II attempts to make prominent the “redemptive nature of suffering.” He writes:

The Redeemer suffered in place of man and for man. Every man has his own share in the Redemption. Each one is also called to share in that suffering through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ has also raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption. Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ.<sup>73</sup>

Now we can see that from the crucifixion of Christ onwards, the early Christian martyrs, the “lifelong” martyrdom of the medieval saints, the victim spirituality in the nineteenth century, to Pope John Paul II’s *Salvifici Doloris*, all this clearly demonstrates that suffering is an important and essential feature of Christianity. However, on the other hand, it is also the case that nowadays, this “essential feature” becomes more and more distant and insignificant in Catholic circles.

A question may arise at this juncture: Is it possible for a Catholic nowadays to believe firmly in the redemptive nature of human suffering and offer his or her suffering for the redemption of souls? Taylor’s words that in the 2000s many of us find disbelief in God “not only easy, but even inescapable”<sup>74</sup> have already given a negative answer to this question. Furthermore, Bultmann’s claim that to accept the mythical view (such as the Catholic notion of redemptive suffering) as true is tantamount to “accepting a view of the world in our faith and religion which we should deny in our everyday life”<sup>75</sup> further reinforces Taylor’s answer. All these statements suggest that the practice of redemptive suffering, though occupying a vital role in the history of Christianity, belongs to the ancient or medieval era, perhaps without having contemporary significance. In this case, another question may arise. Without actual, concrete examples or communities, what is the point of investing in the project of making sense of redemptive suffering nowadays? This is not a question that can be dealt with in a simple and straightforward way. It involves various issues concerning interpretations of the Christian faith, especially in the post-Vatican II era. A thorough discussion of these issues may require at least the length of another paper.

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<sup>72</sup> Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief*, 488, n. 38; 493, n. 46.

<sup>73</sup> John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, no. 19.

<sup>74</sup> Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 25.

<sup>75</sup> Bultmann, “New Testament,” 4.

We shall instead conclude this article by looking at the question of whether the practice of redemptive suffering is devoid of actual concrete references and thus lacks contemporary significance. First, we shall consider the case of Chiara Luce Badano (1971–1990), an Italian laywoman who was beatified in 2010 by Pope Benedict XVI.

Chiara Badano, as the only child of Ruggero Badano and Maria Teresa Caviglia, was born on October 29, 1971 in Sassello, a small Ligurian town in northern Italy. Ruggero and Maria raised Chiara with traditional Catholic teachings in a highly religious community where the majority population were churchgoers.<sup>76</sup> Chiara began to take the Bible seriously when she came across the Focolare Movement in 1980.<sup>77</sup> In 1983, during an international congress of the movement, Chiara rediscovered the meaning of “Jesus forsaken,” a central theme in the Focolare spirituality, focusing on the role of Christ as the intermediary between man and God, with special attention to the moment when Jesus felt forsaken by the Father on the cross. Michele Zanzucchi explains that “when a member of the Focolare talks about choosing to love Jesus forsaken, they mean that they try to love him in all the difficult circumstances and situations of their lives and the lives of those near to them.”<sup>78</sup> By this time, Chiara realized that personal suffering could be offered to God for the unity of human beings both on earth and in heaven.

At the age of seventeen, Chiara was diagnosed with bone cancer (osteogenic sarcoma). This was a critical moment in Chiara’s religious life during which she was left in a real quandary about whether or not to accept this suffering obediently. After a short period of struggle, Chiara soon accepted her “task” and decided to offer her suffering to God for the redemption of sinners. She even refused to take morphine to relieve her pain during the treatment process. Chiara explained herself to others as follows: “It [the use of morphine] takes away my lucidity, and all I have to offer Jesus is suffering. That’s all I’ve got left. If I’m not lucid, what sense has my life got?”<sup>79</sup> In the two-year battle with cancer, Chiara gradually attained a deeper understanding of the redemptive nature of her suffering. Once she said to her mother: “Jesus removes my stains with bleach to remove even blackheads, bleach burns. So when I get to Heaven, I will be as white as snow... I have nothing left, but I still have my heart and with that I can still love.”<sup>80</sup>

On October 7, 1990, Chiara finally succumbed to cancer. Her full acceptance of cancer as part of God’s redemptive work influenced many young Catholics in her

<sup>76</sup> Zanzucchi, *Chiara*, 12.

<sup>77</sup> The Focolare Movement is a Catholic international organization founded by a Catholic laywoman, Chiara Lubich, in 1943. The organization aims at promoting universal brotherhood among Christian and non-Christian communities.

<sup>78</sup> Zanzucchi, *Chiara*, 22.

<sup>79</sup> Zanzucchi, *Chiara*, 43.

<sup>80</sup> “Chiara Luce Badano, a Radiant Life. Last Times,” <https://www.chiarabadano.org/en/life/#ultimi> (access 23.11.2023).

time and ours. On the day of her beatification, September 25, 2010, twenty-five thousand young people attended the ceremony.<sup>81</sup> Chiara's life provided a very "up-to-date" example showing that the practice of redemptive suffering is also possible for Catholics in the twenty-first century.

The findings from the ethnographic field research conducted by Katherine A. Dugan may further expound on this "possibility" of understanding redemptive suffering in today's world. In her fourteen-month field research (2012–2014), Dugan investigated the millennial-generation Catholic devotional practice in the United States. Young missionaries in the Catholic organization DIRECT<sup>82</sup> are taught and instructed with a strict interpretation of the Catholic traditional teachings. Each "gender-segregated small group" of missionaries is assigned to a particular Catholic saint, such as St. Thérèse of Lisieux, St. Faustina, and St. Gemma.<sup>83</sup> They all read the saints' life stories and learn their virtuous way of living. According to Dugan's observations, the Catholic saints gradually become the role models for these millennials and lead them to the path of sainthood.<sup>84</sup> These "saints to be," as observed by Dugan, commit their lives to practicing a pious Catholic way of living, including the saints' way of suffering for the redemption of souls.<sup>85</sup>

Despite the apparent conflicts between modern ideologies and orthodox Catholic teachings, we can see that traditional Catholic devotionalism, including the practice of redemptive suffering, still plays a vital role for some Catholics nowadays in the cultivation of their identities. As Dugan writes: "Devotionalism exists in contemporary Catholicism, and it does so with reimagined emphases that reflects millennials' cultural and religious context."<sup>86</sup> It appears that making sense of the notion of redemptive suffering, considered as a vital doctrinal concept in the Catholic tradition, could be possible for those who take the Catholic faith seriously and persistently practice virtuous Christian living in the present-day world.

## Conclusions

We are aware of the fact that the Catholic worldview and the depiction of redemptive suffering examined in this paper may appear in many ways contrary to

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<sup>81</sup> Leahy, "A Young People's Saint," 164.

<sup>82</sup> DIRECT (Disciples in Relationship Evangelizing Catholics Together) is the pseudonym employed by Dugan in her research to represent the Catholic organization that trains young Catholics to evangelize on American Campuses.

<sup>83</sup> Dugan, "St. Gemma," 9.

<sup>84</sup> Dugan, "St. Gemma," 9.

<sup>85</sup> Dugan, "St. Gemma," 9–11.

<sup>86</sup> Dugan, "St. Gemma," 20.

the contemporary notion of knowledge, modern ways of living, and even moral values and social norms. Although this paper is not about the problem of redemptive suffering in the modern social context, we would like to highlight some of the tensions surrounding this issue in modern society.

In our view, there may be three types of responses to the preceding discussion of the Catholic worldview. Firstly, some Catholics may consider this worldview an everlasting truth that is not to be amended or changed in light of any worldly values. However, the upholders of this position have to answer the question brought forth by Bultmann above. Secondly, others may regard this worldview as not reflecting the true belief of Christianity. However, the point is that this worldview not only represented the traditional Catholic point of view, but was also endorsed in some of the documents of the Second Vatican Council, as well as in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. As such, to reject this worldview is tantamount to rejecting Catholicism as a whole. Thirdly, some other Catholics may take this worldview as truth, but attempt to amend or reinterpret those aspects which are contrary to modern culture. The main difficulty of this position lies in the possibility of reconciling the unseen part of the Catholic worldview with modern culture. Further, it may also lead to a situation in which the Catholic Church concentrates her attention on worldly affairs, such as poverty and social justice, rather than on the salvation of souls in eternity. Although these three responses are not the concern of this paper, we would like to propose them for future consideration in relevant academic studies.

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