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Ioan C. Teșu, *Simt boala ca iubire a lui Hristos* [*I feel the illness as God's love*] (Iași: Doxologia, 2017), 271 pages

Suffering and illness have been, since the first centuries of the Christianity, approached topics. Holy Fathers have tried, based on the Scripture arguments, to define and understand them and to offer keys of seeing them not as punishments, but as a part of the divine pedagogy.

Nowadays, when illness has become an often encountered element in almost everybody's life, the need of approaching this topic again, based on the contemporary realities, but also on Church's teaching, became imperiously necessary. Due to this need, Fr. Ioan Cristinel Teșu from Iași Faculty of Orthodox Theology, offered in 2017, an interesting book entitled: *Simt boala ca iubire a lui Hristos [I feel the illness as God's love]*. Notorious voice of the contemporary theological research from the Romanian space, known thanks to the already published titles,¹ he offers an investigation based not only on the use of the patristic sources, but also on their deep knowledge. Segmented in eight chapters and forwarded by Professor Pavel Chirilă (pp. 7-8), his book speaks about topics like the "daily life's cross" (pp. 15-49), "the metaphysics of the suffering" (pp. 76-114), or the "philosophy of the illness" (pp. 232-271). As the aforementioned professor shows in the introductory part:

"The exams that man need to pass in his daily life are precious, are essentials: the assumed in sufferance, the unwavering patience in case of injustices, the love for the enemy, asceticism, sacrificing love the prayer and the accomplishment of God's will in any moment of life.

Father Ioan C. Teșu goes – inspired by the suffering man, on the road of curacy or, better said, on the road of recovering." (p. 7).

¹ Like: Ioan C. Teșu, *Ortodoxia, în dialog [Orthodoxy, in dialogue]*, (Iași: Sfântul Mina Publishing House, 2019), Ioan C. Teșu, *Vocația desăvârșirii [The vocation of perfection]*, (Iași: Sfântul Mina Publishing House, 2018); Ioan C. Teșu, *Teologia necazurilor [The theology of the problems]*, (Iași: Sfântul Mina Publishing House, 2018).

Since the beginning, the perspective of the author is interesting² and the emphasis on the personal dimension of pain and of its understanding can determinate the reader to see this topic not anymore as a punishment, but rather as a call to a deeper understanding of the Christian message:

“The true answer to the problem of suffering is not just a theoretical one, but a practical one, not a general one, but a personal one, because each one understands and lives his own tests separately. The final answer to all these existential questions, related to the presence and purpose of the tests it can only come from the one who is ‘The Way, the Truth and the Life’ (John 14: 6), Christ the Lord, the Healer of our souls and bodies.” (p. 11).

Starting from this assumption, Fr. Ioan Cristinel Teșu uses the patristic ideas in order to define the “daily cross”, to speak about the pain as about an effect to the seeking for pleasure (pp. 24-31), but also about health and its value as a gift of God (pp. 16-23). Then, in an optimistic key, he suggests the fact that suffering should be seen as a sign that defines the chosen ones for the future and eternal joys (pp. 66-75). Moreover, due to this aspect, he speaks about the metaphysical dimension of the aforementioned topic (pp. 76-103), bringing into attention defining elements like the purpose of the pain, the limits of the “tests” for the human being, but also the pedagogy of suffering. Following the patristic line, he speaks, in the 4th chapter about the “suffering as the academy of the virtues” (pp. 115-149), offering an overview on the way how pain can determinate people to develop a virtuous life and start to love more their neighbour.

In the same optimistic note, he develops, in the last two chapters, the idea of bodily pain as a testimony of God’s love (pp. 186-272). In order to justify this idea, he uses Holy Father’s thought, and in two interesting essays that bring together authors from the first eight Christian centuries and other from the contemporary space, considered also representative for our context, he insists on the relevance of the spiritual aspects in the understanding of the material ones in the investigated situation. Without limiting his approach only to a theoretical aspect, he presents also practical solutions and even speaks about the *milieux* that can be used to overpass the illness and pain (pp. 220-231). Here, he shows that from the spiritual point of view, the practice of the virtues and the prayers are very important elements:

² The author underlines the fact that: "Life itself is a road filled with needs and sufferance, because in times when sins seem to multiply and deepen, to fight against them, to live clean, beautiful and tall, fulfilling Christian virtues, is not an easy thing, but it requires hardworking and effort. But how sweet is the reward and joy that the soul will receive at the end of the road!" Ioan C. Teșu, *Simt boala ca iubire a lui Hristos [I feel the illness as God's love]*, (Iași: Doxologia, 2017), 9.

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“Together with the penitence and humility, a healing cure for the suffering ones is also the earnest prayer. To the sick ones, Saint Porfirie has always recommended to pray not for curacy, but for the peace of their souls. *‘Pray “to be good,” not to “get cured!”* he said. *“Let us ask that God’s wish be accomplished, and he will work what is better for them.”*“

The prayer is ‘the key for the spiritual life,’ and this cannot be learned from anybody, not even from the spiritual Father, but through its practicing and the insufflation of God’s Grace.” (p. 224).

Dedicated to an extremely actual topic and offering not only a theoretical approach, but also solutions for the contemporary people, on the basis of Church’s experience, the book of Fr. Ioan Cristinel Teșu is not only an interesting book that highlights important aspects from the patristic treasure of the Church, but also offers a text that can help the reader to reorganise his or her life and find how the relationship with God can change one’s soul in his way to God.

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