

Druge razprave

Izvirni znanstveni članek/Article (1.01)

Bogoslovni vestnik 78 (2018) 3,825—832

UDK: 27-423.7

Besedilo prejeto: 06/2018; sprejeto: 08/2018

*Marcin Godawa***Spiritual Depth and Dynamic of Patience according to Christian Teaching and Experience**

Abstract: The aim of this text is to present how closely the virtue of patience pertains to the core of spiritual life. The results of the analysis, made by means of distinguishing a two- relations schema, shows patience as a voluntary acceptance of difficulties (the secondary relations) as a consequence of the principal relation to good. Such a method allows us to capture the extraordinariness of Jesus' personal life as well as the teaching on patience in works of important spiritual writers (Peter Damiani, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, Alphonse Liguori). Patience comes from the deep personal transformation of mind and will and results in the attitude of joy and peace. This traditional teaching, along with some newer tendencies, may make a contribution to human spiritual development in the face of contemporary challenges.

Key words: patience, principal and secondary relation, problem, love, joy, inner transformation

***Povzetek:* Duhovna globina in dinamika potrpežljivosti glede na krščanski nauk in izkušnjo**

Cilj tega besedila je predstaviti, kako zelo blizu je krepost potrpežljivosti samemu jedru duhovnega življenja. Rezultat analize, opravljene s pomočjo sheme dvojnega odnosa, kaže na potrpežljivost kot prostovoljno sprejetje težav (sekundarnih odnosov), ki je posledica glavnega odnosa do dobrega. Takšna metoda nam omogoča poglobitev v izjemnost Jezusovega osebnega življenja in obenem v nauk o potrpežljivosti v delih pomembnih duhovnih pisateljev (Peter Damiani, Frančišek Asiški, Ignacij Loyolski, Alfonz de Liguori). Potrpežljivost izhaja iz globokega osebnega preoblikovanja uma in volje ter prinaša naravnost veselja in miru. Tovrsten tradicionalni nauk lahko skupaj z nekaterimi novimi smermi prispeva k duhovnemu razvoju človeštva v luči sodobnih izzivov.

Ključne besede: potrpežljivost, glavni in sekundarni odnos, težava, ljubezen, veselje, notranje preoblikovanje

1. The schema of principal and secondary relations

Patience as a virtue connected with deep personal life appears as a worthwhile object of theological and humanistic research. The insight into its semantics will reveal its nature, dynamic, links to other values and regard it not only as external exercises, but a way of being concentrated on good, which should influence contemporary man living in the impatient world along with its diseases, threats and negative changes as described by so many scholars.

Patience is perceived with reference to similar values, mainly obedience and humility. They are all characterized by the subject's relationality. In case of obedience, he or she turns to an outer authority, whilst becoming humble they relate to themselves so as to capture their own true self, the right image of being. (Keating 2005, 125–153) Whereas the distinguishing feature of patience is the subject's relation to difficulties and obstacles. The two following definitions express the common understanding of the word. Patience means »the ability to wait, or to continue doing something despite difficulties, or to suffer without complaining or becoming annoyed« (Cambridge Dictionary 2018) or »the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, problems, or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious« (Oxford Living Dictionaries 2018). The point of reference here is marked by »difficulties«, »delay«, »problems«, the semantic field to which the issue of natural or moral evil can be introduced (Godawa 2010, 30–35). Human reaction, in turn, is depicted as the ability (the capacity) to wait, to continue doing something, accept or tolerate and on the other side as suffering, lack of negative behaviour (complaining, getting annoyed, anxious).¹ These two dimensions allow us to notice the double relationality of patience in the subject, because these postulated actions – ability and suffering – are performed for some more important, basic activity. Then, the composed relationality includes: the subject's relation to obstacles, called here the secondary relation and the subject's relation to fundamental activity, named the principal relation. According to the Christian belief, shared by great philosophical traditions, it is presupposed that the fundamental action is directed to a good aim, the area of good, truth, beauty and salvation. The sequence: principal-secondary means that reference to good determines demeanour towards problems.

The distinction of two groups of terms (the ability and suffering) reveals how strongly doing is connected with personal experience, one's moral and spiritual attitude. Patience embraces the continuation of business but also the complexity of human reactions. Indeed, it implies some internal wilful act (acceptance of difficulties) as well as some level of self-control towards external disturbances. In the process of exercises, such an attempt becomes a virtue – the habitual facility to do good (*virtus*). (Słomkowski 2000, 123–127) Then, patience means the subject's attachment to good, but brought about by both his or her wish and God's inspiring and strengthening assistance. Just for this reason patience is said to be

¹ Patience derives from Latin *patior*, that signifies *inter alios* to suffer, to bear patiently, to experience suffering (Jougan 2013, 484).

the fruit of the Holy Spirit: »In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.« (Gal 5,22-23) Let us notice that patience corresponds to more psychological human actions (gentleness, self-control), which evokes the traits of patience shown above. Although here they are called the discrete fruits of the Spirit, the bond between patience and psychological dimension is expressively stressed. It is also highlighted how much patience is tied up with other virtues and fruits and that *ipso facto* it belongs to the essence of spiritual life. Thus, patience means the steady ability to undertake the secondary relation (to difficulties) for the sake of the principal relation (to good), which results from the cooperation of man with the Holy Spirit and permeates the whole capacity of human acts.

2. Patience as the face of love in Jesus' experience

Along with this line we can examine the connection between patience and love, the most important virtue. In the New Testament patience, being the fruit of the Holy Spirit, characterizes love: »Love is patient« (1 Col 13,4). Patience is understood as a permanent quality of love, noticing that Paul uses the very word »is«, not for example »love often is patient«; an additional term here would suggest imperfectness. For the rest, the fact that love is conveyed by a noun, while patience by an adjective indicates the dominating role of love. Furthermore, it can be said that every contact with love entails the experience of patience and that in Christian thought patience addresses love. Practising patience may not be restricted to some external exercises, the kind of external perfectness consisting in human deeds only which would be achieved by extraordinary mobilization of human powers. This right meaning is expounded in the Christian idea of *apatheia*, which does not concur with the Stoic idea of perfect distance from joy and sorrow. To Christian writers *apatheia* means the ability – coming from the depth of being a sanctified soul – to react to obstacles on the path of spiritual life, especially to wrong inspirations (*logismoi*) leading to sin. (Špidlík and Gargano 2004, 113–133) Indeed, the issue of *apatheia* illustrates the two-related nature of patience, presented above.

The fact that patience is an attribute of love opens a new perspective on research. There, St. John teaches: »God is love« (1 Jn 4,8), what exclusively for Him means that love is His nature, not only a trait (Katechizm 1994, 221). Consequently, He is said to be patience, because in God only His attributes are identical to His nature (Katechizm 1994, 213; Humbrecht 2005, 194–204). This is God, and notably Jesus Christ, who makes the first object of investigation of our topic, since in Him the double-relationality of patience can be apparently seen, with no defiance of His both natures. The way of patience, being observed in His deeds like the Incarnation and Nativity along with its circumstances (the cave, homelessness), reaches its high point in His sorrowful Passion, as it has been reported in Paul's hymn of kenosis (Ph 2,5-11). The descriptions of the Passion supply a great many spots revealing the

Saviour's patience. One of them is His painful agony in Gethsemani, which, when supplemented by mystical explanation, allows us to reach a deep insight into the problem. St. Catherina of Siena, according to her mystical experience, delivers a new and surprising interpretation of Jesus' words: »Father, remove this chalice from me.« (Raymond of Capua 1980, 208–210) In her words the chalice means »the chalice of his yearning for the salvation of mankind« (208). Here, the chalice represents Jesus' ardent wish to save people, not the burden of passion to come. Jesus makes His petition not because of fear, but of love. Catherina has it: »Surely, that was no prayer that his passion and his death should be removed from him, but rather that they should come upon him swiftly.« (208) Thus, »to remove the chalice« signifies properly to drink it to the last drop, the fulfilment of his desire, not being deprived of the chalice. This wish of Christ is so strong, »almost irresistible«, that for His obedience only He adds His prayer for the ultimate fulfilment of the Father's will (»Yet, not my will but yours be done«). The same wish reaches its zenith in the hour of Passion: »He prayed that the chalice, which he had been drinking all his life, might now in this great final draught be drunk to the last drop.« (208) Let us notice that this is achieved through passion and death. This attitude of Jesus presents, in terms proposed above, the principal relation of the subject to good, the relation which charges the area of personal experience and is equate to the secondary relation to difficulties. This equating along with the specific sense of Jesus' words poses the unique and most striking apprehension of patience. The virtue is paradoxically revealed through some impatience in His petition: Jesus's apparent impatience towards the passion is His patience indeed, because the patience refers primarily to the accomplishment of a good aim. Such connotations of words like »suffering«, »acceptance« are here realized in the highest degree.

On the other hand, Raymond of Capua, Catherine's biographer, recalls the traditional, scholarly interpretation of the same Jesus' petition in the meaning that »Jesus' sense-nature instinctively shrank from the approach of death« (209). This traditional exposition conveys that what was called above the secondary relation to difficulties. The contradiction between the two interpretations is explicated by Catherina's statement that the action of the Saviour is »so rich in meaning« and every soul finds »its own share of spiritual food« there, so that the level of understanding is conditioned by the level of spiritual life. For the present analysis it is important that both interpretations coexist, and that at the same time Jesus thirsts death and fears it. Our hypothesis is that they are tied up with two ways of perceiving Christ: the latter interpretation is applied to the humanity of Jesus, whilst the former shows the power of His divine nature. The dogma of two wills and two minds present in one Jesus explains this coexistence (Katechizm 1994, 470–475; 612). In the end, we receive two expositions of Jesus' patience: 1) from the perspective of His divinity this is the comprehension of the equity of both principal and secondary relations; 2) from the perspective of His humanity these relations are differentiated to show that Jesus, the real man, strives to undertake the secondary relation for the sake of the principal one, that is to fulfil as man what He wants as God. The richness of the mystery of Christ lets us see strikingly

the truth that »love is patient« and also that patience comes from the depth of spirituality and is a manner of existence.

3. Two-related personal transformation in man towards love, patience and joy

The topic of patience as an essential feature is next interestingly explained by great spiritual writers. Their starting point is the situation of man who seeks spiritual development, peace, sanctity, when facing obstacles. The secondary relation to difficulties is here more accentuated, but this is the principal relation which delivers a solution to a problem. The first of the exemplary texts is a letter by St. Peter Damian (1007–1072) (Peter Damian 2018), where the sources of patience are clearly presented. The cordial spiritual direction is one of those sources which, following the Bible, discovers the necessity to perceive oneself in the context of God's relationship with mankind. The author communicates the Word of God spoken to man: »You are a son of God and, as such, should take possession of your inheritance.« This is the identity of a son of God which makes the perspective from which all the tribulations should be perceived and received. The principal relation, which is man's bond with the Father, allows the formation of the secondary one by supplying powers to understand and accept difficulties. This basic relationship is full of God's living activity: »Then God bends down, cradles the fallen figure, whispers words of consolation.« Such a spiritual and personal experience poses in man the source of patience. This comprehension is strictly connected with the temporal dimension of life in the sense that obstacles, the objects of the secondary relation are limited to the terrene life, whilst the principal one is the way to the eternity, when the identity of a son of God will be enjoyed in glory with no sorrows.

Awareness of being a partaker of God's loving plan along with the experimental knowledge of His care, results in a personal transformation leading up to the phenomenon of joy despite sorrows, suggested by the Bible: »Think it a great joy, dear brothers and sisters, when you stumble onto the many kinds of trials and tribulations.« (Jm 1,2) From the perspective of a Christian, the ability of patience attains its fullness right here and then man follows exactly the example of Christ's patience shown above. Thereupon, the role of human capacities, mainly of mind and will, should be noticed. The achievement of reason co-working with grace is a new interpretation of tribulations, which though not devoid of pain, are now perceived as places of meeting with God which carries great joy. They appear as necessary elements of purification of the relationship with the Father. The change in thinking becomes the mental fundament of a patient attitude. The following fragment shows how much the inner transformation determines the outer behaviour: »Do not let your weakness make you impatient. Instead, let the serenity of your spirit shine through your face. Let the joy of your mind burst forth. Let words of thanks break from your lips.« »The joy of mind,« conveying the new, converted thinking directs outwards (»bursts forth«) that means that this mind is a cause of

external conduct. Analogically, »the serenity of spirit« conditions a shining face. Taking into account that spirit is a concept wider than mind it is clear that the change takes places in mind along with other human capacities. »The words of thanks« evoke and imply the activity of will along with emotions. In this sense the author speaks about love, which »enkindles zeal«, linking it with hope, which »leads to joy«. Ultimately, the transformation permeating the whole personality expresses itself in a kind of zeal by which the subject turns him- or herself from sufferings and contemplates the real good: »The well-prepared mind forgets the suffering inflicted from without and glides eagerly to what it has contemplated within itself.« The original Latin expression: *obliviscatur mens bene ebria* (Petrus Damianus 2018, 476) – that is »mind well-drunk which therefore forgets its tribulations« – reveals the magnitude of this inner transformation in spiritual patience. To sum up, patience signifies a share in the principal relation to good, the relation which dominates over and determines the secondary relation to difficulties. Contemplation of this principal bond »within itself« underlines how deeply patience is rooted in the subject's personal life.

Patience shown in the face of difficulties belongs to the idea of perfect joy according to St. Francis of Assisi (1905). This perfect joy and patience can be captured in the face of extreme tribulations. In his imagination, Francis presents himself and brother Leon as persons suffering from the rain, the cold, mud, hunger – the men who at the end of their journey are being angrily and aggressively rejected by their friars and deemed frauds and thieves. This collection of wrong factors is a place of revelation of perfect joy connected with patience: »If we should sustain this with patience, and with joy, and with love, o Brother Leo, this would be perfect joy.« (28) Or »if we should bear all these things patiently and with joy, thinking of the pains of the Blessed Christ, as that which we ought to bear for His love, o Brother Leo write, that it is in this that there is perfect joy« (29). Patience functions as a keyword, an inherent element of this experience, featured by being numerated together with joy and love, especially the love for Jesus' pains. This triad of virtues allows us to see that patience is strictly connected with love and joy along with kind behaviour, as it was shown above. Patience may be called a condition and an identification mark of joy and love, since »love is patient«. Using the instruments of analysis it can be said that here attention is paid firstly to the secondary relation to reveal the spiritual phenomenon of joy and patience up against problems, but this exposition urgently appeals to the principal relation, that is to the relationship with the crucified Lord. Similarly, St. Alphonse Liguori (2010), when commenting the line »Love is patient«, stresses a dependence of patience and peace so that practising patience enlarges peace and joy in earthly life and merits for eternal happiness. This effort ought to follow God's will, not human notions. (58–61) Such a principle occurs also in mystical life where sharing God's love (the principal relation) implies the subordination of human capacities, including intellect, to the grace of infused contemplation (Godawa 2015, 531–535). The secondary relation pertains especially to being purified and conducted by the Holy Spirit (531–539).

4. Perspective of the omnipresence of God

The newer contribution to understanding patience is built on the premise that every situation in human life makes an opportunity to experience God's constant loving care, enabling man to accept and calmly deal with difficulties. The novelty lies in transcending the mental division of the world into sacral-safe and profane-dangerous areas. The clear image of such an attitude, reflecting the Biblical wisdom (Mt 6, 25-34; 1 Cor 10,31), may be found in St. Francis of Assisi's image of a friar. He is intended to be fully open to reality along with each of its manifestations. Since the universe belongs to God and is subordinated to His providence, man should not protect himself from this world but is to stay fully subjected to it: »Whatever happens, it would be God's gift for us.« (Tugwell 2006, 148) This kind of passivity, intrinsically connected with the relinquishment of one's own will and the transformation of mind, constitutes the source of patience.

This idea sounds in St. Ignatius of Loyola's teaching too. In the *Foundation of the Spiritual Exercises* he speaks that all the goods on earth ought to be used by man so as to praise the Lord resulting in spiritual indifference towards particular questions:

»We must make ourselves indifferent to all created things, as far as we are allowed free choice and are not under any prohibition. Consequently, as far as we are concerned, we should not prefer health to sickness (sickness), riches to poverty, honour to dishonour, a long life to a short life. The same holds for all other things.« (2018, 23)

This principle, when connected with the belief that God dwells everywhere through His potency, presence and essence (1999, 278), pictures the vision of man who is able to find Him in every life situation whereby the most important aim is achieved. In confrontation with this principal relation, the attitude to issues like illness (etc.) goes really as the secondary one. Man attaining, on different paths, his or her main goal can calmly and patiently face all obstacles and hardships.

Building spirituality and patience by means of contemplation of omnipresent God is typical of the contemporary times. It can be followed in writings of many authors like Ch. de Foucauld, C. Carretto (2014), T. Gannon and G. Traub (1999), A. de Mello (2017) or C. de Hueck Doherty, who implements Russian idea of eremitic life (*poustinia*) to the conditions of Western civilisation. Her *Poustinia in the Marketplace* puts forward the idea of forming the principal relation through silent and hidden contemplation, being one's constant broadness to the Lord, and through love to people (1975, 79–93) which results in patient openness to the whole reality along with its difficulties, »accepting the weaknesses of each other with deep love, with great patience« (87). Thus, what is very characteristic of *poustinia* is the fact that the influence of the principal relation on the secondary one is strictly mediated by love to neighbours. She claims: »You are Christ-bearers. You are *poustinia* bearers. Where? In the marketplace. To whom? To anyone whom you meet there.« (91)

The issue of patience pertains to the core of spirituality, not only as any outer behaviour but as a way of being which reflects love and joy. The insight into the selected texts made by means of two-related schema reveals the value and deep personal roots of this virtue. This knowledge, along with the capture of the dynamic of patience, where the external is caused by the internal in cooperation with grace, highlights the very important point of reference within the contemporary discourse around man living in the impatient world.

References

- Cambridge Dictionary.** 2018. Cambridge Organization. <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/patience> (accessed 16. 3. 2018).
- Carretto, Carlo.** 2014. *Pustynia w mieście*. Trans. Hanna Cieśla. Częstochowa: Edycja Świętego Pawła.
- Francis of Assisi.** 1905. *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi with eight Illustrations by Paul Woodroffe*. Trans. Thomas Okey. London: Trench Truebner and Company Limited.
- Gannon, Thomas, and George W. Traub.** 1999. *Pustynia i miasto*. Trans. Piotr Wilczek. Kraków: WAM.
- Godawa, Marcin.** 2015. Conditioning of Intellect in Christian Contemplation in the Light of Definitions and St. Augustine's Experience. *Bogoslovni vestnik* 75, no. 3:525–540.
- — —. 2010. Teologiczna oferta wolności w nauczaniu i doświadczeniu duchowym Jana Pawła II. In: *Oblicza wolności*, 29–44, Ed. Rafał Łętocha. Oświęcim: Wydawnictwo Państwowej Wyższej Szkoły Zawodowej w Oświęcimiu.
- Hueck Doherty, Catherine de.** 1975. *Poustinia: Christian Spirituality of the East for Western Man*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press.
- Humbrecht, Thierry-Dominique.** 2005. Teologia negatywna św. Tomasza z Akwinu. In: Święty Tomasz teolog. Wybór studiów, 136–209. Trans. Agnieszka Kuryś. Warszawa: Instytut Tomistyczny.
- Ignatius of Loyola.** 2018. The Spiritual Exercises. Ignatian Spirituality. <http://spex.ignatianspirituality.com/SpiritualExercises/Puhl#id-1.6.2> (accessed 14. 4. 2018).
- Jougan, Alojzy.** 2013. *Słownik Kościelny Łacińsko-Polski*. Sandomierz: Wydawnictwo Diecezjalne.
- Katechizm Kościoła Katolickiego.** 1994. Poznań: Pallotinum.
- Keating, Thomas.** 2005. *Zaproszenie do miłości*. Trans. Krzysztof Pachocki. Poznań: W drodze.
- Liguori, Alfons M.** 2010. *Umiłowanie Jezusa Chrystusa w życiu codziennym*. Trans. Maria Pierzchała. Kraków: Homo Dei.
- Loyola, Ignacy.** 1999. List do Antoniego Brandao z 1 czerwca 1557. In: Thomas Gannon and George W. Traub. *Pustynia i miasto*. Trans. Piotr Wilczek. Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM.
- Mello, Anthony de.** 2017. *Szukaj Boga we wszystkim: Rozważania nad Ćwiczeniami Duchowymi świętego Ignacego Loyoli*. Trans. Justyna Grzegorzczak. Poznań: Zysk.
- Oxford Living Dictionaries.** 2018. Oxford Dictionaries. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/patience> (accessed 16. 3. 2018).
- Peter Damian.** 2018. A Letter. The Liturgy Archive. <http://www.liturgies.net/saints/peterdamian/readings.htm#loh> (accessed 14. 4. 2018).
- Petrus Damianus.** 2018. S. Petri Damiani S. R. E. Cardinalis Epistolarum Libri Octo. Documenta Catholica Omnia. http://www.documenta-catholicaomnia.eu/02m/1007-1072,_Petrus_Damianus,_Epistularum_Libri_Octo,_MLT.pdf (accessed 14. 4. 2018).
- Raymond of Capua.** 1980. *The Life of Catherine of Siena by Raymond of Capua*. Ed., trans. Conleth Kearns. Wilmington DE: Michael Glazier Inc.
- Stomkowski, Antoni.** 2000. *Teologia życia duchowego*. Żabki: Apostolicum.
- Špidlík, Tomáš, and Innocenzo Gargano.** 2004. Duchowość Ojców greckich i wschodnich. In: Tomáš Špidlík, Innocenzo Gargano, and Vittorio Grossi. *Duchowość Ojców Kościoła*, 5–178. Trans. Konstanty Franczyk and Janusz Serafin. Kraków: Homo Dei.
- Tugwell, Simon.** 2006. *Drugi niedoskonałości*. Trans. Aleksander Gomola. Poznań: W drodze.