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**THE PARADOX OF EVIL AND SUFFERING:  
“A LIFE IN CHRIST THROUGH SUFFERING AND  
ENDURANCE”**

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All my biblical quotations are from the *African Bible*.

**DECLARATION**

I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work. It has been achieved through my personal experience, reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious studies. This long essay has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All the sources have been cited fully and acknowledged.

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

“...My heart is sorrowful even to death... The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Mt 26:38,41). Like Jesus, every human person finds himself or herself sometimes in such a concrete situation when confronted with the pangs of suffering. Though the intellect would want to make out its meaning and purpose in order to overcome it, the body the medium through which this suffering is encountered and expressed is always weak.

Evil events such as earthquakes and floods have always have left many people confounded in silence with fear, loneliness and anxiety. Though they are an iceberg of many silent sufferings and deaths, they have always provoked within man a sensation of pain that man is short of completeness in life. Such consciousness evolves into uneasiness and concern, worry or dread, lack of fulfilment, but above all heightened feelings of inner emptiness, isolation and intense longing to overcome suffering.

Suffering may be transient, or long lasting. It is common to all, the young and the old, the poor and the rich alike. From the standpoint of human history, suffering is a legacy that is as old as humanity. When we switch on our radios and TVs and read newspapers, the most dominant news is about suffering in the world. Summits, conferences, councils, seminars are always held to forge ways on how to diminish, alleviate or to prevent suffering.

Though suffering and pain seem to be an integral and unavoidable part of human existence on earth, man upon failing to establish a rapport between suffering and life, ends in posing basic questions: Why suffering? Is there meaning in suffering? Can suffering be totally abolished from the earth? Does God create evil

and suffering? Why suffering in a good world? These questions summarise my motives and aims in writing this essay: there is a necessity to develop and cherish a firm positive attitude towards evil and suffering in the world.

The notion that God is a good God and he is the creator of the good universe magnifies the horror and dread of suffering. This is because man cannot comprehend a good God creating or allowing evil in a good universe! The question about the origin of evil and suffering is not an afterthought in man's intellect. Thus, comes the problem of evil in the world. The ravaging effect of suffering, of which the human mind cannot exactly situate the origin, plunges man into a flight from the reality of life.

Many a times man in his wisdom attempts to rationalise the problem of evil and suffering so as to attain comfort, but all in vain. On the contrary, man's flawed attempts to evade evil and suffering have always propagated loneliness and anxiety in life. In any case, human philosophy should aid us in making out how evil and suffering profoundly fit into the divine plan for humanity and into the probationary nature of life; philosophy should help to develop a healthy attitude that will influence right actions towards evil and suffering, thereby removing the misjudgement about evil and suffering. Again it should help us to see that suffering is not irrational, purposeless and meaningless and that it is not the end of life. This is the basic stream of thought in Chapter One. Man with his intellect in confronting the problem of evil and suffering, engages in an earnest, modest and endeavouring *disputatio* to offer a solution appertaining to this problem.

The pure human rationality that has led to a tussle to comprehend the meaning and purpose of suffering in the world is full of conjectural arguments.

Baffled by the fact that evil and suffering are indiscriminately affecting all persons, even other animals, the human mind has unfortunately occasionally wandered away from the truth that there is a good God in control of the universe. The supernatural revelation purports to found the fact that even though evil and suffering are inherent in the world, the good God has triumph over them and that they are only a fleeting reality. Chapter Two is a move to locate the origin of evil and suffering and its relation to God's presence. However, we will only deal with the New Testament in this chapter in order to see how Jesus, who is the paradigm of Christians in front of suffering, understands and lives the problem of suffering and evil.

“...affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint...” (Rom 5:3-5). In these verses Paul reiterates our vocation to authentic living amid suffering. Theology as a rational method of establishing the truth of revelation, bears the responsibility of giving a rigorous and exact exposition of the doctrines of faith pertaining to evil and suffering. As such, theological reflection should offer Christians a spirituality that is completely useful in nourishing and strengthening faith. This is the core message of Chapter Three: how to face suffering squarely with the purpose and meaning as a way to God.

Christ on insisting on the carrying of the cross as a way of discipleship to him, offers an overhaul in the meaning of the cross: a new meaning that embraces suffering as a necessary component on the way to new life. In Chapter Three we also establish this new meaning of the cross.

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

### A) What is Evil?

Within the human person is the imprint-like tendency to flee from sufferings, to run away from our dreaded loneliness and ignorance. We do not want to face the reality of suffering squarely, yet it always generates inevitable questions concerning its cause, evil. From time immemorial both in a philosophical sphere and religious sphere, the human intellect has always engaged in serious discourse purporting to establish the meaning and origin of evil, a menace that rocks the world. As Peter Vardy points out, “The problem of evil is very obvious when we look at the world from our point of view, from the anthropomorphic perspective.”<sup>1</sup> Many philosophers, psychologists, and theologians have struggled to offer the meaning of evil, not relying directly on the biblical expositions on evil.

For St Thomas Aquinas, evil is not anything substantial in reality, but the privation of a particular good inherent in a particular being: the shortcoming of a good a given thing ought to possess.<sup>2</sup> Everything naturally is by essence endowed with good. Any decline or depletion of this essence would be termed evil. From the mind of Aquinas, we would concur with the fact that while goodness is definite, evil is the degree to which a given thing falls short of perfection.

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<sup>1</sup> P VARDY, *The Puzzle of Evil*, (Glasgow: Fount, 1992), 21.

<sup>2</sup> ST. T. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologia*, Vol. I, Q 48, a. 1, (New York: Benzinger Brothers, Inc., 1947), 254.

Charles Journet says that evil as a privation (steresis) in reality could be perceived in two perspectives: as the lack or absence of good in general; and as the absence of some good that should be present in a thing.<sup>3</sup>

Evil has also been defined as a non-living, inanimate, a disposition of the soul which contradicts virtue and draws forth a heedless desertion of good by a rational being.<sup>4</sup> That is, it is not anything external but the wickedness within a person. This is St. Basil's point and it narrows down evil to the human persons only. It apparently equates evil to human faults.

For Teilhard de Chardin, evil is that disorder and failure inherent in nature but which is necessary for the unfolding evolution of the cosmos through the constant play of natural laws.<sup>5</sup> In other words, evolution, as the process by which the universe attains perfection, requires a contrary force and disorder since it tends to perfection and order. Nature can only, in this sense, realize its perfection by overcoming an opposite force -- evil.

St Augustine, for his part, views evil as not any substance but a perversion of the will, turned aside from God. Like St. Basil, Augustine also, in this understanding, narrows down evil to the human person's fault.

In the New Catholic Encyclopaedia, R. Jolivet states that evil as a privation implies that a particular being lacks a good it requires to enjoy the integrity of its nature. It only exists in relation to the subject it affects and negates its perfection. In

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<sup>3</sup> C. JOURNET, *The Meaning of Evil*, (New York: P J Kennedy and Sons, 1962), 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid* 34.

<sup>5</sup> F. PETIT, *The Problem of Evil*,(New York: Hawthorn Books, 1954), 25.

this view evil is neither total nor absolute.<sup>6</sup> We would deduce here that the existence of evil is relative. Without good or perfection it would be absurd to talk of evil.

According to Peter Vardy *privation* is the absence of some perfection which is included in the essential nature of a thing in question.<sup>7</sup> Evil is thus posed as a by-product representing the lack of a good. It is a negation of perfection proper to the being of any given thing.

From the above expositions, we conclude that evil is basically a privation of a reality but that which only exists relatively, thus not absolute. However, the question about the origin remains perplexing.

## **B) Origin of Evil.**

The experience of evil and suffering as encountered in the world is a riddle that has always confounded the intellect of man. Though the world is perceived as intelligible as such, the question of the origin of evil remains a puzzle to every thinking and reflecting mind.

R. Jolivet says that by virtue of man's free will comes the genesis of evil within the human person. It comprises the act of disregarding divine law -- a voluntary privation of moral uprightness springing from a positive act of denial. Concerning physical evil, it is due to the finitude of created things. Things like earthquakes, floods, and the like, are not evil since these are as a result of courses of natural laws, but evil is in the sufferings that are subsequent to their occurrences.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> R. JOLIVET, "Evil" *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5(U.S.A: Jack Heraty & Associates), 665-666.

<sup>7</sup> P. VARDY, *The Puzzle of Evil*, 25.

<sup>8</sup> R. Jolivet, "Evil" *NCE*, 666.

The philosopher Francis Suarez, in a bid to explain the origin of evil, stated that: "Actions are good or evil simply and solely in so far as they are ordered or prohibited by God."<sup>9</sup> In other words, for him God, by his divine volition, has authored natural laws and willed men to adhere to the dictates of these laws, found in right reason. As such, there is the natural intrinsic moral character in a rational being to execute acts that are compatible with the natural law. Suarez purports to affirm that the origin of evil is due to man's breach of God's natural laws which, according to him, are imprinted in man by nature. We would posit here that evil as such is due to man's pervasive and voluntary choice that is in contrast with divine laws. Suarez does not distinguish between Divine laws and natural laws: in any case he takes the two interchangeably.

In the mentality of the Gnostics, matter is evil. They attribute the work of creation to a demiurge, not God. They claim that between God and the demiurge existed two intermediary aeons (worlds). One of these aeons sinned causing the emergence of evil.<sup>10</sup> They have a view of a world that is totally bad, that cannot be salvaged. It has to be escaped. While this philosophical explanation tends to give the origin of evil as external to man, the former, of Suarez, attributes the origin of evil to man, out of man's deliberate disobedience to natural laws.

The Manicheans, taking the same trend of thought as the Gnostics, that matter is bad, go further to show that there are two eternal principles: good and evil. They are locked in permanent conflict.<sup>11</sup> The principle of evil is held responsible for disorder and chaos in the universe that constantly degenerates into suffering and

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<sup>9</sup> F. COPLESTON, *A History of Philosophy*, Vols, I, II&III, (London: An Image Books,1985), 384.

<sup>10</sup> F. PETIT, *The Problem of Evil*, 18.

<sup>11</sup> *The Catechism of the Church* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992), No. 284.

decay of nature. Both the Gnostics and Manicheans were influenced by the Platonic philosophy of dualism, which perceived the material world as inherently evil.

The philosopher David Hume, emphasizes that man is the origin of evil insofar as he inflicts injustice, conceives malice, sedition, strikes, wars, fraud, treachery, calumny and violence.<sup>12</sup> All these, he holds, as pervasive acts, are manifestations of the inner reality of man's mind and heart as corrupted.

St Augustine, in his observation, asserts that the origin of natural evil origin should be attributed to the activities of the non-human beings, who are nevertheless free and rational beings.<sup>13</sup> Augustine here hints at the devil and his spiritual companions, since they are the only non-human rational free beings that are fallen. They enter man, he says, and operate from within.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches that human persons in their religious behaviour manifest the limits and errors that disfigure the image of God in them.<sup>14</sup> This is the exposition of human limitations as the source of evil acts.

Psychologically, all human problems with their intolerable afflictions and sufferings originate from man's ceaseless endeavours to transform the universe into a man-made reality. The goal here is to attain perfection that can only be realized in the world beyond this. Many psychologists, in asserting this notion on the origin of evil, hold that man continuously and hopelessly confuse the values of this world and the world beyond. This plunges men into disorder of their actions. In other words, it is in the execution of certain pervasive human affairs that evil arises. This explanation does not offer the origin of evils that are not due to human activities.

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<sup>12</sup> P. VARDY *The Puzzle of Evil*, 37.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

<sup>14</sup> CCC, No. 844.

From the above explanations, three positions emerge to show the origin of evil. These are: that evil originates from the defective material of creation – the material that is evolutionally ordered toward perfection. This can be inferred from the Gnostic's and Manicheans' view of evil; the second position affirms evil as originating from man's perverted and distorted tendencies to be what he is not. Man through free choices injures the universe by evil acts. The last position sees God as the cause of evil. God by creating and laying down natural laws, and by imprinting in man free will, is seen as the ultimate origin of evil. He could have created a perfect world. However, those who hold this view, do not expound how God, who is creator of good creation, can at the same time create a contradictory reality, evil. The former two positions tend to exclude God from the puzzle of evil, yet insofar as God is the author of the Universe and that he is infinitely good and all-knowing, he is in one way or another related to the problem of evil. The question is: does God will or permit evil in the world? If so, why? In the subsequent section we delve into the fact of God's relation to evil.

### **C) God's Relation to Evil**

I wish to point out in advance that the fundamental flaw in our argument about the problem of God and evil and suffering may well be that we always think that God should prevent evil and suffering, protect us from it and even efface it from the world. Well, no one wants to suffer, but this is an attitude fitting only for our limited human capacity to grasp nature. God could do as human persons wish but then he is a God who respects human freedom. God gives man his nature and respects that nature, the freedom which is the volitional capacity man has in front of his creator. Yet man, due to his finite knowledge, which prompts him with inability

to fully grasp God's work, blames evil on a lack of divine wisdom: that God does not have sufficient interest in the affairs of human history.

Many authors from different traditions have tried to explain the role of God in the existence of evil and suffering. Bernard Wuellner emphasizes that since evil is a non-being in itself, God does not cause it. However, given that God knows it and could stop it by absolute or abstract power, God must be said to permit evil and its possibility. God being infinitely good only allows evil for the sake of good - either to preserve some good or to enhance the value of good.<sup>15</sup> Wuellner does not tell us that God wills (intends) evil as such, but since evil can lead to a realization of a higher good, God allows it. But how evil can lead to a higher good is still a mystery. Implicit here is the temporality of evil. We have seen that it exists relatively and subordinately to the good. As such, evil cannot nullify good but only affect it. Now it remains a riddle in the human mind how the effect of evil on the good evolves into the good realizing a higher state of perfection! In an attempt to show the good preserved or increased by divine permission of evil, Wuellner alludes to some economy of suffering, an economy that is of divine order, direction and management. This economy will be featured in Chapter Three.

Before God there is nothing that happens by chance. Whatever he does is for the good of creation and human history. Wuellner goes on to affirm: "... it is the mark of excellent government to allow evil to have a subordinate and secondary place in the great scheme of things and administration of the perfect order of the

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<sup>15</sup> B. WUELLNER, *A Christian Philosophy*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1957), 228.

universe.”<sup>16</sup> Man being a free being is governed by his proper free nature amidst the power of evil that always confronts him.

According to R. Jolivet, God does not cause evil since he is infinite goodness but the pains and difficulties encountered in the universe are naturally ordained to the good and the happiness of humanity.<sup>17</sup> The term “ordain” here refers to permission and not will.

The theodicy of the Irenaean tradition, explained that God was partially responsible for evil. They held that man was created imperfect so that he would attain perfection through development and growth. They stressed that evil was a means to this end since God from the beginning created a world mingled with evil.<sup>18</sup> Here again, God is shown as using evil to bring about full perfection of the universe.

The Augustinian tradition totally denies that God is responsible for the evil that torments the universe since God is infinitely good, omnipotent, and as he does not wish suffering, he cannot will evil and suffering. Augustinians hold that God created a perfect world. The evil is due to free choice of rational free beings- man and fallen angels.<sup>19</sup>

The Thomistic theodicy asserts that God, though having no defect, is responsible for natural or physical evil. However, it states that God does not cause natural evil directly but incidentally.<sup>20</sup> For instance, if a virus causes herpes and prompts great pain, it is because the nature of growth for a virus is being fulfilled but accidentally their growth causes pain because the law of nature realizes itself in a wrong environment.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 234.

<sup>17</sup> R. JOLIVET, “Evil” *NCE*, . 667.

<sup>18</sup> P. VARDY *The Puzzle of Evil*, 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 15.

<sup>20</sup> ST. I. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologia*, Q 49, a. ii, 255.

The fact that creation is dependent on God does not imply that God as such is in total control of history and daily minutes of human life. If it were so, man, despite his natural free will, would be under total determination. In that sense freedom would be an absurdity. God only illumines the human will to act according to right reason- the conscience.

If God were compelled to allow evil, then he would cease to be an all-powerful God. Again if he willingly permitted evil in nature, then he is without boundless goodness. This amounts to a classic dilemma, which human intellect cannot comprehend in depth. Charles Journet observes that in spontaneous reasoning and common sense or philosophy there is an earnest problem of a moral, general and impersonal character due to the co-existence of an all-powerful God and the evil of the universe, that it is irreconcilably scandalous to intelligence in front of a Holy God.<sup>21</sup> The dilemma remains!

There is a danger of seeing God's existence as concomitant with that of evil. Existence of God is not presupposed by anything, even by evil - since evil only affects created things. In that sense, we would see evil as the opposite of good, creation, and not of God. Again we accept evil as a privation, an existence that is subordinate and relative to good, then God, who is the author of good, will be held as only permitting it in nature - not willing it. For to will on God's part is to bring to existence or is to command and sustain the existence of a given thing.

If evil is non-being having no positive nature, it cannot, according to Journet, be created by God.<sup>22</sup> It is only from this perspective of understanding of evil's

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<sup>21</sup> C. JOURNET, *The Meaning of Evil*, 60.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid* 73.

presence in nature, that we can overcome the temptation to conceive of two eternal principles as conflictingly steering the course of the universe (Platonic dualism).

According to evolutionists like Teilhard de Chardin, evolution of the universe does not occur devoid of extinction: new forms of higher life emerge to replace the old forms of life. He says that the new things, the good, the directly intended outcome of evolution, come about with the evil they inflict (destruction of the old forms), not intended directly. The evil here is an indirect and accidental result. If God by his providence - the principle that maintains the universe in existence and brings it to perfection - allows the destruction of the old forms of life for the higher forms of life, then God accidentally permits evil.<sup>23</sup> In this case, God is seen as related to natural or physical evil as far as its cause is concerned. These evolutionists are almost in the same line of thought with Thomas Aquinas.

The main trend of the argument from the above views is that God allows evil. The slight attestation is that he permits evil in nature to achieve higher perfections, a theory that is hard to explain. This "permission" remains a dilemma mostly at times of sufferings. When things like misfortune, sicknesses or suffering of any kind befall us we often ask the accusatory or desperate question: "So why, if there is a good God?" Such immediate questions obstruct us from looking at the human caused evil, moral evil, which is actually the most tragic evil in the world. Having seen God's relation to evil, I wish to embark on moral evil and its agent, the human person.

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

### C) Moral Evil.

This subtopic “Moral Evil” by itself presupposes a fact that there are other forms of evil. For example, metaphysical, physical or natural evil. It is beyond the scope of this research to discuss these other forms of evil. We deal exclusively here with moral evil. By virtue of his rational nature and free will, man is part of the cause of evil in the world. Man is held responsible for the cause of manifold sufferings rocking the world. Another dilemma here is that in the course of the battle against older forms (the already present sufferings) man often creates, almost automatically, new kinds of sufferings for himself, without intending it. There is thus an *ad infinitum* recurrence of evil that man cannot avoid.

In the moral government of God, the Divine operates, by providence, within history, effectively guiding the universe to his destined purpose, by suitable means. He especially directs members of the human race to their supreme end by proper human acts, according to Wuellner.<sup>24</sup> Any form of order requires some law, either natural, divine or moral.

Man by nature is endowed with freedom of choice. As such he is a morally responsible being. That is freedom of choice confers on man the responsibility to own his acts. For God to compromise the gift of freedom by imposing any deterministic law on man is tantamount to rendering that gift futile and ingenuine. Since man is free to choose, the possibility of evil as arising from some of his actions indicates his inevitable contribution to the corruption of nature.

According to Francis Petit, moral evil, as a wrongdoing, is the divergence between the will of a rational created being and the will of God. That is to say, it is a

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<sup>24</sup> B. WUELLNER, *A Christian Philosophy*, 233.

revolt against the total sovereignty of God. It is a chaos consciously and knowingly introduced into the harmony of nature.<sup>25</sup> In this light there is no person who is genuinely responsible and liable to God's vindication unless he has had opportunity to make choice between good and evil, between embracing and rejecting God.

Moral evil, according to Journet, as opposed to moral good, is never pure evil nor privation but a partial good which distinguishes evil, a deceptive good from the true good. It arises from inner desires of man that stifle from within thereby thwarting the creative process and causing man to deviate from the course of right reason.<sup>26</sup> In moral evil, man is the good that bears it insofar as man exists. Evil as moral works through the man whom it wounds, in the first place by perverting thoughts and depriving man's actions of their aptitudes - moral uprightness.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that evil in the domain of human will is that which deprives the human being of his ordered progress to his destiny. For him evil of ignorance is connected with the evil of guilt and of punishment. That is, an absence of knowledge which one ought to possess. If one is responsible for this privation, then it is a sin. If one is not aware of it so as to make it right, it becomes invincible ignorance that can be attributed to the evil of punishment. Aquinas terms this also as an evil of fault, when an agent intentionally neglects the rule of reason and the divine law and chooses an undue end<sup>27</sup>. He calls it *sin*, in short.

We may note that when Aquinas talks of evil of guilt and of punishment he means the privation in the intellectual creature of form, or habit or anything that does not necessitate good acts. It can be the result of fault in the rational creature: it

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<sup>25</sup> F. PEFFIT, *The Problem of Evil*, 86.

<sup>26</sup> C. JOURNET, *The Meaning of Evil*, 43.

<sup>27</sup> C. A., HART, *Thomistic Metaphysics: An Inquiry into the Act of Existing*, (Englewood: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959), 371.

is opposed to the will's constant tendency to embrace it; it also comprises certain sufferings because of some extrinsic principles.<sup>28</sup> Aquinas actually emphasizes the fact that when man commits moral evil, he acts irrationally or immorally. The question is how to explain the fact that there are some positive elements that accompany moral evil acts, so as to give suffering a positive meaning in the Christian domain of faith. This aspect will be seen in Chapter Three.

Bernard Lonergan observes that the human person is endowed with willingness and freedom and "... inasmuch as the course of action that men choose reflects either ignorance or their bad will or their ineffectual self-control, there results the social surd."<sup>29</sup> By *social surd* Lonergan mean anything irrational that is opposed to the proper order of nature, and in particular human order of life. In Lonergan's philosophy, the human free will is only upright and good as long as it conforms to intelligence (the right reason or rationality). He argues that defective free will always rationalizes wrong acts to be right ones. Thus for him moral evil, which he terms as "social surd," that first affects the agent of origin (the man who commits it) is any act of a rational being that lacks intelligibility of actual choices that are good. In other words, any act that is incompatible with the proper nature, inclination, of the free will to do good, is morally defective, is bad, and so sinful.

The fundamental allusion which results from the arguments of the above philosophers and theologians is that moral evil basically is due to deliberate human defective decision. It is also due to inclinations which automatically expressed themselves sinfully when actualized. Man, being free in front of his creator, chooses

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 372.

<sup>29</sup> B. J. F. LONERGAN, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophy Library, 1957), 689.

either to act according to the dictates of right reason and divine law thereby perpetuating the good, or act in contrast with the right reason and divine law and so causing moral decay and pervasion. Sin that is committed here is equated with moral evil. We can sin in the form of thought or in the form of an act. However, in any deliberate evil act, the evil thought supersedes. Man is here the agent of moral evil in the world. And he is held responsible for the biggest percentage of suffering in the world. This is because, as we have seen above, moral evil emanates from the human will's deliberate proceeding to act or choose in disregard of laws and course of right reason and the divine law.

It has been observed that moral evil is the major cause of a lot of sufferings in human history. It is the major problem facing humanity as it compromises the infinite goodness of God and his providence. It is the adversity of men against one another and against nature at large that constantly depletes the world of its originally willed state of harmony. Man here degrades himself and his environment by seeking pervasive satisfaction in the pursuit of selfish desires. It is clear that this harmony is also degraded by natural/physical evil, but this is to a lesser extent compared to moral evil.

As Christians, our questioning of evil and suffering does not remain at the realm of human intellectual capacity to offer explanation. Given the limitation of the human mind to comprehend nature fully, there is a need to venture into the realm of faith. This one heightens our quest to know what the Bible says about the problem of evil and suffering. We will confine ourselves to the New Testament.

# CHAPTER TWO

## EVIL IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the previous chapter we delved into the struggle of human wisdom to establish the origin and meaning of evil and suffering that is inherent in nature. Notwithstanding all the eloquence of human wisdom, all the efforts to explain satisfactorily the problem of evil and suffering met with frustration at the discovery that evil is a mystery in relation to the presence of a good God. That God cannot create anything bad and so cannot create or will evil, pronounces the horror of this mystery in the universe. As such, evil remains incomprehensible to human intellect, to a great extent.

Chapter Two is an attempt to expose the understanding of evil from the scriptural point of view. We confine ourselves to the NT.

### A) What is Evil according to the NT?

Unlike in the sphere of human wisdom where there is a lot of discourse on the definition of evil, the Bible offers very little as far as defining evil is concerned.

In the NT there are two Greek words used to denote evil: *kakos*, that is, bad, referring to the shortcoming or the inferiority of a particular thing. It also implies evil, destructive, damaging, unjust situations in life. The other word, *poneros*, that is, evil, referring to the ethically negative and religiously destructive character or thought of a person.<sup>30</sup> *Kakos* would, in this sense, be identified with evil as a privation, as we saw in chapter one. Since it is a shortcoming or an inferiority of a thing, it points to the lack of a good proper to any given thing.

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<sup>30</sup> E. ACHILLES, "Evil" *NIDNTT*, Vol 1, Ed. Colin Brown, 564.

*Poneros* on the other hand, in its understanding as the ethically negative and religiously destructive character or thought, would implicitly mean the moral evil due to human acts. Pilate's question: "What evil has he done?" reveals evil as a misfortune or as a sin done by someone. Paul talks of contrary ethical thoughts and actions as evil (Rom 7:19,21) He sees evil as the force prevailing over good. Basically, in these verses, Paul equates *poneros* with sin. In Jn 3:19-20, we find one of the classic descriptions of evil as *kakos*: it is the power that reigns destructively in the universe. While *light* refers to the truth, *darkness* implies perversity and abomination to the truth.<sup>31</sup>

The narrative in Lk 13:1-5 presents evil as God's righteous punishment to sinners, and that only conversion could protect a sinner from this punishment. In any case, it gives a negative understanding of evil as a chastisement God uses to bring about repentance and subsequent salvation. The immediate danger is: many people lose faith in front of evil and suffering and so if God were using them as means to convert sinners then God might not succeed in winning many sinners since evil and suffering scandalize minds that are not informed.

In the NT, evil, as a shortcoming or an inferiority of a thing, is seen as lack of perfection in nature (Rom 8:19-25). It also emerges as a perversion of a human act or thought, it is exposed as the contrary force in the universe that is opposed to God and evil has been understood as God's way of leading sinners to conversion. In all this conception we see evil expressed as having both a pragmatic, on the level of human act, and a qualitative, as imperfection of nature, sense. A particular thing or being is termed evil when it is corrupt and worthless, displeasing and ugly, painful

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<sup>31</sup> P.PERKINS, "The Gospel According to John" *NJBC*, 956 (61:3-62:44)

and injurious; when it does not measure up to its proper nature. But where is the origin of evil?

### **B) The Origin of Evil according to the NT.**

Even though the experience of evil and suffering often leads to profound crisis in man's relationship with God, there is no definite expression in the NT that evil is equal to God or that it is caused or willed by God. "No one experiencing temptation should say, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God is not subject to temptation to evil, and he himself tempts no one." (Jas 1:13). In this verse James shuns the fallacy of attributing the origin of evil to God.

In the NT, evil is not directly presented as a privation, a thing that only exists in relation to a good. This understanding as a privation is only indirectly inferable from the texts. The picture given of evil is concrete: it is presented as an independent entity though acting through some agents. The NT basically offers the human heart, the devil, and sin as the main origins of evil. Sin, which is considered in the Bible as the root of all evils, however, under critical analysis, cannot *be* without the agents committing it.

"From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile" (Mk 7:21-23). These are some of the main verses in Mark that attribute the origin of evil to the human heart. Inasmuch as evil deeds and vices proceed from the person, the person becomes evil<sup>32</sup>.(cf, Mt 12:35; 15:19-20). These texts, and many others, show how Jesus

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<sup>32</sup> J. HARRINGTON, "The Gospel According to Mark," *NJBC*. 612 (41:3-109).

exposes his knowledge of the human heart as the source of evil, in particular, the moral evil.

Hans Schwarz commenting on Lk 16:25, explains that "... the evil that arises out of humans themselves is not inconsistent with the simultaneous conviction that ... evil is the ultimate ground of the negative things that stand behind humanity."<sup>33</sup> Though man by his failures contributes to the perpetuation of the effects of evil, evil for him, Schwarz, is responsible for the misfortunes and sufferings that infringe on human life. He pictures evil as the godless situation within which people constantly find themselves and which entices them to commit vicious acts.

While the role of the devil is insignificant in the OT, it is rather conspicuous in the NT. The Pharisees and their contemporaries believed in the hierarchy of evil spirits headed by the devil. However, the scriptures grasp the difference between the devil and the profane notion of the evil spirits: the former is a personal force diametrically opposed to God, while the latter are enigmatic, unintelligible weird, usually destructive and impersonal powers in the universe. Analysis of Mt 12:24ff, affirms the orderly empire of the devil. Although it is full of strife, it is apparent it has a chief devil at its head called Beelzebul (cf. 2Cor 12:7; Rev 12:7-9). It is, nonetheless, important to note that amidst affirming the presence of these powerful diabolic forces in the universe, the NT definitely rejects the notion of dualism: the devil and evil spirits are principles hostile to God, but they are not equal to God<sup>34</sup> The fundamental concept about the devil and its evil spirits is the understanding of the calamitous consequence wrought by them in the universe (cf, Mt 4:1-11; Jn 8:44;

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<sup>33</sup> H. SCHWARZ, *Evil: A Historical and Theological Perspectives*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 75.

<sup>34</sup> M. SCHEMAUS, *Dogma 2 God and Creation* 221.

Eph 6:6-12). With dexterity, subtlety, deceit and gross force, the devil conspires to destroy Jesus and his mission. This is explicit in the scene of Jesus' temptations and in the instances where evil spirits turn the opponents of Jesus against him and his disciples.

In Jn 7:2: 8:48,52, we witness clearly that the devil has many assistants who commit his mission in the universe. They blindfold, harden hearts, lead astray and even confuse people thereby causing suffering and infidelity to God. Johannine tradition categorically presents Satan as the father of lies and claims that Satan is a murderer (cf, Jn 8:44). The devil's diabolic deceit reaches its peak in the event where he inspires those whom he has corrupted that for the sake of God and his revelation, they must kill Jesus. Here he masquerades as the guardian and defender of God's saving institutions,<sup>35</sup> (cf, Mt 12:22-23; Jn 11:45-53; Lk 11:14-23).

Sin as a source of evil, however, depends on the agent. It is a consequence of an agent's act or thought. In the NT it is shown that many people encounter suffering due to their sins, (Mk 7:15). There is a subtle difference between sin as the origin of evil and the human heart as the base of all human immorality. The human heart conceives of the vices before they are actualized into sin. In that case, sin in itself is only a source of evil and suffering in so far as one suffers its consequences. In Jn 5:14, Jesus interprets suffering as a consequence of sin. The sinfulness of Jerusalem causes Jesus a lot of concern (Lk, 19:41-45).

Amidst all the above NT texts on the origin of evil, it is the Book of Revelation that forcefully and categorically reveals the origin of evil as prior to human rebellion: that the fall of man presupposes the existence of evil in nature. Evil

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 226.

took root earlier on in the revolt of the great band of angels<sup>36</sup>, (Rev 12:7-9). In the ensuing chapters of the Book of Revelation, we witness how the devil with the help of his evil spirits in command, become the cause of suffering, sin and constant moral decay in the universe which it takes as its abode. He has wrought miseries, injustices, and scourges that work against the divine plan.

The mystery of freedom proper to the wicked angels was given by God. To this extent, the mystery of evil remains only to be taken in light of faith. (1Pet, 1:19). It is because it confounds the human mind to exonerate God from the blame of being the cause of evil since he endowed angels with freedom and will, the faculties that enabled them to decide against him.

We see in the NT how evil features in both forms, as moral and as physical. Though evil has entered the world thereby infringing the plan of the Kingdom of God, the world is not divided into two equal principles, good and evil. The wicked are not completely wicked but preserve their good. Though sin is a source of evil, neither moral evil nor physical evil is a necessary punishment of a personal sin (Jn 9:2-3). While Revelation shows the origin of evil as external to man, man must still bear the responsibility of his actions since in his freedom and will he yields to the selfish plan of the devil in his heart. O.A. Piper says: "... evil – the operation of factors by which the teleology and harmony of this world is disturbed - would never have changed from potentiality to actuality except for man's sin."<sup>37</sup> This is fundamentally about the moral evil, which is also the greatest cause of suffering in the universe. Nowhere does the NT teach that good can be realized from evil. Nonetheless, from the analysis of 1Pt 5:10 and 2Cor 4:17-18, we learn that it is in

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<sup>36</sup> F.PETIT, *The Problem of Evil*, 62.

<sup>37</sup> O.A. PIPER, "Suffering and Evil," *IDB*, Vol 4 451.

spite of evil that goodness asserts itself. As such, evil is evidently inferior to good and evil is transitory.

Though the NT confirms and affirms the immanence of evil in the universe and its adverse diabolic effects on nature, it does not efface the cloud of mystery that surrounds the origin of evil. The NT does not teach us that evil can be alleviated in this age. It is abiding to the end of the ages. It thus leaves humanity with the task of adopting a spirituality that would enable it to counter the effect of evil and suffering so as not to lose its faith in God. This spirituality is of particular necessity to Christians. In the following chapter will discuss the Christian spirituality of suffering. The cross assumes a new meaning. Referring to the sufferings encountered due to our allegiance to God, the cross becomes a system of life that leads to God.

# CHAPTER THREE

## THE CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY OF SUFFERING

### A) Human Predicament of Suffering

The phenomenon of human existence shows that each one of us lives in his or her own world. It is a world marked chiefly with self-concept, where we see things in relation to our selves. It is a subjective world needing to grow to authenticity. It is a world an individual cannot grasp fully and so it remains a mystery. It is a world full of falsity, flaws, and imperfections that constantly pose despair, worries, feelings of guilt and inferiority. In any case, due to this, we end up having a distorted image of reality even to the point of denying abiding realities in nature such as suffering and death.

While Charles Journet comments that, "In so far as man is a person his hopes would be to elude suffering and death..."<sup>38</sup> Bernard Wuellner says:

Human preoccupation with the woes of life betrays some people into forgetting the other side of the picture, the...truths about God's efforts to give temporal happiness to men and God's far seeing concern to alleviate suffering. Things like sleep, rest, release of emotional tension through tears, the comic elements in life, the catharsis of tragedy in the theatre, beautiful world of music, dancing, fiction and sports, desires to care for others, gifts of sympathy, power to discover drugs and treatment ... are all in the domain of God's caring plan.<sup>39</sup>

The riddle here is that confronted with suffering, man only occupies his life's outlook with a portion of the entire order of nature. He only refers to a segment of the total history of time and eternity. Man fails to appropriate the good inherent in

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<sup>38</sup> C. JOURNET, *The Meaning of Evil*, 54

<sup>39</sup> B. WUELLNER, *A Christian Philosophy*, (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1957), 235.

the present misfortunes of life. So by the perversity of the will man rejects the proper nature of life.

The tragedies of the world that have left humanity appalled, such as the catastrophe of the world wars, the holocaust in Germany, the Rwandan genocide, ethnic cleansing in Bosnia, and recently the *tsunami* in the Asian world, continue to prompt a struggle to understand suffering. Human beings, are surely horrified and appalled by the sufferings of the innocent people. The question: "Why suffering in a world that looks good?" is hard to forge an ultimate explanation for. It is in this regard, as well, that suffering and evil constitute a concrete problem and mystery

The paradox that suffering, by divine permission, forms an inevitable normal way to glory, emphasises the difficulty in embracing it as a mystery. The suffering descending on the innocent can pose a stumbling-block thereby promoting the irreligious with a base for believing that life is nothing but a game where chance holds sway. It can also occasion superficial minds with the impression that the universe is in constant unavoidable chaos, that it is senseless and irrational.<sup>40</sup> For instance, Peter cannot comprehend when Jesus talks of his cross, (Lk 18:34).

The problem of suffering has lured many people, especially philosophers, to make resolute full sceptical deliberations about God's existence and his goodness: this scepticism has always contributed to the sustenance of the spirit of atheism in the world. Many of these philosophers would hold that the limited amount of order and prevailing suffering in the world may mean that God is finite in respect to the attributes of God as good, all-powerful, all-knowing; that God is not concerned with the human situation.

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<sup>40</sup> F. PETIT, *The Problem of Evil*,98.

George Kosicki, in his part, condemns the psychology of self-fulfilment in explaining away the reality of suffering. Psychologists like Maslow, Rogers, among others, talk of suffering simply as a mere manifestation of lack of self-realization. They image suffering as a personal fault and a bad thing to be fought.<sup>41</sup> This view makes it impossible to see why the innocent, should suffer. Human growth or actualization, in itself, entails suffering. So it becomes absurd to exalt self-realization as a life free from suffering. This psychological trend of thought is also assumed by the academicians who affirm that the higher and the wider one attains formal and intellectual knowledge the lesser the suffering. In practice, this is only theoretical since to establish the rapport between suffering as a reality and accumulated knowledge is impossible. Intellectual knowledge can only aid us in alleviating the effects of suffering but not effacing suffering in itself. Otherwise, it is a mere illusion.

A distorted view of suffering is also contributed by some Christians. They have a too exalted image of God. They have an image that God wills everything in nature; that God is so good that he cannot allow evil and suffering. They give a mechanistic image of God: God who gives everything he is asked. If God is really God, the Sovereign and only Absolute, then he cannot simply be a projection of our wishes. He too far exceeds our ideas and expectations. He is only God when he cannot be fitted into any conventional pattern by our human mind.<sup>42</sup> It is by acting not in a way we would like that God reveals his divinity to humanity. This distorted image of God which Christians have tends to show God as willing or causing suffering. If all

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<sup>41</sup> G. W. KOSICKI, *The Good News of Suffering. Mercy and Salvation for all*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1981), 13

<sup>42</sup> FR. G. LENZEN CP, "Seminar: *The Passionist Desert*," Nairobi, 2002.

that happens is willed by God, then human freedom, will and dignity is compromised, and so man can do nothing about suffering. Again the fact of suffering due to moral evil ceases to exist! The charismatic healing propaganda is renowned for the propagation of this view. It stresses that charismatic prayers alleviate suffering. This is just a fleeting emotional relief, that only temporarily provokes people to evade facing suffering squarely as a reality in life. In fact, such fundamental doctrines have plunged many into depression and loss of faith upon realizing their emptiness.

Suffering, as the disruption of inner human harmony caused by physical, mental, spiritual and emotional forces, experienced as isolating and threatening our very existence, is made more pronounced by human attempt to make flight from it. In flight man craves for a stature and destiny that is impossible to attain on earth. As the presence of moral or physical pain and deprivation encountered by a group or by an individual, knowingly or unknowingly, suffering calls for an authentic attitude and freedom of self-acceptance to embrace it.<sup>43</sup> It is a human legacy that abides in the universe. We cannot avoid experiencing it.

Even though the mystery of evil and suffering assails the heart of man immediately and scandalizes man's faith in God, it belongs to the general human condition. It should thus be embraced as a human cross. In the OT suffering is regarded with passivity and punishment conceived as retribution according to which affliction was part of God's moral government, by which he punished sinners (cf, Nm 12:1-5; 2Chr 26:16-21). However, the OT emphasizes the inevitability of

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<sup>43</sup> P. KANYANDA(G), "The Cross and Suffering in the Bible and the African Experience," *The Bible in African Christianity: Essays in Biblical Theology*, eds. H W Kinoti, J M Waliggo, (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1997), 123.

suffering and how the faithful man is to integrate it into his world of inner conviction and cope with it. Suffering is perceived as the lot of all indifferently, but the just, the faithful, would overcome it. That is, to the faithful, suffering was God's way of educating his people.<sup>44</sup>(cf. Is 42:1-4; Ws 3:5). This is the message of hope that was always emphasized by the prophets in times of difficulties and oppression, particularly in the desert and times of exile.

In the NT, Jesus launches the Good News of the cross as the only way to God. Consequently, the inevitability of the cross as a way to God calls for the understanding of the new meaning of the cross. I will take few quotations from the gospels that give new meaning of the cross.

### **B) The Cross: Its New Exalted Meaning.**

In his homily on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, Fr. Edmondo Zagano, gave this historical exposition of the use and meaning of the cross among the cultures alien to Christianity, in particular, the Romans. That "cross" as a piece of timber, was used proverbially to signify agony, suffering and curse. As a metaphor of ruin and full loss, it was a total folly to be hanged on the cross. It was used to crucify those who met with capital verdict. It was preserved for the rebellious slaves, political rebel, and other criminals who were deemed as pernicious social deviants.<sup>45</sup> It was, in short, used as a punishment.<sup>46</sup> This ancient understanding of the cross, which was alive even at the time of Jesus, had a very

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<sup>44</sup> J. BLINKINSOPP, "We rejoice in our Sufferings," *The Way*, vol 7, No 1 (London: The Way, 1967), 36.

<sup>45</sup> FR, E. ZAGANO, *Homily: Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross*, (Nairobi: St. Paul Retreat Chapel, 2004)

<sup>46</sup> H. CHIRAT, "Cross" *NCE*, vol 4, 473.

negative connotation. To die on the cross was total alienation from the entire community. The bodies of the victims were left to rot on the crosses or be eaten by wild animals. Only bodies of victims from noble families could be removed for burial.

It is probable that it might have been due to the scandalous meaning of the cross that made the disciples of Jesus to fail in faith upon his crucifixion. With this abominable meaning of the cross, it would be very hard for the people including his disciples, to grasp the value revolution in the meaning of the cross as wrought by Christ's crucifixion. The new exalted meaning of the cross, that would accord it a theological as well as a spiritual meaning, would only infiltrate the understanding of the disciples after the post-resurrection appearances. In many instances, Jesus talks of the new meaning of the cross as no longer a wood of agony, death, suffering, curse, and abomination.

In one of the classic verses, Jesus says of the cross, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me, "else, "...whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me." (Mt 10:38;16:24; Lk 14:27). Here Jesus does not allude to his crucifixion but to the hardships that those who opt for him are inevitably bound to encounter. As Barbara Baisley observes: "The cross demonstrates in a graphic term the fact that God is in all creation, to be found in failure, cruelty and decay as well as beauty and growth..."<sup>47</sup> The hearing and doing of Jesus' call to salvation prompts difficulties and sufferings. It is not the pious invocation of Christ as Lord and receiving of the mission that guarantees true discipleship. The fundamental call is that of a disciple

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<sup>47</sup> B. BAISLEY, *No Easy Answers An Exploration of Suffering* (London: Epworth Press, 2000), 48

in integrity with the will of the Father ( Mt 7:21). It is a way of self-denial, assuming the will of the Father responsibly. It presupposes sacrifice.

In Mt 10:38-39, we discern that disciples must be ready to face suffering even to the point of death, in allegiance to their master. Here the cross is depicted as a violent rejection and death by persecution. The disciples are not to be irresolute in faith and mission, thereby shrinking and recanting in front of trials.<sup>48</sup> The total denial of oneself because of Christ, makes suffering and death necessary components of discipleship. This condition of discipleship is a breaking of every link which ties a person to his self. All these show that cross is no longer a timber but the concrete living faith in Christ. It is the way to attain the purpose and meaning of suffering as Christians.

The above texts offers us a solid biblical basis for the profound theological and spiritual meaning to the mystery of the cross as pointing at all the things that make us lose the sight of God.

With the new meaning of the cross, Jesus makes first conscious and then salvific the suffering that is inherent in our evil alienated condition of life. The suffering of Jesus is a place of self-discovery, a necessary correlation of his sinlessness in a sinful world. Since he embraces willingly this situation, we do not imitate him but share in his atoning suffering. He is our identity.<sup>49</sup> We can construe here that Jesus' agony did not efface suffering from the earth but offered men a freedom to live an authentic life in front of suffering and evil.

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<sup>48</sup> W. D. DAVIS, DALE C. ALLISON, "A Critical and exegetical commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Mathew" *The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, Vol II*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 224-225.

<sup>49</sup> S. MOORE. *The Crucified Jesus is No Stranger*. (New York: The Seabury Press, 1981), 23.

Jesus embraced both the tormenting limitations of a spirit in the flesh and the contradictions of a God incarnate in a hostile, sinful world. He humbly put up with the machinations of the Scribes, the oppositions of the Pharisees, and the lack of understanding among his own people and disciples. In love he did it and so he transformed the cross from a symbol of condemnation into a sacrament of liberation.<sup>50</sup> In the world today many people, Christians alike, find themselves victims of repressive systems and mechanisms: many people find themselves violated, harassed, raped, and even slaughtered and assassinated. Things like abortion, euthanasia in the name of mercy killing, rock the society today. Innocently people are stripped naked just as Jesus was stripped naked. These pains and travail depict the concrete crosses of the Christian era. They are situations Christ calls us to bear objectively since they mark the way to the new life.

If all the evil, suffering, vices and situations that separate us from God are components of this world, then the world becomes *the cross* for Christians. That is, it is in the world, with all its frustrations and allurements, that a Christian must realize his faith and love. The teaching of beatitudes affirms that suffering does not prevent happiness nor obstruct us from the sight of God. Paradoxically it contributes to happiness and provokes our ascent to God.

From these discussions the cross, as such, emerges with two distinct meanings: first, it is the hostile situation of the world coupled with vices like racism, defilements, rejections, killings, political upheavals. Secondly, cross implies the pain we encounter due to our allegiance to God, our acceptance to follow in the footsteps of Christ. It is a way of self-denial for a higher good, the wholehearted submission

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<sup>50</sup> L. BOFF, *The Way of the Cross, Way of Justice*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1980), 14.

of oneself to the will of God. It is the life-time project that marks the pilgrimage of faith on earth, the unfailing hope for eternal salvation. The latter meaning is the one emphasized by Jesus as the only way to God and so it is the one that underscores the new meaning of the cross as taught by Jesus.

### **C) Suffering: The Way to New Life.**

“Beloved, do not be surprised that a trial by fire is occurring among you, as if something strange were happening to you. But rejoice to the extent that you share the sufferings of Christ, so that when his glory is revealed you may also rejoice exultantly.”(1Pt 4:12-13). These verses purport to explain the fact that as Christians we participate in bearing the tribulations that marked the life of Christ and his apostolate. J.L. McKenzie says that suffering belongs to the general human condition. Jesus did nothing which distinguished his own condition from that of humanity. He submitted to suffering. His passion, much like those of his contemporaries, was a commonplace in life.<sup>51</sup> Our participation in his passion is our way of the cross.

Jesus does not inaugurate the cult of pain and suffering for its own sake! He shows his disciples that it is through suffering that we attain the higher divine life. God could use other means apart from suffering but that he chose suffering as a way, there is no option. In any case there is no salvation from suffering, but there is salvation in suffering.

Jesus' acceptance of suffering to the point of death on a cross indicates precisely that suffering, for Christians, is the seed from which we receive life and

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<sup>51</sup> J.L. MCKENZIE, “The Son of Man must Suffer” *The Way*, vol.7, No 1, 40.

power to share tribulations with others. That is, in this sense, suffering is a way of life, a way of wisdom inspiring reflective action aimed at alleviating unnecessary travails and pains of life. However, a Christian's suffering will only ennoble him or raise his dignity if it is experienced as due to a struggle to fight against the crosses laid upon the lacerated shoulders of the downtrodden, humiliated brothers and sisters. In the teaching of Jesus, those who bear these crosses, shattering as they may be, are people of dignity because it is the result of a commitment to the gospel values of love, hope, perseverance.<sup>52</sup>

When Christians fail due to egotism prompted by fear of suffering and persecution to take cognizance of the unnecessary crosses and, they make Christianity an instrument of oppression. They distort the true image of Christianity which should be the vehicle of socialization, by which messages about self-worth, sin and redemption are handed down. Nonetheless, Christians would only achieve the task of living their faith and of bearing the dehumanizing situations of their brothers and sisters if they develop an objective spirituality of suffering founded on the paradigmatic passion of Christ.

Ps 139 which reflects God's total knowledge of humanity and its history, attests to the truth that God is ever by our side, in all situations. Like Jonah in the whale, Daniel in the den of lions, Elijah escaping the sword of Jezebel, sailors in the sea without compass, tossed by storm, we are also scared, bewildered and confused when confronted with suffering. Just as those prophets faced persecution due to their mission, Christians should also be prepared to face dangers when they make public

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<sup>52</sup> L. BOFF, *The Way of the Cross. Way of Justice*, 17.

profession of their faith. Here suffering is an unavoidable outcome of the missionary aspect of the vocation of the Christians, the call to salvation,(Mk 13:12-13).

The gospels do not give us an image of an omnipotent God who can do anything he wills. Even Jesus whose incarnation is perceived as an illumination into the world is under the grip of evil forces. Though he is limited in his human nature, he is however the source of light that never goes out. Christians, taking the place Christ on earth, should be unquenchable light to the world amidst the baffling force of evil and suffering,<sup>33</sup> (cf, Rom 8:38-39). Jesus, in the gospels, exalts his disciples as the light and salt of the world. This mission is only possible despite suffering when Christians anchor themselves on Christ. It is therefore explicit here that trusting in God and fulfilling his will does not guarantee exemption from facing the hardships of life: on the contrary it puts one squarely in the forefront to face the hostilities of the world.

Christians should not conceive of suffering as a retribution. As rational and faithful beings, the primary doctrine is that we are subjected to a test, a test that has a time-limit (1Pt 5:10). The depth and amplitude of our human intelligence was such as to enable us to take in at a glance the question of our acceptance or rejection of grace that raises us up to a new level to participate in the divine order of life. It is only under the aid of this divine grace that Christians will be able to appropriate the realization that though Jesus' power was limited, it prevailed through weakness, not in omnipotent strength, that he had power that came from refusing to retaliate against the crucifiers.

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<sup>33</sup> P. VARDY, *The Puzzle of Evil*, 117.

Though Jesus overcame all his enemies at a tremendous price, he nevertheless proceeded to instruct his disciples to rely on the hospitality of people. He called the disciples to turn the other cheek, to travel an extra mile, to leave the dead to bury themselves, to abandon investing in material things. In all this the central appeal and challenge Jesus makes to Christians is that faith should be in God alone and that this faith in God is no immunity to harm. To follow Christ, in this manner, is to make a resolute and decisive step to face evil and suffering without evasion.

At Gethsemane Jesus manifests his sorrow at, aversion to and fear of the pending persecution, (Lk 22:42,44), but he does not deny his pain. He accepts it and offers it for the redemption of the world. There is no human suffering which he had not known and assumed as his own by his personal encounter. It is this encounter that has made Jesus the head of the restored human race.<sup>54</sup> O. A. Piper while emphasizing the atoning effects of Jesus' passion observed that the passion rested upon Jesus' willingness as the sinless one to give his life for sinners in perfect obedience to God' judgement. He did not act under compulsion but rather under the spontaneity of love. Christians have to express the same spirituality of suffering, to bring to focus the suffering of the universe and to purge faith from the dross of self-love and of attachment to the passing whims of the world.<sup>55</sup> This is the message Paul gives in Rom 8:19-22 and in 1Tm 1:8,12. Christ's mission to save the world, which is perpetuated by his disciples, runs counter to the aspirations of the world and its powers. This suffering for Christians is inescapable,(Jn 15:18;1Cor 2:8).

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<sup>54</sup> F. PEYI, *The Problem of Evil*, 95.

<sup>55</sup> O. A. PIPER, "Suffering and Evil" *IDB* Vol 4, 452.

The Stoics were interested in the human capacity to withstand suffering physically and mentally. This view is somehow contrasting with that of the NT. In the NT the emphasis is on the spiritual aspect. Satan is presented as only able to attack the flesh, that which ties us to this material world. He cannot overcome the spirit unless allowed. It means Christians should rise above the Stoics' limited and materialistic mentality if they are to bear suffering with patience and without fear and anxiety so as not to rebel (cf. Mt 6:25-33; Rom 5:3-4; 1 Pt 3:14f). Boesak quotes Mongosutu Buthelezi on redemptive suffering as "... suffering after the model of Christ to save others. This suffering is not an end in itself but is endured in the course of struggle to realize well-being of others...this is the suffering the followers of Christ must bear."<sup>56</sup> In other words, just as Christ came to save the whole world, every Christian lives his or her faith not only for his or her own salvation alone, but also for others.

Suffering, as we have seen above, is not caused by God and it is an inhuman experience that cannot be justified without taking into account its kind and cause. Unnecessary suffering must be fought against by all means. Any theology or philosophy or spirituality or devotion that exalts suffering in itself as redemptive must be rejected. It is a way to salvation only inasmuch as it is a necessary cross on our way to God. It is the path to salvation but not salvation itself.

Since suffering forms the journey, it become a paradox of experience. It poses a journey and a story of contrast. Man must let go the superficial beliefs and cling to the truths of the heart. Man must let go the rote religious falsities about reality and assume true spirituality. To experience a real life situation and accept it is

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<sup>56</sup> A. BOESAK, *Farewell to Innocence*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1977), 33.

to accept life as encompassing suffering and comforts. There is no shortcut to enjoying life without appropriating its painful drawbacks. For inner peace to thrive one must count gains in life at the expense of losses. This might be very painful as Jesus taught: it calls for personal dedication, commitment and mostly, sacrifice.

Any efforts to evade our human situation as limited in a hostile world can only deplete us of energy and make us become subject to depression and loss of faith and even atheism. Just as Christ confronted suffering without evasion, so do the Christians. It is the wisdom of the cross. (1Cor. 1:23-24)

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

In our Christian perspective, Karekin II may offer us a succinct summary that crowns the whole theme of this essay, *The Paradox of Evil and Suffering: Life in Christ through suffering and endurance*. He says that:

... life is impregnated by such qualities - faith, hope, love, sacrifice, service, prayer, communion - which transcend time and space. They are expressed through history, but are not bound by it. They constitute a sacred legacy which is a constant source of inspiration and motivation for all ages and in all times...they are the concrete manifestation of God's spirit in Christ and through him in the lives of men and women, congregations and nations here and there, now and then... their historical reminiscence today is not sheer knowledge, memory, souvenir, but communion, inner appropriation and actualization in the days and places of our lives here and now.<sup>57</sup>

The problem of evil and suffering practically remains a mystery that will always astound inert minds and suffocate retarded faiths that are not yet actualized to embrace it as an invincible human experience on earth. Man by virtue of intellect and will is capable of developing overwhelming objective approaches to counter the adverse effects of evil and suffering in the world. We find that to make a flight or to evade suffering only but doubles its sting on life since suffering is a mystery inherent in the universe. It is part and parcel of life. As such, man is actually challenged to discard the delusion that suffering can be effaced from the world. With this view, suffering will not take captive our human faculties and induce them with confusion and unnecessary perplexity.

To deny the presence of God because of evil and suffering does not solve the problem. Instead, it engenders its own horror and dread. That God permits evil in a good world only reveals his surpassing exclusive sovereignty and incomprehensible

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<sup>57</sup> KAREKIN II, "Life in Christ through Suffering and Endurance" *Jesus Christ the life of the world. An Orthodox contribution to the Vancouver Theme* (Geneva: 1882), 21.

government to human intellect. God may allow some amount of suffering to preserve us from other evils and to keep certain virtues. From the pains and troubles of our life the opportunities to learn and develop patience, perseverance and courage and hope may spring up.

The direct encounter of evil and suffering is a condition for learning important lessons and attaining higher, less immediate and spiritual goods. That is, from suffering as our own unique personal journey and history, we become detached from the unsatisfying pleasures of this world, (1Jn 2:15,17). This shows that the complexity, obscurity and inexplicability of suffering and evil is not a mystery to God who calls us to this higher good. Evil and suffering may be a way of forming human free will to bring about the possibility of human growth. When human freedom goes, the human capacity to be perfect is compromised. Thus, man will remain totally subject to deterministic laws and so would not have any moral responsibility for his acts.

Christ did not come to do away with human history. He came to present to it an order. Consequently, through his passion and death he summons us to face suffering rather than try to wear mask that only harbour our resentments and helplessness. The paradox is: suffering is not diminished in itself but its pangs and dreadful effects are diminished by our growing positive understanding and acceptance of it as part and parcel of life.

The implicit message in Chapter Two is that the Bible should not be used to offer ready-made answers to our problem of evil and suffering. Since the Bible was authored in a context distinct and detached from ours, its message about evil and suffering calls for contextualization. Since it is inspired we need faith to understand

it. In this regard, the problem of evil and suffering is not solved by theories or explanations of theodicies. However, it is fulfilling to see evil and suffering as part of the divine government to bring the world to perfection. The Bible only offers us a spirituality of how to cope with evil and suffering, and above all to see the meaning and purpose in them.

As we have seen above, evil and suffering prompt alienation, “This alienation, characterised by emptiness, restlessness, and lack of sense of belonging, calls for atonement. That is, being made at one again with oneself, with the neighbour, with the creation, and with God.”<sup>58</sup> To this effect, Christians ought to learn that suffering reveals our natural desire for full happiness that cannot be attained on earth. Suffering reminds us that we are not as wonderful as we suspected, but that we are needier than we realize. It forms the Calvary road to Golgotha, endured by Jesus Christ. The fact is that Jesus’ crucifixion does not answer the question why suffering exists. It challenges us to relate our sufferings to God. This is the true ordained path for Christians to reach God. Sufferings and pains become mysterious inner sources of energy for our faith, love and our hope to mature.

We must allow growth to occur and to trust that a God who is good will, in the end, triumph over evil and suffering and bring order in the world. That the incarnated and crucified God, that is Christ, whose love for humanity abounds, leads men and women in his footsteps to Calvary and beyond. This is a tremendous encounter that only faith, love and hope can embrace.

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<sup>58</sup> FR. J. MTHENGI, *Retreat: Our Spirituality*, (Karungu: 2002)

In his suffering, a Christian never ceases to live in hope, not only because evils and sufferings are transient and so short lived, but also because whatever he or she may lose in this earthly life is nothing compared to life to come (cf, Rom 5:4-5; 1Pt 1:6; Mt 16:26). In Mt 6:32; Lk 12:30, Christians are exhorted to trust in God, notwithstanding the fact that evils and sufferings are experienced with deep intensity under the New Covenant in Christ. With a sense of great compassion for the sufferings of others, Christians need to take these calamities as a divine indication that they are to grow in a helpful love (cf, Lk 10:29-37; 1Pt 4:7-11). This is the message stressed by the Vatican Council II fathers when they hold that the attention of Christians should not be on the meaninglessness of human suffering. But suffering, they emphasised, should be viewed in relation to Christ's offering for the salvation of humanity. That with this view Christians will be able to involve in works of alleviating unnecessary sufferings in the world.<sup>59</sup>

The virtues of love and hope and faith remain crucial in encountering evil and suffering. In other words, without these virtues in our bid to face and endure suffering, we are bound to waver on our pilgrimage to God. *Aluta continua*.

## ABBREVIATIONS

CCC	—	The Catechism of the Catholic Church.
Cf	—	Confer.
2Chr	—	2Chronicles.
2Cor	—	2Corinthians.
Eph	—	Ephesians.
IDB	—	The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible.
Is	—	Isaiah.
Jas	—	James
1Jn	—	1John.
Jn	—	John.

<sup>59</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, Nos 21, 22.

Lk		Luke.
Mk	.	Mark.
Mt		Mathew.
NCE		New Catholic Encyclopedia.
NIDNTT		The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology.
NJBC	—	The New Jerome Biblical Commentary.
Nm	—	Numbers.
NT		New Testament.
OT		Old Testament.
Ps	.	Psalm.
1Pt	—	1Peter.
Rev	—	Revelation.
Rom	—	Romans
1Tm	—	1Timothy
Wis	..	Wisdom.

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