

TANGAZA COLLEGE

THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

**THE SICK AND THEIR EXPERIENCE OF GOD, BASED
IN THE SLUM OF KIBERA.**

BY

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STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the material used here in has not been submitted for academic credit to any other institution.

All Sources have been cited in full.

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

Signed

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Introduction

“The sick are the poorest people among the poor.” This is what I have seen in the "slum" of Kibera. I started to do my apostolate in Kibera in September of 2000. At the beginning, I began by accompanying one of my Religious Brothers in visiting the sick. I felt "lost" because of the language. I felt a great challenge facing me because I saw many sick people and I could not say anything to them neither I could understand them. When I was able to express myself in Kiswahili, I faced yet another challenge: How do I express to these sick people that God is a Father to them? Many of them had been suffering for a long time; and it was not easy for me to tell them “God loves you”. Sometimes I saw them suffering very much and I could say nothing to help them. I felt that my prayer at those times was dry. As I was getting along, I started to discover something: I found many sick who really trusted in God. They started to talk about God in the midst of their suffering. I said to myself: “These people, in spite of their suffering, can experience God.” But one day, I asked myself a question. “Is it in spite of or because of their suffering that sick people experience God? This question moved me to want to become closer to the sick in order to find an answer. I have discovered

that many sick people experience God simply and clearly because of their suffering. They undergo a process of purification through questions and feelings that they ask themselves about their situation. They find that they have a need to depend upon someone outside of themselves to endure their suffering.

The sick have taught me in my life to believe in God in a stronger way. They helped me to talk about God in the midst of suffering. Now I am able to remind the sick that God loves them and that He is accompanying them in their struggles. This experience which I have had with the sick is the motivation for this written Essay. Here I want to present my experience of the suffering of these sick and their experience of the presence of God in their lives.

In the First Chapter, I present some of the history of Kibera and the situation in which the sick people live as well as my own lived experience with some of them. In this Chapter I conclude that poverty has a lot to do with the illnesses of the people.

In the Second Chapter I reflect upon what the Scriptures and some scholars say about the sick and their suffering as well as the way in which they experience God in their lives. God is very much present in them and to them. In Jesus' suffering they find meaning for their own suffering.

In the Third Chapter I present the challenge for us all in living with and ministering to these suffering people. We Christians are called to be Good Samaritans. We cannot be indifferent in confronting this suffering; and we must ask ourselves how it is that we can respond to this reality.

CHAPTER 1 THE KIBERA SLUM AND ITS SITUATION.

The population of the Capital city of Nairobi has continue to grow rapidly, particularly since Kenya became independent in 1963. It has increased from 350, 000 at the time of independence to 1.35 million in 1989.¹ In 1996 we were told that the population of Nairobi was of 3 million persons.² "75% of Nairobi's three million inhabitants live in the low-income areas of the cities; and more than 40% of these live below the official poverty line."³ An increasing number of the city's residents live in "informal settlements" or what we called "slums." Kibera is one of the 8 administrative divisions within Nairobi Division. The name Kibera means "a forest to Nubians" because it was originally used as a settlement for Nubian soldiers who were part of the Kings' African Rifles. Kibera was established during the 1940s⁴ and has since then become a multi-tribal settlement.

1.1 The Location, Size and Population of Kibera.

Kibera settlement lies in the southwest of the city of Nairobi. It is demarcated by Jamhuri Park and the middle class housing area of Langata; by Golf Course and Woodley; and lies about 7 Kilometers from the City Center.⁵ "The size of Kibera is approximately 50 sq. kms."⁶

¹ Cf. MATRIX DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS., Nairobi's Informal Settlements (Agency For International Development), Nairobi: 1993, I.

² Cf. A. SHORTER, *Secularism In Africa (A Case Study Of Nairobi City)*, Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1997, 59.

³ A. SHORTER, *Secularism In*, 59.

⁴ Cf. MATRIX DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS, *Nairobi's Informal*, 15.

⁵ Cf. A. MUIGAI, *Kibera Slum Settlement (State of Water and Sanitation)*, Nairobi: 1994, 5.

⁶ H. O. OKETCHI, *The Kibera Juhudi Business Credit Micro Scheme (A Profile of Proprietors and Assisted Enterprises)*, Nairobi: K-REP (Kenya Rural Enterprise Program), 1991, 3.

"Kibera is the largest "slum" in Nairobi, with a population estimate ranging from 250, 000 (local leaders' estimate) to 700, 000 people."⁷ Kibera is composed of 14 neighborhoods. Four of these neighborhoods are formal estates namely Olympic, Karanja, Fort Jesus and Ayany. The remaining 10 neighborhoods are considered "slum" areas.⁸

1.2 Historical Background of Kibera.

From the general background of the Nairobi's slums, it is known that these informal settlements in Kibera were constructed soon after the end of the Second World War by the Nubians, who participated in that war and who were unable to return to their home in Southern Sudan.⁹ The area which is today Kibera was originally a rifle range for the Nubians. Here soldiers practiced shooting and were also taught tactics to be used during the War.

In 1952 during the struggle for independence, people from other ethnic groupings started moving into Kibera as well.¹⁰ Many people who provided manual work within the City but could not afford the more costly residential housing moved into Kibera and constructed wood and mud structures for their homes. As the number of people increased in Nairobi the informal settlement of Kibera continued to grow.

⁷ J. PARKER, *Kibera's Small Enterprise Sector (Baseline Survey Report Dodndo)*, Nairobi: 1991, 3.

⁸ *The ten-slum neighborhoods are Kianda, Gatwikara, Makena, Kambi Muru, Kisumu Ndogo, Lindi, Mashimoni oweto of Line Saba and Shilanga.*

⁹ Cf. COMMUNITY STUDY, *General Background of Kibera Division (Government Profiles)*, Kibera: p. V

¹⁰ Cf. COMMUNITY STUDY, *General Background*, VI.

1.3 Social and Economic Conditions in Kibera.

As has been demonstrated above, Kibera is the largest "slum settlement" in Nairobi City, the majority of whose residents are poor. "A housing survey of Kibera families classified them into three distinct groups based on income-earning activities. One group is comprised by people who are employed within or outside Kibera. The second group consists of people who are self-employed, again within or outside of the slum."¹¹ The third group consists of all those who do not have jobs.

1.3.1 Lack of Employment.

Unemployment is one of the major problems faced by the people of Kibera. On the one hand, we can say that this situation is due to the fact that most of the people are illiterate and have no adequate qualifications to enable them to get well-paid jobs.¹² On the other hand, there is a major factor which is beyond their control: In Nairobi, there are not enough factories or other sources employment.

According to a study in Line Saba, "10% of adult men and 23% of adult women are unemployed. In addition 33% of the men work as unskilled laborers while 43% of the women spend their time in housework. Taking into account those who are working, 9% of all adults work in the small enterprise sector of Kibera."¹³

The Kenya Manpower Survey of 1989 analyses earnings by occupation groupings. This survey demonstrates that the largest number of the workers earn wages

¹¹ H. O. OKETCH, *The Kibera Juhudi*, 4.

¹² Cf. COMMUNITY STUDY, *General Background*, X.

¹³ J. PARKER, *Kibera's Small*, 3.

between Kshs. 500/= to Ksh 999/= per month. The average income per household is estimated at between Kshs 500/= and Ksh 1000/= per month.¹⁴ Nowadays, the largest number of workers earn wages between Ksh 2000/= to Ksh 2500/=.¹⁵

The reality of unemployment has led to many other social problems such as poverty, malnutrition among children, frustration, lack of opportunities for children's education because their parents do not have enough money for their school fees.

Many parents cannot afford to meet the fundamental needs for their children such as housing, clothing, clean water, leisure and relaxation. It is not surprising to find in Kibera that most of the children have picked-up socially unacceptable behavior and habits such as smoking, use of drugs, stealing, alcohol, abuse and prostitution because their basic needs have not been met.

1.3.2. Family Life.

Most of the families in Kibera have single parents either only a father or only a mother. It is more common, however, to find single mothers. Most single mothers are those who have never married but who continue to have children with different men who then go to live elsewhere. A few, on the other hand have been deserted by their husbands.

Most of the men who are single parents are widowers who cannot get another wife due to alcoholism and perhaps also because they lack economic resources. In

¹⁴ Cf. H. O. OKETCH, *The Kibera Juhudi*, 3.

¹⁵ I got this information by asking some leaders of the Kibera Slum.

some other cases, the wife has become mentally ill and lives as an "outcast" elsewhere.¹⁶

There are cases in which the children themselves have abandoned their parents and run away from home and their parents do not know where they are. Many families also live with tensions as a consequence of different bad habits that children have adopted such as alcoholism, drugs use, etc. We cannot deny that there are also many unified families which enjoy much peace and harmony.

1.4 Services in Kibera.

Kibera is characterized by very poor physical public utilities and resources such as lack of electricity, poor water distribution, and poor communication in terms of roads and an inadequate and almost non-existent telephone network.

The absence of these basic and adequate facilities has led to a feeling of social deprivation which remains a constant worry for the Kibera's residents. These as such, remain poor and continue to live with various forms of extreme deprivation.

1.4.1 Water.

The water supply in Kibera does not easily reach all residents; and as a result some of the people have to move frequently in order to buy the water from those who have water taps on their plots. During the rainy season people harvest water and use it for all their needs. There are also kiosks where residents can buy their water, the cost of

¹⁶ Cf. COMMUNITY STUDY, *General Background*, VI.

which is between Kshs 2/= to 3/= for 20 liters. Women's water committees run many of these water kiosks where 75% to 90% of the population gets water in this way.¹⁷

1.4.2 Electricity.

Electricity is found in some few areas of Kibera such as in Makina and Line Saba. However, even in these sections, only a few houses have access to it where residents have to pay a necessarily higher rent.¹⁸ There are no street lights in Kibera; and despite the lack of electricity many residents of Kibera stay awake up to the late hours of the night.

1.4.3 Roads and Transportation.

The few roads in Kibera are made of dust and are considered "temporary" as are the many footpaths. There are, however, "planned" roads in the section of Makina, Kisumu Ndogo, Lindi and Shilanga. There are a few roads for vehicular access in Makina; but there are hardly any in Line Saba, Mashimoni, Soweto and Gatwekera. Some of these poor roads and paths cannot be used during the rainy seasons for obvious reasons.

75% of the people of Kibera walk to work because of the proximity of the Industrial Area where most of the people of low-income do have jobs.¹⁹ Matatus and buses are available to Town but they are far from some residential areas, as far as 3 km.

¹⁷ To get this information I asked many families from Kibera. They say that there are times when the water becomes more expensive and they need to go to farther places in order to get it.

¹⁸ Cf. MATRIX DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS, *Nairobi's Informal*, 16.

¹⁹ Cf. MATRIX DEVELOPMENT CONSULTANTS, *Nairobi's Informal*, 16.

Away for some. The train is used as a means of transport for those working in the City Centre, but only in the morning and evening hours.

1.5 Sanitation.

The relationship between good health, life expectancy, and access to clean water and good environmental sanitation has long been established. "This indeed was responsible for the revolution in Public Health Engineering for urban areas in 19th Century Europe. Typhoid and cholera epidemics were then common in the working districts of cities"²⁰

There are few countable pit latrines in Kibera; proportionally speaking it is common to find that one whole plot which has 30 residents has just one pit latrine.²¹ Some of the residents have to walk actually some distance to get to a toilet whose plot owner may not be willing to let it be used. As a result, those residents who cannot reach a pit latrine dispose of their waste in polythene paper and end up disposing it anywhere and everywhere of the environment.²²

Sometimes we can see the contents of the pit latrine seeping out onto the pathways of Kibera, especially during the heavy rains. This practice necessarily causes a strong odor, which can farther negatively affect the health of the people.

There is no formally planned drainage system in Kibera; and every kind of waste is thrown just outside the door of one's house. Some of the residents dig trenches that

²⁰ A. MUIGAI, *Kibera Slum*, 6.

²¹ Cf. COMMUNITY STUDY, *General Background*, X.

²² Cf. COMMUNITY STUDY, *General Background*, X.

lead nowhere but to their neighbors' plots. The entire environment is quite dirty, thereby causing many different illnesses for the people of Kibera.

1.6 Government Care.

After having experienced first-hand and frequently the adverse conditions found in Kibera, one can ask: Where is the local government care? Unfortunately, we must admit that the government has apparently seriously neglected its duties of caring for its citizens; especially for those living in informal settlements such as Kibera. The only potential assistance that can be seen in Kibera is the presence NDP (National Development Party). The duty of NDP here in Kibera is to help the tenants when their landlords expel them from their homes, in case when a tenant does not have money to pay the rent of the house. These affected tenants have the right to present their cases to this NDP office. Sometimes they are helped to remain in their homes until they get money to pay their rent. But many times, the landlords give "Kitu Kidogo" (some little money) to the members of NDP and, as a result NDP do not defend the tenants. We cannot see clearly here in Kibera the positive intervention of their authorities to defend the rights of the oppressed people.

1.7 My Personal Experience with some Sick People.

I have been doing my apostolate in the parish of Christ the King which is located in the Line Saba section of Kibera. I arrived in Kibera on the third of September, 2000; and since that day I continue to go to Kibera to do my apostolate every Sunday. In

addition, I spent three weeks during Christmas of 2000 and also I spent the whole month of June of the year 2001 in Kibera.

I usually plan to arrive in Kibera to attend the first Mass at 8:00 A. M. Following the Mass, myself and my colleagues visit some of the sick people in our parish.²³ We share with them the Eucharist every Sunday. In the one year and some months that I have been in Kibera, many people have passed away as a result of a variety of illnesses. When I faced these realities, I used to ask myself the question: Do they die because there is no way to save their lives? I have realized that many of them die because they do not have the means to continue to live. They eventually die, not because all of them have had serious sicknesses, but because most of them did not have the necessary money to go to a doctor or to buy needed medicines. Oftentimes many do not even have money to eat something. We could ask here: Where is the pastoral care for these sick people? In our parish of Christ the King there is a Department of Health Ministry. There is also a dispensary where the sick can receive treatment. From the Health ministry Department, a group of people spend many hours regularly each week visiting the sick. They notice their needs and often help to those who do not have money to buy needed medicine. The SCC's (Small Christian Communities) also take care of the sick, by visiting them, praying with them, and sharing some food with them. Despite this pastoral care we realize that Kibera is a large slum and that our Health Ministry Department, our priests and our SCC's cannot possibly reach all of the sick people of Kibera.

²³ *On Sundays we are around 20 Religious; Sisters and Brothers who do apostolate in Christ the King Parish. After the first Mass we visit the sick people. We are divided into three groups.*

The people of Kibera are exposed to different illnesses as a result of the poor and unsanitary conditions in which they live. They live alongside the rubbish and with the strong odor that comes from it and from the pit latrines which are often near the houses. In Kibera, we find people who are sick from AIDS, typhoid, malaria, tuberculosis, diseases of the skin etc.

On the one hand, I personally have met some people who question the Providence of God because they themselves have been sick for a long time. In some cases they have felt that God is very far from them; and it is therefore difficult for them to accept that God is a "Father" to them. There was a time, I recall, when an old woman whom we were visiting refused to listen to us. We were unable to share the word of God in prayer with her. These people suffer more than those who have found some meaning in their suffering. We have also realized that these people need our presence to show them that God is also with them. This is a great challenge which we face each week.

On the other hand, many sick people in spite of their suffering are able to live happy lives. The serenity and calmness they show in the midst of much suffering comes from their deep faith. Many of them have a strong faith and truly believe that God is walking and suffering with them.

I present below three cases of three women who have taught me how to experience God and who have also helped me to grow in my own personal faith.

1.7.1 Bernadette.

Bernadette lives in Soweto which is one of the 14 areas within Kibera. She comes from Machokos: has 6 children and has been abandoned by all of her children. One of these children is married and lives here in Kibera, but he visits her only occasionally. One of her daughters was living with her and she was not behaving very well. It seems that she was involved in drugs. There was a time when this daughter disappeared; and up to now she has not yet come back. She was the only one physically living with Bernadette and has abandoned her.

Bernadette has been very sick with AIDS for more than a year. We share the Eucharist with her every Sunday; and she seems happy when she sees us. She has been suffering from many kind of diseases as a consequence of her primary sickness; and there have been times when she was not even able to move. I remember very much two instances in which she has taught me something which I will never forget.

- a) During one visit she was very sick with malaria. She said that she had been expecting some medicine from someone. We left her and the following Sunday, I asked her if she had taken her medicine. She responded "No, Jesus is my medicine. I have just prayed and God has healed me." I was amazed at this demonstration of her faith. She taught me the importance of believing in God in a way that I had not experience before.
- b) On another occasion, we were with her, sharing about the departure of one Religious Brother whom she knew. She looked into my eyes and said, " Miguel, you will never leave, am I right?" In that question I could experience her care

for my vocation. She told me that day that she would pray for me; and I really believe in the power of her prayer for me.

Bernadette has been suffering very much, but God has been with her in her midst of all her suffering. Every time we visit her, we find her with her Bible and rosary beside her.

1.7.2 Monica.

Monica also lives in Soweto. She has been sick since June of 2000 up to the present time. She has had different sicknesses such as tuberculosis and malaria. In addition to other illness. She has 9 children, two of whom are daughters and who live with her in the same room; each of them already having her own children. This same room is also used as kitchen. There are a total of 16 people living in that small room and her husband and three of her older children do not have jobs.

We visit Monica every Sunday. She is a woman who believes that God is caring for her; and because of that faith I feel she is still alive. When we visit her, we need to take our time because she likes to sing and to share what the Word of God tells her. With her we are not worried about what to sing or how to speak. She takes the initiative and occupies most of the time which we have to spend with her.

There have been times when Monica has been able to actually walk. When she is able to do so, she accompanies us in visiting some other sick people. She likes to share her faith with them. She talks about her own experiences and what God does for her in her life.

Every time we visit Monica we feel that we ourselves are the ones being evangelized. Sometimes we are present with her without speaking, since we feel that her faith is much greater than ours.

1.7.3 Teresa.

I had a specific experience with a sick woman called Teresa which I would like to recall here. Teresa had been sick for 7 years and had spent about two years in bed. She had some of her children who were living around Kibera. In spite of the fact that she had some of her children close by, she had in fact been abandoned by them. Once in a while, one of her sons used to visit her. I had the impression that her children were just waiting her to die. We used to visit her and to take her the Eucharist every Sunday. At these times, she was always waiting for us in order to share with us her suffering. In my memory, there are two facts about my relationship with her that I remember most clearly.

- a) Once, when we were with her, I sat beside her on the bed and she said, "I give thanks to God because you are with me. You are the only people with whom I can share what I feel": While she was speaking, some of her tears fell on my hand.
- b) On another occasion, during one of my visits she touched my hand and said, "I am praying that may the Lord help you and do not allow you to fall." She was interested in our vocations and in our happiness as well. Teresa was a woman of great faith. God evidently gave her the strength to accept and endure her

suffering for 7 years. She truly experienced the suffering of the "just" and she died on the first of December, 2000.

The overall environment in Kibera (poverty, social problems, lack of services etc...) brings more inconvenience and suffering to the already sick people. What does the Word of God say about such suffering? In that Word we find, among other things the Christian meaning of suffering. The illustration of this reality will come in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER 2 THE SITUATION OF THE SICK AND THEIR EXPERIENCE OF GOD

2. 1 Suffering In the Old. Testament.

The Old Testament often links moral suffering with the physical pain experienced in the various parts of the body: the bones (Is. 38:13; Jer. 23:9); kidneys (Ps. 73:21; Job 16:13); liver (Lam. 2:11); viscera (Is. 16: 11; Jer. 4:19; Job 30:27);and heart (I Sam. 1:8; Jr. 4:19). According to Pope John Paul II we cannot deny that moral suffering has a physical or somatic element and that these two realities are often reflected in the state of the entire organism.²⁴ This is what sick people can experience every day of their lives.

In the Old Testament, suffering and evil are identified with each other.²⁵ There was in those days the conviction that suffering was somehow linked to, and resulted from sin. The people generally considered and believed that those who were suffering physical ailments were sinners as well. For example, Job's consolers attempted to move him to renounce his so-called innocence and to confess his sin.²⁶ "The most significant attitude towards suffering in the Old Testament was that suffering was God's punishment for a person's sin."²⁷ The ultimate cause of suffering was to be related somehow to our Original Sin.²⁸ As we know, in Gen. 2-3 our first parents were created

²⁴Cf. POPE J. PAUL II, *Salvific Doloris (On the Christian Meaning of Suffering)*, Washington: Catholic Conference, 1984, 9.

²⁵ Cf. POPE J. PAUL II, *Salvific Doloris*, 10.

²⁶ Cf. J.M. MCDERMOTT, *The Bible and Human Suffering*, London: St. Paul Publications, 1990, 38.

²⁷J. BUKOUSKY, "Suffering", *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Washington: Jack Heraty and Associates, 1981, 775.

²⁸ J. BUKOUSKY, "Suffering", 775.

is a state of innocence and happiness; but as result of the sin of disobedience they brought onto themselves physical suffering and death. "Suffering was considered just retribution for sin."²⁹

The Old Testament portrays innumerable examples of physical and emotional suffering. Such a situation could come in many different forms: "... a loss in battle; destruction of the nation and the symbols of worship; ravaging illness; premature death; great physical pain..."³⁰

Job is an excellent and very graphic example of personal physical and emotional suffering in the Old Testament. Job's friends easily and almost automatically relate his suffering with sin: "They believe that a just God rules in the world. Such awful things would not happen to Job unless he was deserving of them."³¹

2.1.1 Job.

Job is presented in the Old Testament as a man of integrity and honesty, a man who fears God and shuns evil;³² in his heart there was only goodness. He is put into test to demonstrate his faith in God and in his reactions to God's action in his life. He loses all of his property; he receives news of the death of his sons and daughters.³³ Job is finally attacked in his own health. It is God who allows Satan to test him: What Satan wants is for Job to curse God. Even Job's wife asks him to curse God by asking, " Do

²⁹ J. BUKOUSKY, "Suffering", 775.

³⁰ D. J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*: Vol 6, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 219.

³¹ D. J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 222.

³² Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *On Job: God Talks and the Suffering of the Innocent*, New York: Orbis Books, 1987, 3.

³³ Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *On Job*, 3.

you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die." But Job replied " You speak as a foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" (Job 2:9-10). Even though Job committed no sin and did not reproach, God, he did questioned Him. As a result, Job underwent a kind of purification.

Job is not a passive, sick person. He cries and curses the day of his birth: "Let the day perish in which I was born and the night that said, a man child is conceived" (Job 3:3). Job not only curses the day of his birth, but also the night of his conception.³⁴ There are people who suffer, and who many times long for death since they do not find any meaning in their suffering.

"In the midst of his suffering, Job protests or complains to God:"³⁵

First protest: Job says that God put him in the wrong and has closed his net around him (Job 19:6).

Second protest: Job points out the silence of God by saying, "Even when I cry out violence, I am not answered; I call aloud, but there is no justice" (Job 19:7).

Third protest: He feels that God has raised some obstacles to him: "He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my path" (Job 19:8).

Fourth protest: Job protests against the deprivation caused by God: "He has stripped from me my glory, and taken the crown from my head" (Job 19:9).

³⁴ Cf. B. THOMASON, *God on Trial (The Book of Job and Human Suffering)*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1997, 13.

³⁵ A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering (The Mystery of Suffering in the Bible)*, Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1997, 112.

Fifth protest: Job complains about the destruction caused by God: "He breaks me down on every side, and I am gone. He has uprooted my hope like a tree" (Job 19:10).

Sixth protests: This protest is against the hostility of God, and Job says, "he has kindled his wrath against me, and counts me as his adversary. His troops come on together; they have cast up siege works against me, and encamp round about my tent" (Job 19: 11-12).

Seventh protests: In this protest, Job points out the complicity of God and his friends: "Have pity on me, O, you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me! Why do you, like God, pursue me? Why are you not satisfied with my flesh?" (Job 19: 21-22).

Antonio Magnate points out that Job never broke his relationship with God; that he must have had such an experience of God that, in the moment of suffering and solitude, he is not afraid of him.³⁶ In his protests, Job addresses God with strong words and in graphic language. We could say that Job acts in this way either because he has nothing to lose or because he feels he is a close friend of God.³⁷ Out our own personal experiences we know that, with a close friend, we can express what we feel honestly and openly.

Job, in the midst of his suffering, experiences frustration, since he realizes that any litigation between a mortal and a deity is unbalanced: God could overpower him and increase his wounds.³⁸ He expresses this in Job 9: 16-18: "If I summoned him and he answered me, I would not believe that he was listening to my voice, for he crushes

³⁶ Cf. A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering*, 113.

³⁷ Cf. A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering*, 113.

³⁸ Cf. A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering*, 114.

me with a tempest, and multiplies my wounds without cause; he will not let me get my breath, but fills me with bitterness." With these words Job is convinced that it is useless to bring God to court because he would not answer and decide whether he is guilty or innocent.³⁹

Job challenged God and compelled him to speak. At the end, God broke the silence and Job experienced a restored hope. In Chapters 38 to 41 of the Book of Job, God answers him. God manifests Himself as a Creator, Sustainer and Provider of everything that exists.⁴⁰ God interrogates Job about his knowledge of the world and his experience of the universe. Job had been longing to meet God, to speak, to discuss, and to argue with Him in order to defend his cause. Finally God appears and speaks. He is now visible and audible. The hidden God becomes a revealed God. After the speeches of God, Job accepts his ignorance and he replies in an extraordinary way demonstrating his humility: "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. Who is in this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know..." (Job 42: 1-6). Job learns a great lesson out of his suffering: He learned that in suffering we achieve maturity. Job becomes a new person and the vision of God leads him to accept his place in creation.⁴¹ At the end, Job is consoled in the midst of his suffering. After Job's suffering, God restored his fortunes; Job received twice as much as he had had before (Job 42:10).

³⁹ Cf. A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering*, 114.

⁴⁰ Cf. A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering*, 124.

⁴¹ Cf. A. MAGNANTE, *Why Suffering*, 129.

Harrington sees the person of Job as an outstanding example of someone who is challenged. Job's personal journey was from faith to faith. His quest for an answer to the problem of innocent suffering is as pressing in our day as ever it was in his.⁴²

2.2 Suffering in the New Testament.

In the New Testament, the old and accepted belief about the relation of suffering to sin was still prevalent. God was still regarded as a good and just God; and it was believed that evil would be punished and that good would be rewarded, "...although this would not necessarily happen in this life."⁴³ But Jesus gives a different and expanded meaning to suffering. When Jesus is asked about the sin of the blind man he responds, "Neither that man nor his parents sinned: he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him" (Jn 9:3). The answer of Jesus refuted the idea that one's misfortune resulted directly from one's sin, either committed personally even before birth, or by someone in a previous generation. He rejects an absolute doctrine of retribution, which connects sin to punishment in individual cases of suffering.⁴⁴

2.2.1 Jesus and the Sick.

The evangelist Matthew writes that Jesus traveled all of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues, proclaiming the Good News of the Reign, and healing every illness among

⁴² Cf. W. HARRINGTON, *The Tear of God (Our Benevolent Creator and Human Suffering)*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1992, 30.

⁴³ D. J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 224.

⁴⁴ Cf. D. J. SIMUNDSON, "Suffering", 124.

the people(Mt. 4:23). Jesus obviously had been given the gift of healing.⁴⁵ "He healed by a simple intervention-a word and a sign."⁴⁶

Jesus is sensitive to every human suffering and cannot witness suffering without being profoundly moved with divine mercy.⁴⁷ "He does not suppress suffering; he consoles it (Mt. 5:5)."⁴⁸ He dries the tears of the people while passing by (Lk. 7: 13; 8:52). Jesus did much to relieve individual suffering, but clearly he came with a wider mission. He emphasized in the Good News of the Kingdom of his Father and righteousness in that Kingdom. Jesus' message was not that we should pursue physical health, a comfortable and fulfilled life as the supreme goal of our existence. Jesus likewise did not dismiss physical pain and sickness as insignificant. He cared for and about and he also cured the sick.⁴⁹

Jesus helped blind people to see (Mt. 9:27-31; Mk. 8: 22-26); the deaf to hear (Mk. 7: 32-37); and the lame to walk (Jn. 5: 1-15). He cleansed lepers (Lk. 5: 12-16;17:11-19); cured fevers (Mk. 1:29-31); stopped a hemorrhage (Mk. 5: 25-34); restored a withered hand (Mk. 3:1-5); and replaced a cut off ear (Lk. 22:51). Jesus healed with a word (Mt. 8: 16); by touching, and from long distances some who were sick (Mt 8:1-13).

⁴⁵ Cf. R. J. SCHREITER, *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, New York: Orbis Books, 1991, 129.

⁴⁶ R. J. SCHREITER, *Faces of Jesus*, 129.

⁴⁷ Cf. X. LEON DUFOUR, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2nd Edition, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973, 589.

⁴⁸ X. LEON DUFOUR, *Dictionary of biblical*, 589.

⁴⁹ Cf. B. BAISLEY, *No Easy Answers (An Exploration of Suffering)*, London: Epworth Press, 2000, 53.

Jesus came not only to make human persons spiritually whole and to free them from sin, but also to make them physically integrated as well. There is no evidence that Jesus refused to heal any individual when this gift was sought with faith. (Lk. 5: 12-13)

I want to focus here on the case in which Jesus took the initiative to heal the man born blind and of whom Jesus had pity. "The healing was not only an example of Jesus' ability to restore sight, but it was also represented, figuratively, and for the blind man experientially, the dawning of spiritual light."⁵⁰ The encounter between Jesus and the blind man seems to have been a casual one. Since blind beggars have little opportunity for employment, they were dependent on charity for their sustenance.⁵¹

The disciples of Jesus were overcome by theological curiosity rather than by compassion for the blind man. For them, the blind man was a "sinner" rather than a sufferer to be relieved. Their question was: "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (Jn. 9:2). Jesus did not consider the blindness as a punishment, and said, " Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's work might be revealed in him (Jn. 9:3). The healing was a sign to manifest God's healing power in the man's life.

The diseases of the eyes, and particularly blindness, have a special place in the Biblical literature. To be blind is the ultimate disaster because with it comes total dependence upon others.⁵² This is the case with this particular blind man: He had been

⁵⁰ F. E. GAEBELEIN, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Vo. 9, Michigan: Regency Reference Library, 1984, 100.

⁵¹ Cf. F. E. GAEBELEIN, *The Expositor's Bible*, 101.

⁵² Cf. M. SUSSMAN, "Diseases of the Eyes and Ears", *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, New York: Doubleday, 1992, 12

dependent upon others from birth. He had been a beggar known by the people (Jn. 9:8) who had been suffering for many years without knowing through sight the external world. It seems that he was not a boy; he was an adult because, when the Jews asked his parents about the healing, they said, " We do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself" (Jn. 9:21).

Jesus had compassion for the blind man and brought him to a new life enabling him after the healing to be able to go on in life by himself.

2.3 Theology of Christian Suffering.

The problem of suffering has exercised the minds of people for centuries, especially the minds of those who want to believe that God is Father as well as Creator. Why does He allow pain and suffering to exist? Why didn't He make the world good, kind and peaceful? Is life worth living? These and many more questions arise in the minds and hearts of many people.

As we know, there are not easy questions to answer. According to Alan Paton, "these questions cannot be answered in an article or a book, but only in a life".⁵³ He says this by presenting the figure of a woman who lost both breasts; but despite that tragedy every time she speaks she gives thanks to God and to her friends. It is not because she found answers to the difficult questions, but because she found meaning to her life. In some way, "she took her suffering and made it her instrument, the use of

⁵³ A. PATON , *Creative Suffering The Ripple of Hope*, Kansas: The National Catholic Reporter, 1970, 14

which has given her this continual thankfulness. She is an example of faith, courage and love."⁵⁴ Alan Paton points out that "he cannot conceive of life without suffering, that it could not have meaning without it".⁵⁵

According to Lucien Richard, "suffering is a complex reality as it is perceived in the history of humanity. Suffering is not always a negative reality although it may be perceived as such. In fact the world in which there was no place for suffering and sorrow, even to deep grief, would seem to be inhuman, it would be a world of robots, and even an unreal world".⁵⁶

Certain suffering, when borne with courage and dignity, can contribute to maturing of the individual. There is also suffering for a good cause, a suffering motivated by sacrificial love as the one of Jesus and as that of many Christians.

Christian theology seeks to explain the meaning of the complex of symbols that make up the Paschal Mystery (life, death and resurrection of Jesus) and its truth to any way given age, which involves the demonstration of its universal relevance. "The similarities of fundamental human experiences to those described in the Paschal Mystery are an important basis for the possibility of discovering in the Christian story insights for our own situation."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ A. PATON, *Creative Suffering*, 14.

⁵⁵ A. PATON, *Creative suffering*, 14.

⁵⁶ R. LUCIEN, *What Are They Saying About the Theology of Suffering?*, New York: Paulist Press, 1992, 30.

⁵⁷ R. LUCIEN, *What Are They Saying*, 6-7.

2.3.1 God in the Midst of Suffering.

The God who is lover of life does not desire the suffering of people, not even as a pedagogical device, but instead their happiness.⁵⁸ He does not want human beings to suffer; but He wills to overcome suffering. He wants salvation for men and women and in it victory over suffering. Salvation cannot be separated from human liberation because salvation from God is always salvation for men and women with all what it implies for truly human life.⁵⁹ So, salvation cannot be found outside suffering since suffering is a reality in human beings.

"God is present in the suffering and death of Jesus as overcoming suffering itself. God is in the sufferer giving him/her strength to endure the pain. It is in suffering that we discover the mystery of God's love."⁶⁰ It is important to know how to suffer since it is not easy to answer why the suffering. Jesus gives us the answer of how to suffer. He answers the questions of how to suffer by doing it himself in humility, docility, obedience and joy (Heb. 12). "His utter and radical trust in the Father is at the root of how to suffer"⁶¹

Suffering is not something that is embraced in and for itself but rather for others. As we unite our sufferings with Christ's, we enter into the sacrifice of Christ and into the work of salvation. Here, I want to reflect upon some teachings of St Paul: "all this is as God intends, for it is your special privilege to take Christ's part-not only to believe in

⁵⁸ Cf. D. SOELLE, *Suffering*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975, p. 108.

⁵⁹ Cf. R. LUCIEN, *What Are they Saying*, 32.

⁶⁰ G. W. KOSICKI, *The Good News of Suffering Mercy and Salvation for All*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1981, 11.

⁶¹ G. W. KOSICKI, *The Good News*, 12.

him but also to suffer for him" (Phil. 1:29). As Christ suffered out of love, he invites us to share in his love for the world and to bring his salvation to it.

John Howard says that God does not allow suffering to evaporate uselessly, that "suffering is being used and really does not matter. If suffering does evaporate uselessly, then nothing the sufferer can do to change that."⁶² If a sufferer accepts and lives with the suffering in his/her life in a kind of simplicity and openness to its teaching, then this attitude turns the sufferer into giver, into lover, into consoler. Long experience with physical suffering teaches the person to bear what he/she has been faced with. But he/she cannot bear it when others suffer. One's and others' suffering constantly reawakens him/her to mercy and to authentic empathy for others who are suffering.

God does not make a general rule of allowing suffering for the special purpose of facilitating what He has in mind to accomplish in our lives. But, once suffering is present, God wastes no opportunity to use that suffering for redemptive purposes.⁶³ For example, trials handled successfully gives the sufferer new power and strengthen spiritual nerve. Bitter testing and severe trial produce positive decision and, as a result one's character grows stronger.

In Christ's confidence, we believe that one's suffering is being shared by God Himself. This belief can remove our loneliness and sense of isolation. God feels the pain which we cannot find words to express. But, there could be a question: If God is

⁶² A. PATON, *Creative Suffering*, 33.

⁶³ Cf. J. TAL MURPHEE, *A Loving God and a Suffering World*, Illinois: Intersivity Press, 1981, 110.

spiritual, He cannot experience physical pain? We as Christians believe that God actually took-on to himself a physical body in Christ. As a must He experienced the unbearable suffering of a crucifixion and tasted death for every person.⁶⁴ In this sense God is suffering with us

When a sick person is able to experience that Christ is present and is seen in his/her suffering, that person comes to believe also that Christ has suffered with herself/himself. If she/he allows Jesus to speak within herself/himself, the person will realize that He has suffered for him/her and will now suffer with him/her.⁶⁵ "Discovering God's acceptance brings us to a greater peace with ourselves, whether this comes about through a counseling journey or as a result of psychotherapy; through prayer ministry, or as part of our spiritual growth and personal prayer life."⁶⁶

According to Baisley; "there is a sense that the continuing journey towards integration and wholeness is far more significant than the cure of disease. It is a journey towards God that none of us can avoid and will presumably continue after this life is over".⁶⁷

2.3.2 Meaning of Suffering.

Each human being is taught a basic truth about human existence. That to live involves suffering, but to survive means a person must find meaning in that suffering.⁶⁸

There must be a purpose in suffering and dying; and each person must find that for

⁶⁴ Cf. J. TAL MURPHEE, *A Loving God*, 122.

⁶⁵ Cf. B. BAISLEY, *No Easy Answers*, 58.

⁶⁶ B. BAISLEY, *No Easy Answers*, 58.

⁶⁷ B. BAISLEY, *No Easy Answers*, 58.

⁶⁸ Cf. H. CALKINS, *Living with Illness*, Illinois: Thomas More Press, 1973, 13.

himself/herself. When the person finds this meaning, he/she will grow in inner strength despite all indignities.⁶⁹ "Each person finds his/her own level of growth through illness; but each person must find meaning in illness to rise above its agonies."⁷⁰ Any lack of meaning in suffering increases the same suffering; and it could be called the suffering in suffering.

We Christians naturally look to the Cross as the key to discover the purpose of suffering. The lack of any purpose of any sort in suffering is a real difficulty. In fact the lack of purpose is the suffering.⁷¹ It is possible for a sick person to find meaning in the midst of suffering. Where there is an opportunity to experience sickness, there could also be an opportunity to value life at a deeper level. We can ask God about the meaning of suffering with all emotion of our heart and with our mind full of dismay and anxiety; and God expects the question and listens to it. An example of this is what we have seen in the Old Testament, in the Book of Job.

Lucien Richard points out that "Jesus did not seek suffering, nor did he seek his death, but because of his radical love he was unconcerned about the consequences for his life."⁷² In following his example, any one who sets no limits to his/her sacrifice for the suffering of others will sooner or later have to pay with his/her life.

In the Paschal Mystery, we are assured that neither suffering nor death can separate us from God and that the basic negativity of suffering will be overcome. "The

⁶⁹ Cf. H. CALKINS, *Living With Illness*, 14.

⁷⁰ H. CALKINS, *Living with Illness*, 20.

⁷¹ Cf. B. BAISLEY, *No Easy Answers*, 85.

⁷² R. LUCIEN, *What Are They Saying*, 33.

Resurrection leads us to a reality from the side of God."⁷³ And from that side, the Cross is not ultimately a failure. Jesus did not come to suppress suffering all at once, or to explain it, or to justify it. He came to assume it and transform it. Bearing it with infinite love, he taught us how to relieve others of theirs and patiently endure that which remains unavoidable, with him and in him.⁷⁴ "There is no unworthy suffering; there is no Cross, which does not resemble to the suffering of Christ."⁷⁵

The obedience of Jesus was put to test especially during the Passion, that crucible of agony which gather together all of his past suffering and showed most clearly the meaning of his life and the person that he is. In the Garden, Jesus was racked by the resistance of his own human will to the cup of pain, rejection and death that awaited him. Only his obedient love for the Father empowered him to accept the Father's will as his own (Mk. 14:32-42). Despite his inner resistance, Jesus was determined to complete the Father's will and to go to the Cross.⁷⁶

The Cross stands at the center of Christian belief, and from it the significance of suffering must be illuminated. Jesus Christ is more than a model for human beings. He is the savior of the world (Jn. 4:42; I Jn. 4:14). What Jesus suffered redeemed people! When Christians are introduced into the mystery of Christ, their sufferings then find their meaningful place.⁷⁷

⁷³ R. LUCIEN, *What Are They Saying*, 35.

⁷⁴ Cf. L. EVELY, *Suffering*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1967, 69.

⁷⁵ L. EVELY, *Suffering*, 71.

⁷⁶ Cf. J. M. MCDERMOTT, *The Bible and Human*, 94.

⁷⁷ Cf. J. M. MCDERMOTT, *The Bible and Human*, 103.

Love moves love, and the total self-suffering love of God, revealed in its profundity on the Cross and its victory at the Resurrection, demands an absolute response of love from us.⁷⁸ "The union with Christ, the sharing of his life of divine love, relativizes all human suffering, just as the Resurrection overcomes the Cross."⁷⁹ St Paul says, "I consider that sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is revealed to us (Rom. 8:18).

According to Pope John Paul II, "In order to discover the profound meaning of suffering, following the revealed word of God, we must look to the revelation of divine love, which is the ultimate source of the meaning of everything that exists."⁸⁰ Love is also the richest source of the meaning of suffering, which always remains a mystery. Christ causes us to enter into the mystery and to discover the "why" of suffering, as far as we are capable of grasping the sublimity of divine love.⁸¹ God has given the answer about the meaning of suffering in the Cross of Jesus Christ.⁸²

Pain and suffering are part of the Paschal Mystery, the participation in the dying and rising of Jesus in each one of our lives. As baptized Christians, we believe that our own suffering and death have meaning and will lead to resurrection.⁸³ Susan Borrelly says that "in faith we know that it is not just our individual suffering that has been given meaning and grace but that we are part of the greater experience of Jesus that is happening in the present and moving us all towards the future kingdom. The birth, life,

⁷⁸ Cf. J. M. MCDERMOTT, *The Bible and Human*, 109.

⁷⁹ J. M. MCDERMOTT, *The Bible and Human*, 113.

⁸⁰ POPE J. PAUL II, *Salvific Doloris*, 21.

⁸¹ Cf. POPE J. PAUL II, *Salvific Doloris*, 21.

⁸² Cf. POPE J. PAUL II, *Salvific Doloris*, 21.

⁸³ Cf. S. BORRELLY, *With Care (Reflections of a Minister to the Sick)*, Chicago: Liturgy training Publications, 1980, 8.

suffering, and death of Jesus Christ on the Cross as well as his glorious Resurrection provides the ultimate answer to all human suffering."⁸⁴

2.3.3 Acceptance of Suffering.

Our response of acceptance of suffering is based upon faith as assent to things not seen. And our strength comes from hope; trust that in his own way and time God will take care of each beloved son and daughter. "We must especially endure because we know that God loves each one of us, and illness is one way that can lead us to love Him."⁸⁵

There have been patients who have been bedridden for as long as twenty years.⁸⁶ We can ask, Do they know, do they think of the meaning of illness? "Only God knows for sure, or in what manner. But somehow, in their very own way, they have found a meaning that makes sense and gives them courage to live another day."⁸⁷

If suffering is an inescapable part of life, there are many ways of reacting to it. But only one is profitable, and that is to accept it, and use it, and where possible, to prevent it, alleviate it and bring it to an end. Normally, in order to reach acceptance, there are some stages which the sufferer must pass through. These stages are: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Each sufferer experiences these stages in different ways.

⁸⁴ J. TESFAI, *The Scandal of a Crucified World (Perspectives on the Cross-and Suffering)*, New York:Orbis Books, 1994, 37.

⁸⁵ H. CALKINS, *Living With Illness*, 15.

⁸⁶ Cf. H. CALKINS, *Living with Illness*, 18.

⁸⁷ H. CALKINS, *Living with Illness*, 18.

DENIAL: In the midst of suffering there is the attitude and the desire of denying the situation. "Denial provides initial protection from an overwhelming truth."⁸⁸ The facts will surface, as the person is able to handle the reality physically, emotionally and psychologically.

ANGER: "Anger provides an escape value for the emotions that have built up during the denial stage."⁸⁹ Someone has to be blamed for something beyond the patient's control. Reasoning and arguing with the patient in this stage does little good and actually prolongs the stage. "Empathetic listening without judgment is most helpful."⁹⁰

BARGAINING: Once anger has subsided, the patient may begin to bargain. This stage can be an apparently silent time because negotiations may be with God. "I will go to Mass daily if I recover my health"⁹¹

DEPRESSION: This stage is also a silent period of inward movement. The temptation is to want to remove the feelings of depression from the one suffering. This does not help. Just listening helps. "Through conversations, the sorrow inside moves into the light of the outside world."⁹² Once underlying feelings are exposed, the patient can take action. A person may seek the forgiveness of those wronged.

ACCEPTANCE: Here the person may want to share at great length what has been learned from the illness or loss. Reconciliation with those who have been estranged may

⁸⁸ P. NORMILE, *Visiting the Sick (A Guide for Parish Ministers)*, Ohio: St. Anthony Press, 1991, 37.

⁸⁹ P. NORMILE, *Visiting the Sick*, 37.

⁹⁰ P. NORMILE, *Visiting the Sick*, 37.

⁹¹ P. NORMILE, *Visiting the Sick* 38.

⁹² P. NORMILE, *Visiting the Sick*, 38.

become vital. At this stage, a spiritual companion can be invaluable in reflecting with the individual about the deeper meaning of life.

Communication is very important in the midst of suffering. The sufferer has the need to release his/her pain through sharing. If people are to remain unchanged in suffering; if they are not to be blind and deaf to the pain of others; if they are to move from purely passive endurance to suffering that can harmonize them in a productive way, then one of the things they need is language.⁹³

The patient needs to feel loved in order to be able to accept his/her reality. Being loved gives one the courage to face any reality. Love can bring peace and acceptance. When I am loved I do not fear even death. When the sick are able to accept their suffering on behalf of others there is the transformation of suffering. For example, the suffering of Jesus in solidarity with us has brought about reconciliation. "We are called to assume our suffering in solidarity with all those who suffer."⁹⁴

2.4 Is it in Spite of or Because of Suffering that the Sick People Experience God?

Some people in the midst of their suffering, in their searching for the "why", can be driven to experience God in their lives. They can offer up suffering and find some sense in it.⁹⁵ Many of these who suffer grow in their spirituality. God reveals Himself in the midst of suffering, and, as a result these who suffer come to believe in God as the One who is accompanying them. Many can experience God in a stronger way in their lives; and others can experience God because of their suffering. Baisley says, "In the

⁹³ Cf. D. SOELLE, *Suffering*, 75.

⁹⁴ R. LUCIEN, *What Are They saying*, 52.

⁹⁵ Cf. A. PATON, *Creative suffering*, 29.

midst of dark and loving afflictions, the soul feels the presence of someone and an interior strength that so fortifies and accompanies it that when this weight of darkness passes, it often feels alone, empty and weak. The power of God is within the pressure, not in spite of it"⁹⁶ God is in the sick; not in the sickness; and it is He who strengthens the person to overcome his/her situation.

It is normal for a human being to appeal to God in times of suffering, especially when there is no other apparently way in sight. For believers this is a fighting to appeal to God, to invoke a miracle, to be at least consoled and comforted. In such circumstances, "lamentations become supplications for divinely soothing intervention."⁹⁷

Suffering has provided an occasion for countless numbers of people to return to God. When people feel weak they often feel the need to depend upon someone else. There is the example of St. Ignatius of Loyola, who was a soldier and was wounded in 1521. In his suffering, he knew Christ and resolved to give up the military life and devote his life to Christ. Since pain can be corrective and educative, it sometimes provides an opportunity for self-evaluation. One can never really know how she/he would react to the severity of pain until one has the opportunity to experience it.

Not only do Christians find comfort from Christ in their affliction (2 Cor. 1: 3-7) and rejoice after punishment for having been found worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of Christ (Acts 5:41), but they also actually desire to share Christ's suffering,

⁹⁶ B. BAISLEY, *No Easy answers*, 117.

⁹⁷ A. MAGNANTE, *Why suffering*, 116.

considering it a grace to suffer for Christ. In the midst of and because of their tribulation they seem to be constantly rejoicing.⁹⁸

2.5. Evaluation.

In Kibera, there are many people who have become ill because of their behavior. Those who are afflicted with AIDS are presumed to have somehow been sexually promiscuous. Others have become ill because of drinking, etc... Many people still today believe that they are sick because of their sin. As we saw in the Old Testament, sickness is still today for some believers, to be the result of the sin of the person or of the one of his/her parents. Some who are ill are still being rejected by their society. They need to be understood and to feel loved.

Jesus had compassion for everyone. He had a special preference and love for those who were suffering: He had pity on them and brought them to health. (cf. Lk. 4: 40-41) Jesus did not see the sin of the person, but rather responded to their suffering. He gave to suffering a different and more acceptable meaning (cf. Jn. 9:3) In Kibera, there are some very good Christians who dedicate part of their time in staying with and ministering to the sick. They have compassion for them; they visit and pray for and with them. But, we are aware that many people are also abandoned and very few people care for them. There is a need for many more committed Christians to care for and to love the sick among us. Jesus loves the suffering people and brings them to hope through many good Christians.

⁹⁸ Cf. J. M MCDERMOTT, *The Bible and Human*, 129.

In Kibera there are many sick who are Christians; but many also are Muslims, and others who do profess their traditional religions. This fact makes a lot of difference to the afflicted, when they try to find meaning in their suffering. There are many questions that come to their minds: Where is God?; Why me?; Will I die? These and other more existential questions spring up in their minds. The Christians find an easier way to understand and to give meaning to their suffering. We know that there is a need for more Christians to accompany the sick among us in their process of finding some meaning in their struggles. They need someone to tell them that God loves them and cares for them. They need to experience that love of God for them in a tangible way. Not all of the sick have this essential help. Speaking about those who are not Christians, these also have the need to be listened to. Through our presence we help them to become aware that they are not alone. Even though we do not present Jesus in an explicit way, with our care we show them that God loves them. We know that many sick people find their illness to be an existential problem; and, that is not easy to come out from under this attitude. They cannot experience God in the midst of their suffering. Their suffering is therefore double: The fact that they do not find any meaning in their suffering makes them suffer more. In Confronting this suffering, there is a need for someone who can listen and who is willing to accompany him/her.

Many of the sick people in Kibera do not have the means to be properly cared for. A lack of money and other resources keeps them sick for a long time. Jesus himself defended the rights of the sick, here there is also the need for us to speak for them; to make the community and the government aware that the sick have also dignity.

We have seen that in Kibera there is little or no care from the government towards the sick. We are called to promote the participation of all people in campaigns and institutions that defend the sick.

Many sick people in Kibera have come closer to God as a result of their suffering. They truly experience God in their midst. The 3 examples which I have showed in the First chapter illustrated this. Monica, Bernadette, and Teresa showed their faith in a God who is present in the midst of their suffering. They have come to acceptance, but with a firm hope that with God they can overcome their sicknesses.

We Christians have to do something to address the situation of the serious types of suffering around us. We are to follow the example of Jesus, to be compassionate. How? This "how" is developed in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER 3 WE ARE CALLED TO BE GOOD SAMARITANS.

3.1 The Good Samaritan.

"There was a man who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho when robbers attacked him, stripped him, and beat him, leaving him half-dead. It also happened that a priest was going down that road; but when he saw the man, he walked on by on the other side. In the same way a Levite also came there, went over to look at the man, and walked on by on the other side. But a Samaritan who was traveling that way came upon the man, and when he saw him, his heart was filled with pity. He went over to him, poured oil and wine on his wounds and bandaged them; then he put the man on his own animal and took him to an inn, where he took care of him." (Lk. 10: 30-35)

According to Pope John Paul II, this parable belongs to the "Gospel of Suffering," because it indicates what the relationship of each one of us must be towards our suffering neighbor.⁹⁹ We are not allowed "to pass by on the other side." We must stop beside him/her. Everyone who stops beside the suffering of another person, is a Good Samaritan. Everyone who is sensitive to the suffering of others, who is moved by the misfortune of another person is a Good Samaritan. We are called to be Good Samaritans. Many sick people are suffering, they are crying out. "We must stop"!

The Good Samaritan does not stop at sympathy and compassion alone. He/she brings help in suffering. He/she puts his/her whole heart into living out in deeds this compassion. In our days, there are many sick people expecting us to pass beside them and to stop to help them. Jesus fulfilled this task in his ministry. We too are invited to

⁹⁹ Cf. POPE J. PAUL II, *Salvific Doloris*, 64.

be compassionate in action. We must stop and care for those who are suffering. Pope John Paul II says that "the Christian response to pain and suffering is never one of passivity. Urged by Christian charity, which finds its supreme expression in the life and works of Jesus, who went about doing good, the church goes out to meet the sick and suffering, bringing them comfort and hope. This is not a mere exercise of benevolence, but is motivated by compassion and concern leading to care and dedicated service."¹⁰⁰

3.2 Pastoral Care for the Sick.

Ministry to the sick is a caring for the whole person, and it is therefore pastoral as well as sacramental. Pastoral ministry is care for the whole person in relation to God and the community.¹⁰¹ It is the sick who experience God through a personal relationship with the faith of the community. God cares for us and commands us to care for one another. "The subject of the pastoral care of the sick and the suffering is not limited to the celebration of the sacrament and Anointing of the Sick or giving the Viaticum as it was in the past."¹⁰² Caring for the sick is/should be a concern for all the people of God. The pastoral care of the sick cannot achieve its purpose without great love and concern for one another among the healthy, sick and the suffering.

The pastoral care of the sick is intended to help Christians to participate fully in building the body of Christ. The Gospel may reach the sick and produce abundant fruit

¹⁰⁰ POPE J. PAUL II, *Message of the Holy Father for the World of the Sick for the Year 2002*, From Castel Gandolfo, Vatican, 6 August 2001, 2.

¹⁰¹ Cf. S. BORRELLY, *With Care*, 2.

¹⁰² D. SSENGOOBA, *The Laity and the Pastoral Care of the Sick*, Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1996, 11.

in them and in those around them.¹⁰³ This is our duty, to evangelize our sick people. This pastoral care is also intended to help our suffering brothers and sisters to overcome as well as to accept their bodily pains and to bear them in a Christian way. The call to care for the sick has its foundation in the Scriptures. In St Matthew we find "I was ill and you cared for me" (cf. Mt. 25:36). It is Jesus who invites us to take care of the sick. As he prepared to leave his earthly ministry in the hands of those who were to follow him, he reminded them, "I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father" (cf. Jn. 14: 12). We are invited by the same Jesus to continue his care for the sick.

The sick tend to ask about the presence of God in the midst of their suffering. Our task is to be present there, to listen as they attempt to find God in their particular life situations, to listen as they grow in awareness and understanding of themselves and their God, and to encourage them to grow in faith.¹⁰⁴

Through our ministry, we attempt to help the sick to cultivate the ground so that the seed of faith can grow. We meet people whose faith amazes us. In the midst of their sicknesses they grow in faith. Our purpose is to strengthen them in their faith. Our challenge is to help patients to recognize God in their experience of sickness.

3.2.1 You Visited Me.

The care of the sick includes the ministry of family members, friends, parish ministers, hospital or nursing home staffs; and of course the consecrated people (Priests, Brothers and Sisters). It is a shared responsibility among the people of God.

¹⁰³ Cf. D. SSEBGOOBA, *The Laity and the Pastoral*, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. P. NORMILE, *Visiting the Sick*, 15.

"I was sick", Jesus says of himself, "and you visited me" (cf. Mt. 25: 36) "According to the logic of the same economy of salvation, He who identifies Himself with each suffering person, waits-in this man-for others men, who come to visit him. He waits for the expression of human compassion, solidarity, kindness, love, patience, solicitude, in their various forms. He waits for the expression of all that is noble; elevated in the human heart "you visited me"¹⁰⁵

Jesus is present in our suffering neighbor. He also wishes to be present in every act of charity and service of ours. He wants love, the solidarity of love. We are called to show this Jesus through our love and care. Pope John Paul II believes that Christ Himself is mystically present in those who suffer and in those who, out of love, serve the suffering.¹⁰⁶

Visiting the sick is one of the priest's most important duties and much can be learned from the way in which he ministers to them. The priest visits them to help them to pray; to invite them to turn to God; and to bring them the healing of Christ. But the priests need to promote among all of the Christians a desire for sharing in this responsibility. Priests cannot reach-out to all of the sick people within their parishes. The visitation of the sick is the duty of all Christians who share the concern and love of Christ, and it enables them to strengthen the sick in the Lord by offering them help as brothers and sisters. By their presence and concern these ministers support them in their

¹⁰⁵ Cf. POPE J. PAUL II, *Healing and Hope (Messages to the Sick, the Suffering and the Elderly)*, London: St. Paul Editions, 1982, 36.

¹⁰⁶ Cf. POPE J. PAUL II, *Healing and Hope*, 36.

pain and help to relieve their loneliness. All members of the community are called to be involved in the pastoral care of their sick.

The visits of friends, of neighbors, of members of the parish, bring life and interest to the sick-room. The sharing about what happens outside, in the community, in the parish... helps the patient to turn away from his/her own condition and to realize that he/she is still a part of the living community around him/her.¹⁰⁷ A visit to a sick person is a human act; but also a profoundly Christian one and we should not forget that we come to bring Christ to them, even if only by a smile or a gesture.

Visiting the sick goes hand-in-hand with prayer. Prayer is an essential part of our Christian life. "We pray in communion and in community. We lift our hearts to the Lord in a spiritual conversation, and we put our trust and hope in God our Father"¹⁰⁸ When one is in difficulty and is suffering, prayer is indispensable. Sick people need to have intimacy with God. It is in Him that he/she can find the strength necessary to bear their suffering. It is in God that sick people find hope and a sense to continue to live.

In our visiting the sick, we are encouraged to show the sick that we believe in and that we practice prayer. "The purpose of prayer would be to help the sick person to accept his/her illness and to pray that if it is God's will, the person will be cured. It is also to remind the sick person that she/he is a member of the Body of Christ, the Church, with all the responsibility that this entails."¹⁰⁹ We are to invite them to offer

¹⁰⁷ Cf. J. D. CRICHTON, *The Care of the Sick*, Chicago: Catholic Truth Society, 1966, 10.

¹⁰⁸ D. SSENGOOBA, *The laity and the Pastoral*, 22.

¹⁰⁹ D. SSENGOOBA, *The Laity and the Pastoral*, 23.

their suffering and prayers for those who are in the same condition of sickness and for the good of all human beings.

3.2.2 The Family of the Sick.

We are encouraged also to motivate the families of the sick. They are the first ones who are in daily contact with their sick. The family has much to contribute to the spiritual well being of its sick member. In the Christian vision, the family is called upon to be a salvific community dedicated to the wholeness, integrity and salvation of each member.¹¹⁰ The family has always participated in the healing process of its members. The love the family can show to the sick person is the beginning of being healed. What is needed most is to comfort and strengthen the patient with words of faith. Pope John Paul II says, " The family has the mission to become more and more what it is, that is to say, a community of life and love, in an effort that will find fulfillment, as everything created and redeemed, in the Kingdom of God."¹¹¹ Unfortunately many sick people are abandoned by their own families. Here is where we need to involve the community as such. We have the duty to encourage the families and the whole community to take care of the sick.

3.3 The Sacramental Provision to the Sick.

"With the theological meaning of the Sacrament of the Sick in mind, the pastoral application of this sacrament consists in establishing or furthering a special relationship

¹¹⁰ Cf. D. SSENGOOBA, *The Laity and the Pastoral*, 29.

¹¹¹ POPE J. PAUL I, *Familiaris Consortio*, St. Paul Editions, Vatican Polyglot Press, 1981, 32.

between the Lord and the patient."¹¹² Through the sacraments we should try to show the person that Christ is coming to him/her with love. That He comes to forgive and reconcile in Penance, he comes to heal and strengthen in the Anointing of the Sick; he comes to give himself in the Eucharist. If the sacraments are presented in this way, the response of the sick is usually positive.

Penance: If the sick person is a Christian, his/her time of illness gives him/her the opportunity to reflect on his/her life; to review it; and make to an examination of conscience.¹¹³ We can help them to become aware that we are very much in the hands of others; in the hands of God. It is important to show them a loving Father who forgives their sins, while at the same time that they need to share with Him their weakest part. He helps them to realize that in releasing their sins, they will find peace. The Sacrament of reconciliation is an opportunity to repent with true sincerity, an opportunity to come closer to God and to the others.

Eucharist: The Eucharist as taken to the sick does not mean strictly what we knew as Viaticum. It can be distributed to them during Mass when there is a special Mass for the sick so that many of them are brought to participate in it. It can also be distributed outside of the Mass. Through the Eucharist the sick are united sacramentally to the Lord and they are also reunited with the Eucharistic Community from which their illness has perhaps separated them.¹¹⁴ Bringing the Eucharist to the sick is a ministry of love and compassion. In receiving the Eucharist, the patient comes into contact with

¹¹² D. SSENGOOBA, *The laity and the Pastoral*, 33.

¹¹³ Cf. J. D CRICHTON, *The Care of the Sick*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Cf. D. SSENGOOBA, *The laity and the Pastoral*, 34.

Jesus, "Faith is aroused, fears and frustrations are poured out to a person (Christ) who understands and cares. The patient now has full confidence in God and hopes all will be better soon."¹¹⁵ The Eucharist is the food of life. Jesus said, " He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day". (cf. Jn. 6:54)

Anointing of the Sick: In this sacrament, we need to take into account that anointing is not longer seen as "the Last Sacrament of the dying."¹¹⁶ It should not be given only at the moment of death, but rather as soon as the patient's illness becomes serious. This sacrament should be celebrated with the members of the family and other representatives of the Christian community whenever possible. In this sacrament the sick person receives the grace of the Holy Spirit. By this grace the whole person is helped and saved, sustained by trust in God, and strengthened against the temptations of the evil one and against anxiety over death.¹¹⁷

3.4 Love Heals.

On December 27,1978, Pope John Paul II delivered a message to the sick and said "Take heart! God loves you, because He sees in you the image of His son suffering on earth! Your dear ones love you, because you are their flesh and blood! The church loves you, because you enrich the treasure of the communion of the saints! The Pope has a particular preference for you, because you are his most sensitive sons, and asks you for help and the strength of your apparent, weakness, of your prayers and

¹¹⁵ D. SSENGOOBA, *The Laity and the Pastoral*, 35.

¹¹⁶ D. SSENGOOBA, *The laity and the Pastaral*, 36.

¹¹⁷ Cf. D. SSENGOOBA, *The laity and the Pastoral*, 37.

sacrifices."¹¹⁸ This is what the sick need to experience "to be loved." Each one of us is called to show love to those who are suffering. Love gives them strength, patience, and hope.

We are called to be "compassionate."¹¹⁹ Jesus was compassionate towards the sick; he experienced their suffering and, because of that he brought them out of their sickness. He has left this task to us "to be compassionate, to suffer with others and to encourage others to do the same. When we bring the gift of compassion to the sick, "they are no longer alone in their suffering, their anguish, their despair"¹²⁰ When we hear their sharing and show them that we are with them, we help them to lighten both the burden and the loneliness of bearing it.

"The goal of pastoral care to the sick is to bring the love of Jesus to the individual so that fear may be expressed and put aside."¹²¹ In the Scriptures we find, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear" (1 Jn. 4:18a). When the sick people experience Jesus in their lives, they are strengthened. We are to bring them "Shalom,"¹²² which was the gift Jesus spread throughout his earthly ministry (Jn. 20: 19). "Shalom" invites each person to live his/her potential in spite of what ails them physically. "Today medical science acknowledges that physical cures are more attainable when spiritual healing has occurred."¹²³

¹¹⁸ POPE J. PAUL II, *Healing and Hope*, 21

¹¹⁹ "Compassion" is empathy's companion, derived from Latin, the word literally means "to suffer with"

¹²⁰ P. NORMILE, *Visiting the Sick*, 22.

¹²¹ P. NORMILE, *Visiting the sick*, 16.

¹²² According to St. Paul the word "shalom" means total integrity between God and human beings, between one person with another, within each person.

¹²³ P. NORMILE, *Visiting the Sick*, 17.

We are to help the patient to be aware that God does not punish, nor does God use sickness to punish. God is the God of love who loves us even in our sins and our sufferings.¹²⁴ When the sick are aware of these considerations, then it brings peace of mind; and, as a result they would be in a position to see how best they can profit from illness. They can begin to consider how best they can use their illness for spiritual growth and for coming closer to Christ.¹²⁵ A reading from the Gospels will help the sick to know Jesus and to experience that he loves him/her.

We also need to have the courage to express to the sick our love for them, we care for them because we love them. It is important for them to hear the words coming from our mouth, "I love you."

3.5 Justice to the Sick.

Jesus not only cured the sick, but he also defended the dignity of the person and their rights. He was against the idea that the sick were sinners, and along with this he was against the society of his time. For him, sickness was not the cause of sin; it is not a punishment (cf Jn. 9:3). Jesus supported those who were sick and who were rejected by the society, those who were considered dangerous and impure. Jesus shows this response by touching the lepers (Lk. 17:11-13). He is against the Jewish Law, he cures on Saturdays (Cf. Mk. 3:4). For Jesus what matters is the person rather than the Law.

¹²⁴ Cf. J. D. CRICHTON, *The Care of the sick*, 8.

¹²⁵ Cf. J. D. CRICHTON, *The Care of the Sick*, 8.

"The Good News of the Kingdom is social, as the very word "Kingdom" implies."¹²⁶ It is in relationship with God and with one another that we become persons. Jesus preached in the synagogue, "I have come to liberate captives..."(cf. Lk. 4: 16-19). "Love is inevitably in conflict with injustice."¹²⁷ Love is against everything that impedes abundant living. The sick are often abandoned and oppressed by the injustices which are acted out on them.

We, as followers of Jesus, are invited to identify ourselves with and to speak for the sick. We need to take care of them. We are to denounce the rejection of the sick, the lack of care and services towards them. It is not enough to care in a personalized way for each person; there is a need to humanize the structures and to denounce the same society which is oppressing the sick. We are invited to organize campaigns of health, to participate in committees in favor of the sick, to collaborate with the institutions which are at the service of the sick. We are called to be good Samaritans. **"We must Stop and Help Those who are Suffering"**.

¹²⁶ P. OESTREICHER, "*Justice and Pastoral Care*", *A Dictionary of Pastoral Care*, New York: CROSSROAD, 1987, 135.

¹²⁷ P. OESTREICHER, "*Justice and Pastoral Care*", 140.

Conclusion

When we are able to enter into an experiential level, the reality of suffering, we can, better understand what the sick feel, both physically and emotionally. When suffering comes to our own flesh, it is easier to understand the struggle of others. We can write profound reflections about suffering; but it would be better if the sick themselves were those who could write what they feel and think. In my closeness with the sick, I have experienced God in their midst. It is God who has spoken to me through these sick: they have evangelized me! They have shown me the real face of God, “a God who loves and cares.” In my limited experiences with these sick, my own faith has been challenged and has grown. Nowadays, it is not difficult for me to express to them that God loves them and accompanies them in their struggles. Every Christian is called to support and accompany these suffering people.

The sick need special care. Many of them are abandoned or at least feel alone and abandoned. We Christians are invited to come closer to them. However, there is the temptation of staying far away from them. All of us as Christians are called to show love to every sick person, no matter if she/he is Christian or from another denomination or religion. We are invited to be Good Samaritans to all of those in need.

Our priests can provide essential accompaniment for the sick by dedicating part of their time in visiting, and being with the sick. These are the leaders of our Christian communities. They are called in turn to involve all the Christians in caring for the sick. They need to give support and delegation to lay ministers in order to reach out to

all the sick. We know that priests are very busy; but many times they seem to concentrate their time and energies in the administration of the sacraments. They need to come out from the buildings of the parish in order to get in touch with the reality of their people. In visiting families, they can discover that many sick people are waiting for a word of encouragement. We know that the priests cannot reach all of the families; here therefore the need for involving the whole community in the care of the sick.

We are called by Jesus to witness "LOVE", to show that the Kingdom of God is present through our concern and love. The sick are waiting for us. We need to learn to express our feelings to them. We are encouraged to tell the sick also on behalf of the community that we love them, and that God also loves and cares for them. Through us they can experience God's love.

Our prayers for the sick are not enough. We need to pray with them by being present at their homes. I want to conclude by emphasizing the words of Pope John Paul II in his Pastoral Letter "Novo Millennio Inuente:" "We must learn to see Christ especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified." "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." (Mt. 25:35-37). According to the Pope, this text is not a simple invitation to charity, but a page of Christology. It is Jesus, "the Son of God", who through his Incarnation, united himself in the same fashion with every person. If we take this into account, what we do to others, good or bad, is done to Jesus.

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