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**HUMAN SUFFERING AS A PARTICIPATION
IN THE SUFFERING OF CHRIST**

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the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Theology

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DECLARATION

I here by declare that this long essay is my original work and has not been submitted to any College or university for academic credit. All information from other sources has been fully acknowledged.


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DEDICATION

To my beloved late niece, Everlyne Kemunto and my beloved late nephew,
Justine Onyancha. My dear children, I loved you, but God loved you most.

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The concept of *Suffering* is a painful experience to deal with. It evokes and focuses on the hidden issues that we are not ready to bring out or look at. This is so because the experience is most personal and existential. Yet, suffering is a reality, fundamentally constitutive of our being. Consequently, I wish to examine suffering and how our daily suffering is only a participation in that of Jesus Christ.

During the Easter Triduum, I am always and particularly fascinated by two days: Good Friday and Easter Sunday. Here there is an attempt to reveal the mystery of the sufferings of Jesus as a way to his victory into glory. In our daily life, we encounter numerous sufferings, trials and temptations. The wonder is, can our sufferings take the same form with those of Christ? If so, are we or not justified for victory and glory on the last day? This is the concern of this study.

This essay is divided into four chapters. The first one contextualizes the topic of concern: Suffering. There is the definition of the problem in relation to what influenced me to venture into it. Then there is the framework in which I will explore my experiences. Finally, I will indicate the main intention of analyzing this particular field. Chapter two focuses on human suffering, with highlights on different forms. Chapter three dwells on the suffering of Jesus alone. I have taken a brief survey of his whole life, picking a few events depicting his suffering. The last chapter is on the teachings about Christian suffering. In other words, the expected hope while we battle with different kinds of suffering. The general conclusion emphasizes the fact that human suffering is similar to that of Jesus.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CONTEXT OF SUFFERING

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to give the framework of the whole essay. We will try to understand the meaning of suffering in relation to Christ and his believers. This will lead us to the background and limitations of exploring this matter. Then we shall briefly indicate the intention of the essay. These aspects will give us a clear focus on the question of suffering.

1.1 Definition of Suffering

The word *suffer* comes from a twofold Latin word *Sufferre*. Sub-under and Ferre-to bear.¹ Therefore, it literally means to submit to or to endure pain, affliction or death willingly or patiently. The verb suffer covers very different semantic fields in Hebrew and Greek. It can be traced back to the archaic usage compared to the present overview. The traditional society used it in Hebrew- *natan*, Greek-*aphiemi* or *epitrepo*. They all mean to let, allow, permit or grant.

Then the Greek society distinctively sustained the word *Pascho*, meaning to feel pain or anguish. It indicates a passive experience of affliction. The New Testament uses it in reference to the suffering of Jesus and those who suffer for his sake.² As far as this essay is concerned, we will go with the *Pascho* meaning of suffering.

¹ Cf. Webster's *New International Dictionary*, (Second Edition).

² Cf. GEOFFREY W., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol.4, 1998, 649

Its basic meaning is that of “experiencing something which stems from outside of myself, but which affects me either for good or ill.”³

Together with *pascho*, is a word *Pathos*. It is used to “describe the emotions of the soul as the human feelings and impulses which a person does not produce within oneself but finds already present and which one can be carried away with.”⁴ From the composite of the two terms: *Pascho* and *Pathos*, we can formulate our working definition of suffer as the painful affliction of someone, which can affect a person either physically, spiritually or both.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The question of suffering is a reality in our day-to-day experiences. This basically confirms the summary of the sayings of wisdom literature that every person born of a woman has a short life but miseries in abundance from birth to death (cf. job 14:1, Sir. 40:1-9). When I look around the world, I experience more sadness than joy. The human society today is extremely evil. On the political level for example, the leaders have concentrated on individual needs more than public needs. The same sickness has spread throughout the community, affecting everyone physically, socially, spiritually and psychologically. Consequently, everybody is suffering but at different intensities.

While suffering comes in different forms, the real anguish comes when it is perceived as torture, punishment, meaningless and hopeless. On the basis of reasoned conclusions, I am forced to wonder if Jesus Christ, the one who was tortured and died on the Cross, is the very one who rose on the third day! His glorious resurrection exhibited his victory over every evil and suffering.

³ C. BROWN, (Editor), *The International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol.3, 1979, 719

⁴ C. BROWN, 719

Now then, we who are his followers, are we guaranteed the same victory through him and in him? If so, our suffering is really a share in his suffering.

Just as “the last days of summer leads to the first days of winter, after winter comes spring, so after the Cross of Good Friday comes the Resurrection on Easter Sunday”⁵. Therefore, we have every reason to contemplate and believe that the way to the fullness of life is death and suffering leads to joyful moments in life.

1.3 Background of the Study

The event of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ remains a marvelous experience. When we attempt to look at it critically, it only ruffles the calmness of our thinking. Similarly, St Paul presents to us the wisdom behind Christ’s suffering saying, “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1Cor.1: 18). In other words, his suffering and death was only the beginning of our salvation and his glorious life with the Father. This mystery is the point of departure for this essay.

On the other hand, experience has taught me to believe that our suffering is really a participation in the suffering of Jesus. One time I was assigned for pastoral year at Dandora Parish, in the eastern part of Nairobi City, Kenya. The place was densely populated and the majority were Christians. While I was with them I noticed all sorts of sufferings. The hostile environment especially to visitors was spectacular. Murder, rape, theft and domestic violence were everyday occurrences.

Tribal differences and occasional conflicts were inevitable. I met many sick people, poor, widows and orphans. This encounter was a very painful experience and left me puzzled.

⁵ G. W. KOSICKI, *The Good News Of Suffering*, 87

Amidst that chaotic society, most people were calm and receptive of the reality. On Sunday and on other days of prayer, liturgy was lively and actively attended. The spirit of prayer, trust and faith in God were evident. Then I wondered how it could happen. Later on I realized that those people had embraced the power of the Cross. They had transcended their short-term experiences of suffering and were living in hope of a long-lasting happiness. They knew that their suffering in Dandora could come to an end. That conviction was the source of their joy regardless of the conditions. I certainly believed that their spiritual energy was by divine providence rather than a coincidence.

Another challenge that influenced my study on suffering was the encounter with several former seminarians and sisters. There is a case in particular that shocked me. I shared with a young man who was told to leave formation, a night before ordination to diaconate. It was weird! He felt belittled, exploited and mistreated. At that point, his strength was rendered weakest, his visions were blindfolded and all expectations were shut down at once. He lost everything but himself, yet life had to continue.

As dramatic as it was, he took courage and accepted the tragedy. Then he began a new life again, of marriage. His last words to me were, 'every decision, every change of life bitter or sweet, for worse or for good, opens up other opportunities for a new beginning.' His courage and message deeply moved me.

The other person was a young woman who was chased from a convent two weeks before her perpetual profession. She was angry and bitter about the whole act. She believed it was malicious and satanic. She hated those who were involved. She also lost sense of the Church matters like Sunday services and Small Christian Community prayers. According to her, the past had no security for her future.

Over the next weeks and months, she veered from shock to terror, anger to despair. In desperation, she made herself unapproachable and antisocial. The painful experience was too much that neither reason nor faith could help. Thus talking to people was only renewing her wounds.

The medicine for fire is fire (Swahili Proverb). These two cases were hurting, but I considered the opportunity to meet them a blessing in disguise. They stretched my perception of suffering into two extremes of peaceful acceptance and bitter denial. Whoever has suffered falls into either of the categories. Is this what our life is all about? As Christians, which way did Jesus take?

1.4 The Scope and Limitations

It is worth noticing that suffering is an ocean of reality, impossible to be exhausted in such an essay. “Whenever we think of the suffering, we have no choice but to limit the picture in our mind and narrow it down to some particular group of people, depending on our experience, and especially depending on our feelings.”⁶ Therefore, I will address it within the frame of my experience with some people especially in pastoral fields. I will also rely on oral tradition from the African point of view. Then I will incorporate the ideas of other people as are found in books, articles and other media of communication.

This being a scholarly work, the wordings and depth of the whole work is limited to certain standards. Besides that, the work may not be able to exploit the whole reality according to the expectations of many. Nevertheless, there will be some insights about human suffering, Christ’s suffering and the Christian view about it.

6 C. CARRETTO, *Why O Lord? The Inner Meaning of Suffering*. 3

So far, "there is still plenty of room for the investigation on the mystery of suffering. And it is right that this should be so to educate us in humility about God."⁷

1.5 The Objectives of the Essay

The basic intention of this work is to intensify the awareness and acceptance of suffering as a reality. It is to perceive suffering as a vessel, carrying us to a better end. It is also intended to look at some issues that have been held as *sacred secrets* for ages. There is a vast majority in our world today that suffers innocently. Others do not know their rights as solutions to some kinds of suffering. Still others suffer quietly due to their great fear of the Church or State authority. In this case, if one could transcend the unnecessary human conditions, one is most likely to arrive at the perception of suffering as a value rather than a punishment. This discernment is at the core of this essay.

The saying, 'better the devil you know than the angel you do not know' is applicable here. This work intends to enlighten the audience about suffering in order to deal with a reality that is known. According to Avery Dulles,

The words of suffering produce a special and sweet honey of reality. After tasting this honey, I have been convinced of the rationality of the gospel, of the reasons for so many mysterious things. I have come to believe in God because I have known him through experience. Thus, knowledge makes faith easier.⁸

This is true because of the fact that suffering will have meaning for us if we encounter it with a deeper understanding. Consequently, we shall anticipate success in our failures, joy in our sorrows and victory in our defeat.

⁷ C. CARRETTO, *Why O Lord? The Inner Meaning of Suffering*, 7

⁸ A. DULLES, *A Testimonial to Grace*. 98

Conclusion

This framework has laid the foundation for this work. It has given us a clear picture of what we are dealing with. However, recognizing it in our midst is itself a step forward, to equip us against despair. Over and above this, by the eyes of faith, we shall be able to accept ourselves as walking on the way of the cross of Jesus our forerunner. Furthermore, we shall attempt to follow him more closely, know him more deeply and love him more dearly. Hence, our cross is our blessing.

CHAPTER TWO

FORMS OF HUMAN SUFFERING

Introduction

When we are suffering, in flesh or in spirit, we are naturally inclined to weep. Anyone who suffers a great deal will eventually say, just like Job; ‘perish the day on which I was born’ (Job 3: 3). In such moments, we can easily fail to grasp the reason for life, and curse it as a hopeless misfortune. Then our cry will join the Psalmist saying, ‘my God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’ (Ps. 22:2).

This chapter views suffering from four different perspectives. They include natural, social, spiritual and psychological forms of human suffering. If we become aware of our suffering, we shall understand its meaning and value. Otherwise we shall always be casting every kind of suffering into the realms of punishment, curse and abandonment. In my analysis, I will use the terms *society* and *community* synonymously to mean the whole world, the *global village* (Marshall McLuhan).

2.1 Natural Suffering

In our world today, there are a number of events and phenomena that depict disasters beyond human control. They run from old age to evil powers that have made the universe a hostile habitat for human beings.

Consequently, we begin reflecting about the most prominent and eternal questions like, “Why does God, this so called God, permit things like this? Why does he do things the way he does? Why is he so silent in such moments? Why doesn’t he step in, in time?”

Does this God really exist? If he does, why can't he make an exception for me or for us?"⁹ Jesus Christ is the answer.

On the level of natural suffering, throughout the ages some people have experienced times of terrible drought. In the year 2004 for example, most parts of Kenya were hit hard. As a result, a great shortage of food and water for domestic use was experienced. Similarly, most people who live in deserts and semi-arid areas usually encounter famine and the related catastrophes beyond their control.

Contrary to that, some parts of the globe have suffered from heavy floods and storms. Most lowlands of Kenya experience annual floods. The worst of it is where certain countries encounter great storms that sweep away people, animals, homes and other properties. One time, the South African region faced the cyclone, Eline. Heavy rains with fierce storms swept over the coastal regions and Mozambique was severely affected. President Chissano was forced to "appeal for urgent international aid to help more than 800,000 victims of devastating floods and a cyclone."¹⁰

The horn of Africa had its share also. "The torrential rains in Somaliland washed away hundreds of huts, with up to 350 nomadic families and 3,600 animals drowned."¹¹ Some areas outside Africa suffered the same. India, Bangladesh and other southern Asian countries are reportedly facing this calamity.

In the year 2004, "floods killed more than 700 people and cost the impoverished south Asia country around \$7billion in losses to agriculture, industry and infrastructure"¹²sectors.

⁹ C. CARRETTO, *Why O Lord?: The Inner Meaning of Suffering*, 5.

¹⁰ "Chissano asks for aid." *The New Vision* (Thursday 24 February, 2000) 14.

¹¹ "Heavy Rains," *Daily Nation* (Tuesday 28 September, 2004) 20.

¹² "Floods in Asia," *Daily Nation* (Thursday 16 September, 2004) 17.

At the end of the year 2004, the same area especially Indonesia underwent the worst loss. More than 166,000 people lost their lives, and an unknown number went missing.

America did not escape the storm either. The South American coast and Caribbean islands faced it rough. "Ivan, a large and extremely dangerous storm killed 68 people weekly, causing widespread damage. It was estimated that more than 6.1 million people could be affected."¹³ No sooner did it end than another weakening tropical storm called Jeanne came. "Jeanne was blamed for at least four deaths in Florida after causing floods in Haiti the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico in which up to 2,000 people died."¹⁴ Basically, we can see the whole globe being affected by the storms and floods.

Another disaster is the earthquake. The land of the Philippines and her neighbours are commonly affected by extraordinary earthquakes, landslides and volcanic eruptions. In the year 2000, "about 30,000 villagers fled their homes on the slopes of Mayon after the volcano erupted."¹⁵ Apart from that, people who live in snowed highlands endure a lot of suffering. During winter, most of their activities are at stand still.

It is said that *disability is not inability*. There are some people in the world who were born lame, blind, deaf and with other deformities. Though no human contribution is attributed to the damage, the disable are ostracized and treated as less human. Some African families are known to kill twins immediately after birth. They are considered a source of bad omens. Children with other deformities may survive but not fully exposed to their needs as other children.

¹³ "America and the Caribbean," East African Standard (Thursday 16 September, 2004) 16.

¹⁴ "Another Storm," Daily Nation (Tuesday 28 September, 2004) 20.

¹⁵ "Filipinos in fear," The New Vision (Saturday 26 February, 2000) 14.

Together with the disabled are the aged. In the African context, old age is understood as “the favourable time for bringing life to its fulfillment. It is times when everything comes together and enables us to grasp life’s meaning and attain wisdom of heart. It is the final stage of human maturity and a sign of God’s blessing.”¹⁶ The African elders also hold that when they are old, they warm themselves with the firewood gathered in their youth (Bantu Proverb). That is, they expect to be appreciated, comforted, cared for and loved by their grandchildren. In this way, “while the human spirit has some part in the process of bodily aging, in some way it remains ever young if it is constantly turned towards eternity.”¹⁷ Therefore, they just need company and happiness

Although the old people suffer various troubles that advanced age brings, their greatest pain is lack of love and care from those expected. Nowadays in Kenya, there is a growing trend in which the *Dot-com* generation indicates a categorical generation gap with the old. It is like they have no respect or time for the old. They regard the old people as dirty, illiterate, backward, useless, a burden and so on. On the other hand, the aged know that “an old calabash is still useful (Minyanka, Mali).”¹⁸ That is, even though they lack bodily strength, they have amazing experience of life and wisdom, which the young do not have.

Ordinarily, *the older the guitar, the finer the tune*. The young do not see all this wealth in the aged. Consequently, the old die while sad, bitter and hopeless about their future. This is the erosion of the values of African culture because, in black Africa, every old person that dies is a library that burns (Hampate Ba, of Bandiagara, Mali).

¹⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *To the Elderly*, 13.

¹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *To the Elderly*, 17.

¹⁸ M. SCHIPPER, *Source of All Evil: African Proverbs and Sayings on Women*, 49.

2.2 Social suffering

The common understanding of the word *society* is “autonomous populations, whose members are subject to the same political authority, occupy a common territory and have a common culture and sense of shared identity.”¹⁹ Even though the world has different political policies, cultures and identities, fundamentally all the people are the same. Therefore,

Despite the modern civilization of the Global village, in Africa as elsewhere in the world, the spirit of peace and reconciliation is far from dwelling in the hearts of everyone. Wars, conflicts, discriminations and xenophobic attitudes still play too large a role in the world of human relations.²⁰

I am looking at our human family from the social point of view. This is the core of suffering. It is even weird to deal with it because social suffering as such “is a reality in our community that is terribly real and sometimes even atrocious and heart rending.”²¹ However, though traumatized, experience and faith has given me the courage to struggle with this reality. Otherwise I now know that suffering can be offered to God. “If God cannot eliminate suffering, even though God may have the power to do so, then we will have to do God’s task to ensure that God can remain God.”²² Due to our human frailty, we may be tempted to consider every suffering as caused by God.

Experience holds that “there is kinds of suffering that arise from God’s mysterious actions. To these we embrace and revere him with joy. But the other kinds of suffering arise from and are rooted directly in evil motives.”²³ How much pain does

¹⁹ GELLES AND LEVINE, *Sociology: An Introduction* (5th Edition) 5.

²⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 62.

²¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Healing and Hope*, 37.

²² S. HAUERWAS, *Naming the Silence: God, Medicine and the Problem of Suffering*, 48.

²³ G. W. KOSICKI, *The Good News of Suffering*, 31-32.

domestic violence cause? Some husbands batter their wives to a point of falling into a coma. Some have crippled and even killed them.

While beating their wives, they kick their children, overturn foodstuffs and chase them out of the house. The Maasai of Kenya affirm that women-beating is cultural, and therefore acceptable.

Our society is crippled politically. Most politicians were very promising and held people's hands before elections. Then after elections, they held to themselves the confidence of the majority and shattered their promises. We talk of corruption, selfishness, struggle for power and wealth. Mass wealth is in the hands of very few individuals. "Kenya's two former first families and the family of the current president are among the biggest land owners in the country. The extended Kenyatta family alone owns an estimated 500,000 acres"²⁴ The vast majority is violently subjected to abject poverty. Then "who is the biggest thief in this country? The biggest man is the biggest thief."²⁵

Since the year 2003, most parts of Africa were in the grip of a devastating famine. In fact the World Health Organization reported that, "nearly 14.4 million people including 2.3 million children under the age of 5 were at risk of starvation."²⁶ The government of Kenya, and the generous well wishers donated food and other needs for the dying. Unfortunately, some big fish took part of the donations, sold and pocketed the benefits. The British High Commissioner, Sir Edward Clay, once said that some of the Kenyan top officials eat as gluttons. The statement was swallowed with bitterness.

²⁴ "Who owns the land?" The Standard (1st October 2004) 1.

²⁵ C. MAGUA, *Son of woman in Mombasa*, 121.

Dirty politics and social stratification have plunged our society into all kinds of discriminations and division. The rich are becoming richer while the poor are becoming poorer. For example, “20 million South Africans still live in abject poverty; more than 2.2 million families have no shelter. The beneficiaries of South Africa’s apartheid era still retain their houses, cars, pensions and jobs and that apartheid’s international profiteers continue to make ever greater profits.”²⁷ In addition, the black South Africans “have been subjected to untold white racial hatred, contempt and wanton violence simply because of their blackness. Their cross and suffering raise the question as to how is God really there amid black oppression?”²⁸ This segregation causes a lot of pain and suffering.

The discriminated and “exploited group is viewed as innately inferior and is systematically denied political rights, education and economic opportunities.”²⁹ Consequently, we always experience brutal killings in the cities and elsewhere. School children are murdered after being defiled, others disappear mysteriously. While some people are killing, others are stealing and looting people’s property.

Our world is so evil that killing another person is almost becoming part of our life. “The precept, you shall not kill, is strongly negative. It indicates the extreme limit which can never be exceeded. It encourages a positive attitude of absolute respect for life. It leads to the promotion of life and to progress along the way of a love which gives, receives and serves.”³⁰ But really, who is to stop killing? Who is to preach peace? Who is to educate the culprits and rescue the victims?

²⁶ “Hunger”, New People (January-February, 2003) 8.

²⁷ “Apartheid in South Africa,” New People (January-February, 2003) 10.

²⁸ S. S. MAIMELA, *The Scandal of a Crucified World: Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering*, 36.

²⁹ GELLES and LEVIN, *Sociology*, 292-293.

³⁰ JOHNPAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 74.

In 1992, the Kenyans went through a terrible ethnic clash in which lives and properties were lost. In 1994, there was genocide in Rwanda. It was a civil war grounded on the long-standing rivalry between the two tribes, Hutu and Tutsi. One person was interviewed and said, “there was too much killing. They were neighbours killing one another. It is even difficult for us to know how many died.” Another said, “I killed 5 Tutsi children. The government soldiers told me to kill them. To save myself, I decided to do it. I killed them with a machete.”³¹ This took the form of irrational brutality and homicide. So far this story has recorded the “worst episode of genocide as the Nazis extermination of millions of Jews.”³²

The US-Iraq wars of 1991 and 2004 are un-exceptional. It was revealed that “war is now economically more advantageous than peace. The US economy would follow a stronger growth path in the event of quick Allied victory than if there is no war at all.”³³ So the US planned and began the war. The armed forces were expected to “rain some 3,000 precision-guided bombs and missiles on Iraq air defenses, trying to kill Saddam, his sons and closest followers.”³⁴ In this attack, imagine of how many innocent lives were claimed, the intention of the war and its achievements if any.

³¹ G. and LEVINE, *Sociology*, 293.

³² “*Genocide in Rwanda*,” BBC Focus on Africa (April- June, 2004) 30.

³³ “*Iraq Wars*” Newsweek (10th February, 2003) 12.

³⁴ “*Iraq Wars*” 28.

Another conflict that is worthy to remember is that of Yugoslavia and the neighbouring countries. President Slobodan Milosevic killed so many innocent people. When people were fed up with his lies and policies of destruction, “Milosevic was tossed out of office by the same forces that had kept him in power through 13 years and wars in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo: ordinary Serbs.”³⁵

In the year 2004, the worst human atrocity was in Darfur, Sudan. The people of Darfur are Muslims of Arabic and African origins, fighting each other over resources. Statistics indicate that “the Sudan government has encouraged the Arab militias to brutalize the African population.”³⁶ This hypothesis was verified when the “government war planes loaded with tons of explosives rained down death and destruction on black African people. The Arab militias-Janjaweed, burnt down the remaining villages, shot dead the men, raped the fleeing women, pulled down any standing school and other social amenities in a mindless orgy of violence that has stunned the world.”³⁷ In this we see hatred, selfishness, greedy motives and evil intentions.

Social suffering will never go without mentioning the abuses of human life. We know that a human being was created in the image and likeness of God. Out of his love for us, he shared his life with us and gave us the responsibility to propagate it. “The law of God is never detached from his love. It is always a gift meant for man’s growth and joy. It represents an essential and indispensable aspect of the gospel.”³⁸ Therefore, our life ought to be respected, cherished and celebrated at all costs.

³⁵ J. HAMMER, “*Free at Last*” Newsweek (16th October, 2000) 12.

³⁶ “*War in Darfur*” The East African (June 28-July 4, 2004) 9-10.

³⁷ “*The Sudan*” The Seed (24th. September, 2004) 12.

³⁸ J. PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 71.

Nowadays, the contrary is true. Life is mishandled, tampered with and rejected. People are living with the famous slogan that *life has lost its meaning*. I guess we confuse whether life in itself has lost value, or we have lost sight of the value in life. Otherwise, fundamentally life will never lose its value. Jesus said to Thomas, 'I am the way and the truth and the life' (Jn. 14:6). Therefore, if life loses its value, then Jesus who is life, will be valueless and our lives too.

Some people hate life by its very nature. They conceive and kill it instantly through abortion. Some countries have legalized abortion. Others are negotiating about the legal terms for it. But the stand of the Church is loud and clear. "Human life is sacred and inviolable at every moment of existence. Abortion together with infanticide is considered as an unspeakable crime."³⁹ The human life begins at conception. Getting rid of the living cells of a human being is getting rid of that particular human life.

Furthermore, the Church holds that "among all the crimes which can be committed against life, procured abortion has the characteristics making it particularly serious and deplorable."⁴⁰ As long as the ultimate moral teaching remains, those who do it must be aware that "human life involves the creative action of God and it remains for ever in a special relationship with the creator, who is its sole end."⁴¹

Evidently, abortion is done either openly or secretly. In Kenya, the practice is illegal. It is done secretly, but one day it was beyond hiding. On 26th May 2004, 15 aborted babies were found dumped in a Nairobi river. The discovery caused a lot of pain and embarrassment to people of all calibers.

³⁹ Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 51.

⁴⁰ P. PAUL VI, *Humane vitae*, 79.

⁴¹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2258.

The trauma and shock worsened when the minister for health confirmed that “there are 300,000 illegal abortions performed in Kenya each year, 90% of these are on women under 25. Kenyatta Hospital (The biggest National Hospital) alone deals with between 40-60 failed abortion attempts every day with most patients being adolescents and young women.”⁴² This analysis was so hurting.

On the burial day of the 15, the Archbishop of Nairobi remarked, “today we are celebrating the martyrdom of the innocent souls that were sacrificed through abortion.”⁴³ They were massacred at a tender age for they had no mouth to speak and hands to fight for themselves. I believe the whole society, even their parents suffered greatly.

Some days later, the painful wounds were renewed when 20 other babies were discovered in one of the dumping sites of Nairobi city. The information officer was overwhelmed and expressed his sorrow saying, “when the issue of dead foetuses dumped at a rubbish mound cropped up again, I could hardly resist the temptation of cursing the perpetrators silently and wishing that their souls rot in hell.”⁴⁴ As if that was not enough, that very week most of the radio stations aired the sad news, that an abandoned baby was found in the city center. The message was crowned by another worse discovery. One morning, “dogs dragged a foetus to the ministry of agriculture headquarter and started feasting on it, as employees watched in horror.”⁴⁵

⁴² C. NGILU, “*Aborted babies discovered*” The Tablet (June 5th. 2004) 29.

⁴³ R. NDINGI, “*A dignified sending off*,” National Mirror (June 5, 2004) no.15, 8.

⁴⁴ “*A painful fact*,” East African Standard (Wednesday 15 September, 2004) 7.

⁴⁵ “*Another Incident of Abortion*,” Daily Nation (Thursday 16 September, 2004) 2.

The worst evil that can be committed to a child is to deny it to be a child. The absurdity intensifies when you hear that “Romania has released its abortion statistics for the year 2003 that abortions still exceed live births.” Besides that, “the abortion rate is horrific in Russia, where six out of ten pregnancies end in abortion.”⁴⁶ God forgive us!

African history tells us about the slave trade. It was thought to be finished, but history is repeating itself today. Human trade and child trafficking are on the rise. In Kenya for instance, children are transported from the mainland to the coastal regions for sale. Some children are sold while too young to notice the difference. This is evident in the case of *Miracle Babies* in Kenya. Here, “mothers have tales of children disappearances, swaps and even deaths at Pumwani (largest maternity hospital in East Africa).”⁴⁷ Archbishop Gilbert Deya, a Kenyan preacher based in London, claimed that they were born by miracles from God.

One of the reasons of covering the private parts is because they are passages of life. Some sick people are fond of seducing children to undress. Then they stare, touch or take photos of their nakedness. The present technology of media exhibits this evil. This is a deadly abuse because it violates the sense and respect of life.

Another epidemic that is on the increase is connected to sexual abuse. It is experienced in forms of sexual harassment of employees, students or any other junior person in the society. The boss demands for intimacy and promises instant favours. Since most of the African morals are eroded, minors and women are always subjected to dangers like un-consented sex, erotic touches, and funny remarks about their physical appearances and so on.

⁴⁶ P. LAWLER, “*Abortions*,” *The Catholic World Report* (2004) 13.

⁴⁷ “*Miracle Babies*,” *Daily Nation* (Friday 10th September, 2004) 11.

Still another clique of people in our society has opted for voluntary prostitution for money and other gifts. In prostitution there is no element of love or desire for life that is involved. There is no mutual love, transmission of life or satisfaction, but personal gain. Concerning the act of sex, "its true meaning is spoilt, lost, destroyed and alienated."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, one is only selling the body and the other is buying pleasure.

There are also cases of involuntary prostitution. Some rich people take young men and women to their homes in the name of employment. In these homes, they have big and hidden rooms where they hide their employees. "The bosses then connect several other people to come and use them for sexual pleasure. All payments are made to the bosses."⁴⁹ A human being is utterly exploited, misused and robbed of his or her value. They are permanently crippled, destroyed and possibly cut off from humanity.

Similarly, one time I did an apostolate in Kibera slum, Nairobi (one of the biggest slums in the world). I encountered several families in which parents were confining their daughters in the house. Then men were invited within and without the slum to come and exploit those girls sexually. The payments were made to the parents.

Away from that, homosexuality and lesbianism is another degrading act in our society today. Those involved are arguing that it is a natural orientation of their being. They are demanding for their rights as other members of the family. They have even formed associations through which they can propagate their doctrines. Some countries have already acknowledged their demands.

⁴⁸ OSWALD HIRMER, *The Gospel and the Social Systems*, 58.

⁴⁹ L. MAMBO, "Employment," Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) radio, (Sunday 24th October 2004).

“Lithuanian government has accepted a proposal pushed by the international gay and lesbian association to lower the age of consent for homosexual sex acts with boys to 14 years old.”⁵⁰

In other places, gay marriages have been conducted. Surprisingly enough, some church ministers are gay and are allowed to lead the people of God. Mr. John Kerry, the 2004 presidential candidate of United States promised to defend and promote gay rights if he would win the elections. All in all, the psychological genesis of homosexuality remains largely unexplained. Sacred Scripture presents homosexual acts as of grave depravity. Likewise, tradition describes such acts as intrinsically disordered, for they are contrary to the natural law.

However, to those who do not choose the orientation, the Catholic Church holds that they must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. Otherwise if they are just for sexual gratification, they are closed to the gift of life, love and complementarity. Such a relationship is considered against nature and negative since “to deliberately obstruct the divine will, as manifested in nature, is absolutely and incontrovertibly evil,”⁵¹

Concerning human rights, experience has taught us to believe that *the seriousness of an offence is measured by the dignity of the person offended*. It seems, some people have rights while others do not, depending on one’s status of life. Human right are almost equated to authority over the weak, the rich over the poor, elites over the illiterates, men over women and elders over children. In the World Charter, “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.

⁵⁰ P. LAWLER, *The Catholic World Report*, 13.

⁵¹ A. DULLES, *A Testimonial to Grace*, 55.

They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in the spirit of brotherhood: (Universal Declaration of Human Rights-UDHR, Article 1)⁵² It implies that man was created with rights and dignity as gifts and constitutive of his being. These gifts are inalienable, unless with an intention to harm one's life.

The African philosophy of socialism concurs with the universal declaration. It states clearly that "at the basis of socialism, is a belief in the oneness of man and common historical destiny of mankind, which is human equality. The purpose of socialism is the service of man regardless of colour, size, shape, skill, ability or anything else."⁵³ So much has been said about human rights and dignity. Nevertheless, "various forms of discrimination continually reappear. Human rights are still too often disregarded if not scoffed at, or else they receive only formal recognition."⁵⁴

Our contemporary world is a *class society*. Class in the Marxist sense implies the division between the rich, fortunate, powerful minority (Bourgeoisie). and the poor, unfortunate, weak majority (Proletariat). Human rights are exercised and experienced differently on the basis of these classes. The powerful live as though they own the rights, while the weak live as though they have no rights and as if they are less human.

The Swahili proverb elaborates it deeper saying, 'Kamba ukatikia papovu', *the rope snaps where it is weakest*. Our society as the rope, the minority are privileged by the power they exert over the majority. Thus like a broken rope, there are divisions. The abuse of human rights can be noticed in issues like the life conditions of prisoners and refugees. I know of a national prison in Uganda that was meant for 450 inmates.

⁵² "Rights for all," Leadership (No.378, March 1999) 18.

⁵³ J. NYERERE, *Ujamaa: Essays on Socialism*, 38.

⁵⁴ P. PAUL VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, 20.

By the year 2000, it had more than 1,000 people. In Kenya, one of the prisons “which was built to accommodate a maximum of 500 prisoners, is currently holding more than 1,400 people. One room is a 3ft by 6ft box, just large enough to place a single bed.”⁵⁵ In such rooms, more than ten people are thrown. Refugee camps are congested and people suffer diseases and hunger. Women and children are repeatedly raped and assaulted. Living conditions are just beyond the human standards.

During the *Kanungu* cultic killings in Uganda, several mass graves were discovered at different places. Then unprotected prisoners were used to exhume the bodies. In one of the occasions, the government was quoted “using bare-foot prisoners to exhume about 400 bodies.”⁵⁶ Elsewhere prisoners are used to do odd jobs and services that are not meant for them, as part of their punishment.

In the history of the African Traditions, women were considered the property of men. They were owned and oriented towards listening, submission and obedient. Women could not talk in meetings and could not become community leaders. They had no say in matters of marriage. They were picked and had to offer the required services irrespective of their will or desire. Men were unfaithful to their wives, but none complained since men held of themselves as naturally polygamous.

These traits of segregation can be spotted in our society today. Recently a Nigerian Muslim girl, Hajira Ibrahim conceived out of wedlock. Then she was sentenced to death by stoning but not the man. Basically, the Africans did not intend to diminish the value of women, but it was held respective that way.

⁵⁵ “*The Prisons*,” Daily Nation (Tuesday 28 September, 2004) 2.

⁵⁶ F. OSIKE, “*Kanungu Prisoners fall sick*,” The New Vision (Thursday 24 March, 2000) 1.

From the Biblical point of view, the Jewish traditions held their values too. In the book of Judges 19-20, a woman is delivered into the hands of abusers so as to save the man. Genesis 19 presents Lot who is prepared to protect his visitors at the cost of his own daughters, when men of Sodom want to violate them. As awful as they are, the two stories are fundamentally meant for the value of hospitality and option for the lesser evil. Therefore, both the African and Jewish traditions had their own values and reasons for such events. Today, such responses will be regarded as violation of human (Women) rights, intolerable injustice, exploitation and alienation of one's humanity and dignity.

In his analysis of child psychology, Erik Erickson believed that to mutilate the spirit of a child was the deadliest of all sins. Nowadays rape cases are common. The rapists may be strangers, parents, neighbours or relatives of any degree. Sometimes, men above 40 years defile children below ten. Some young girls are forced to marry very old men in the name of respect for culture.

In February 27, 2004, the US conference of Catholic Bishops released a report indicating that "over 4,000 American Catholic priests have been charged with the sexual abuse of children in the past 50 years."⁵⁷ Amazingly, the same problem was detected in some European countries. "Bishops of England and Wales face their first major test on sex abuse cases in allegations made against priests and lay workers in the church. There is a string of high-profile sex scandal involving pedophile priests."⁵⁸ In the year 2004, "Bishop Kurt Krenn of Australia was asked by the Pope to resign. He, among many was known of sex and child pornography scandals in his diocese."⁵⁹

⁵⁷ P. LAWLER, *The Catholic World Report*, 28.

⁵⁸ P. LAWLER, *The Catholic World Report*, 31.

⁵⁹ "Sex Scandals," *The Standard* (Friday 1 October, 2004) 22.

Over and above, there was a research that was done globally. It indicated that “up to the year 1990, 2 Cardinals, 5 Archbishops, 9 Bishops and an unknown number of priests have been asked to resign due to the abuse of children, either themselves or securing those who were directly involved.”⁶⁰ In this scenario, sex scandals remain largely a hidden reality. A few cases have surfaced, but what is behind the curtains is horrible. Be it erotic talks, fondling, exhibitionism or full act, some clergy have indicated erosion of morality in matters of sexuality.

Of course an old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb. This is for the simple reason that she will think you are attacking her indirectly. If one is not a player, let him be a peaceful spectator. On the 28th September, 2004, there was “a case scheduled in the civil court of a priest who abused a 14 year old girl in Bondo District, Nyanza Province”⁶¹ of western Kenya. Similar cases have gone silent whereby priests have survived narrowly from the wrath of enraged husbands, accused of having affairs with their wives. Some priests use parish subordinate staffs on condition to save their jobs. Others use young girls and supply a few gifts in return. At the same time, a number of abortions have been procured and hidden. To such people, their rights are confiscated and manipulated.

Industries and other places of work are arenas of violation of human rights. The workers are exploited by working for long hours, hard jobs regardless of gender, harsh conditions and relationships and very low wages. Besides that, we have child labour. Some rich people use children to work. They seek for those who do not know their rights and terms of payment and subject them to hard labour for long hours each day.

⁶⁰ H.LAGAN, *Pastoral Psychology*: Class notes, 2004.

⁶¹ Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC), (Tuesday 14 September, 2004).

In a nutshell, “it is most unfortunate however that with progress in socio-economic development, we (Society) have permitted prosperity to destroy the essential factors and social values which dignify man. At the end, all sections of the society cannot enjoy the fruits of the resultant progress.”⁶² Consequently, social suffering has become the foundation of all forms of suffering.

2.3 Spiritual Suffering

People have been tortured and killed by others due to their faith. But others have suffered within themselves because of the fact that the principles of their faith have been violated. The faithful usually are scandalized and suffer internally when their leaders fall. To this regard, spiritual suffering can be for the saints, but also for the common believer when his or her faith is challenged or abused.

Persecution of the Church claimed many lives over the ages. Some of those who died have been canonized as saints simply because of *why* they did what they did, rather than *what* they did. Others though not canonized are recognized for their suffering. In the Old Testament, we have the phenomenon of Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego in the burning fiery furnace (Dan 3:12-30). Another scene is of the mother and her seven sons (2Macc 7:1-42). By faith they courageously expressed their inner conviction. They chose death rather than to break their relationship with the living God.

On the other hand, persecution is persistently existential in a different sense. In the year 2000, the government of Uganda was warned by a man called Joseph Kibwetere, about the end of the world that could be on January 1st, 2000. He was a leader of a cult called *The Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God*.

⁶² Kenya Medical Women Association (KMWA), *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 6.

It was found out that, "the self-styled prophet Joseph Kibwetere, ex-roman Catholic priests, Dominic Kataribaabo, Gredein Mwerinde, John Kamagara and two ex-nuns"⁶³ spearheaded. This cult sprung up against the teaching of the Catholic Church. Its leaders indoctrinated a crowd of people and assembled them in a building. Saying that they had a short cut to heaven, they set the house into ablaze and more than 600 people died. The cult was also "responsible for the murder of more than 1,000 of its followers including their children."⁶⁴

The Ugandan cult "was linked to an Australian doomsday group, *The Marian Workers of Atonement*, headed by William Kamm."⁶⁵ Similarly, "in 1978, in the middle of a south American jungle, Guyana, 914 people were murdered using cyanide. The cult was called, *The People's Temple*, headed by James Warren Jones."⁶⁶ It is evident that these atrocities have happened in different parts of the globe.

It is worth noticing that they have certain common elements shared by all. They claim the apparition of Mary. Before mass suicide, several individuals are murdered first. They are very rich, but the source of their wealth remains a mystery. They stress about the last days and preparation for heaven before mass suicide. Most of their followers are from the lower social strata.

As far as spiritual suffering is concerned, all those who are killed are in search for salvation. They are lured to death in the name of religion. Besides that, their leaders are very prominent people, highly educated and well connected.

⁶³ "Cult Suicide," Sunday Vision (Sunday 19 March, 2000) 2.

⁶⁴ M. MUGISHA, "Mwerinde's Man Speaks out," The New Vision (Friday 7 April, 2000) 34.

⁶⁵ "Linked to Australian Cult," The New Vision (Saturday 22, 2000) 25.

⁶⁶ J. NAM, "Global Conspiracy," The New Vision (Thursday 30 March, 2000) 23.

So, why would such people who preached the Good News of salvation, justice, love and life after death plot to kill a multitude of naïve people? In such cases, the Catholic faithful in particular, remain astounded and ashamed of their religion and leaders.

Further spiritual suffering is experienced in the victims of atheistic propaganda in China, and the conflicts between the Muslim fundamentalists and other religions. There is persecution that aims at individuals. John Paul II has said; “a great number of consecrated persons who live in difficult situations even suffer persecution and martyrdom.”⁶⁷ A case in point is Father John Anthony Kaiser, American Mill Hill missionary in Kenya. To his death, the then cabinet minister was mentioned to have troubled him. “Father Kaiser had expressed fears for his life, saying that the minister was angry with him.”⁶⁸ Kaiser died defending justice of the weak.

There is a rebel leader, Joseph Kony of the *Lord's Resistance Army* (LRA) in northern Uganda. He was brought up as a Catholic. Then he decided to use his faith to persecute the whole country. Then there are cases of interdenominational discrimination. I know of Nyanchwa Seventh Day Adventist (S.D.A) Secondary School, in Kisii District, Kenya. Admission and precedence is given to the main religion. The non-SDAs are not allowed to practice their prayers or private devotions like wearing a rosary.

On the ground level, spiritual suffering can be experienced in the relationship between the Church leaders and the believers. Father Peter Kiarie of Nairobi confirmed this in his homily. ‘The rot we see in churches and among religious leaders has always been there.’ Religious leaders have their own struggles. In the process of trying to negotiate them, they enter into conflicts within themselves and with their people.

⁶⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Vita Consecrata*, 26.

⁶⁸ P. LAWLER, *The Catholic World Report*, 20.

“The Anglican Church is also reeling under the rot because of corruption and love of money by the leaders.”⁶⁹ The ultimate cause for spiritual suffering among the Catholic leaders is summed up by Alexander Schmemmann (Theologian):

The tragedy of theological education lies in the fact that young people who seek priesthood are consciously or unconsciously seeking this separation, power, and rising above the laity. Their thirst is strengthened and generated by the whole system of theological education of *clericalism*.⁷⁰

Every ‘-ism’ has its own setbacks. Clericalism therefore is a priestly culture with immense status, privileges and unearned or unquestioned respect. It is the conscious or unconscious concern to promote the particular interest of the clergy and to protect the privileges and power that have been accorded to those in the clerical state. Different people enter into religious life with different motives. Some wish to be away from their family matters and other forms of life. Still others seek status of authority and honour. Thus, they choose priesthood not for its very value, but out of anxiety. Unfortunately, this kind of priesthood can be described as an incredible call to an inadequate person to do an impossible role for an indefinite time.

The 21st Century is also a period of remarkable spiritual trials and temptations. We are torn between faith and science. The pulling power of science tends to be more attractive than that of faith. The present generation goes by the ideologies of *modernization*, *westernization* and *globalization*. The young people are at peace when referred to as *Dot-coms* and *Millennialists*. These ideologies have geared some people to think that they are self-creating and do not need God. What can we say? “The characteristic of every authentic missionary life is the inner joy that comes from faith.

⁶⁹ C. NJONJO, “*Corruption in the Church*,” Daily Nation (Monday 4 October, 2004) 14.

⁷⁰ H. LAGAN, Pastoral Psychology Class Notes, 2004.

In a world tormented and oppressed by so many problems, a world tempted to pessimism, the one who proclaims the Good News must be a person who has found true hope in Christ.”⁷¹ Otherwise we shall become spiritual dwarfs and suffer the consequences.

2.4 Psychological Suffering

A person is an integral being. Thus, if one aspect is affected, the whole person will automatically be affected. All forms of human suffering in one way or another affect the person psychologically. Some people have undergone a serious experience, leading to medical attention, others occasional psychological breakdowns that heal with time. Be it ordinary or clinical, psychological suffering is a painful encounter. Any form of child abuse and neglect affect deeply the psychological makeup of a person. Sexual and domestic violence have the worst psychological effect on the people in question.

“During the war, gang rape is used by military as an instrument for delivering a psychological impact. So, women’s bodies are used to relief the pain.”⁷² In Kenya today, some men are raping women and children, harming and humiliating them mercilessly. Those sexually assaulted incur unwanted pregnancies, physical injuries, diseases or psychic trauma. The offense is so devastating that their response to life and behaviours are definitely altered.

Patriarchal societies tolerate male dominance over women. Hence, husbands can beat their wives without remorse. However much this act can be culturally accepted, women and children must suffer psychologically.

⁷¹ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 151.

⁷² “*Women Bodies used*,” *The EastAfrican* (December 6-12, 2004) Part 2.

“There is nothing as psychologically damaging to a child as seeing their mother being brutalized by the father.”⁷³ The social impact on the child is very significant.

Gender discrimination is another great source of psychological suffering. Families assign roles and duties to their children on the basis of being male or female. Female children are often taken to be weaker. As they grow, girls believe of themselves as lower class human beings. Some even miss education and suffer awkward situations simply because they are women. At marriage, they are taken as properties of men. Therefore, throughout their lives, women are forced into a psychological battle between who they really are and who the society thinks they should be.

Statistics have indicated that those people suffering from terminal illness like cancer and AIDS die earlier than they could because of psychological suffering. In the cases of AIDS, some family members and relatives “reject their members who are sick by chasing them out or by neglecting to care properly for them or by making them feel guilt for getting sick.”⁷⁴ However much can be said about AIDS patients, in fact psychological suffering is for both the infected and the affected.

Death is a universal reality that marks the destiny of humanity. This reality transcends the ordinary level of understanding and affects us psychologically. That is why, in war areas like the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, the trauma caused by that horror is yet to heal. In Sudan, many people were brutally murdered, abducted, raped and others became refugees. “The family values have been badly eroded, leaving the war generation culturally impoverished and lacking identity.”⁷⁵ Such people suffer most psychologically.

⁷³ Kenya Medical Women’s Association (KMWA): *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 20.

⁷⁴ H. SLATTERY, *HIV/AIDS A call to Action: Responding as Christians*, 25.

⁷⁵ I. M. Dau, *Suffering and God: A Theological Reflection on War in Sudan*, 53.

All and above, different people have suffered psychologically in many different ways. Who can doubt the torture of barren women and impotent men? Look at qualified people in different spheres of life who have no jobs. While those dismissed from religious formation suffer intense stresses and confusion, married partners suffer the same when they divorce.

Conclusion

This topic is wider because the forms of human suffering make the backbone of the whole essay. Some sufferings are not caused or controlled by human power. On the other hand, our society is sinful because we have sinned and thus caused our suffering. Therefore, the whole human community ought to attempt to grasp the mystery of suffering so as to understand ourselves, others and God. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that 'the ultimate challenge of a person is not where he stands in times of comfort and convenience, but where he stands in times of challenge and controversy'. This is our task now as we live in a suffering society.

CHAPTER THREE

FORMS OF CHRIST'S SUFFERING

Introduction

The son of man must suffer greatly and be rejected [...] and be killed, and rise after three days (Mt 8:31). This is the main aspect of this chapter and the pivot of the whole essay. According to McKenzie, the title *Son of man* in the gospels refers to the human condition of Jesus. It is linked with some features of his humanity exhibited in abilities like eating and speaking. The title is also associated with Jesus' passion and death, in which his humanity is most explicit.⁷⁶ That though he was God, Jesus voluntarily deprived himself of that state. He took the form of a slave and became like us in everything but sin. With humility, he accepted to suffer a severe death on the cross (Phil. 2: 7-8). In this way, God descended into humanity and humanity ascended into divinity through Christ.

Christ was both human and divine. While on earth, he underwent all forms of suffering as man. He at different moments experienced the pains of his passion like loneliness, body weakness, self-pity, sharp physical and mental pain, disappointments, failure and shame among others. His suffering ended at death on the cross. Just like his death, "violent death at the hands of one's fellowmen was a more common risk in that world than it has yet become in ours."⁷⁷ But by his resurrection, suffering and death were conquered. He opened a new page of hope for our destiny after suffering, whereby, in his victory, our victory is pre-ordained.

⁷⁶ Cf. J. MCKENZIE, "The Son of man must suffer", in *The Mystery of Suffering and Death*, ed. T. J. Michael, New York 1973, 32.

⁷⁷ J. MCKENZIE, "The Son of man must Suffer", in *The mystery of Suffering and Death*, ed. T. J. Michael, New York 1973, 34.

3.1 His Whole Life

Right from his birth to his death he is at peace, though there is no record of a moment that Jesus laughed. But in most occasions he his sorrowful. Our life today takes the same move too. Consequently, I consider the understanding of Christ's suffering in relation to ours of paramount importance. If we do, then we shall understand the suffering of God and the whole of creation. Otherwise "it becomes theologically incoherent to keep referring to the impassibility of God upon creation. If God is impassionate, then he is a masochist, rejoicing of the suffering of humanity."⁷⁸ Contrary to that, Jesus is God, he lived and suffered. Therefore, our God is a living and suffering God.

In the incarnation narrative, Jesus was born just as any other baby and was laid in a manger (Lk 2:6-7). Being born in a manger clearly suggests that he was born into some difficulties like poverty. His birth conforms to that of the poor, weak and the sinners. The harsh conditions worsened when King Herod wanted to kill him and all other children. So the family had to escape to Egypt (Mt 2:13). "The jealousy of Herod made him an exile from the first month of his childhood."⁷⁹ This was difficult for the whole family too.

The flight into Egypt and the massacre of the innocents "manifest the opposition between darkness and light, Christ's whole life was lived under the sign of persecution."⁸⁰ When the time came for the family to go back to the land of Israel, Archelaus, king of Judea was still a threat. So they went to Galilee, to a town called Nazareth (Mt 2:22-23). The political situation made Jesus a wonderer at a tender age.

⁷⁸ L. RICHARD, *What Are They Saying About the Theology of Suffering?* 125.

⁷⁹ A. DULLES, *A Testimonial to Grace*, 78.

⁸⁰ The Catechism of the Catholic Church (C.C.C.), No.530, 149.

While in Nazareth, the baby Jesus is presented in the Temple and his life is hidden for years. He re-appears briefly with the doctors of the law in the Temple and his hidden life resumes till baptism. In his hidden life, Jesus grew filled with wisdom and fear of God (Lk 2:40). All and above, the Palestinian village life was just as difficult as of any other village. There could be primitive and crowded houses, sub-standard nourishment, dusty and muddy seasons. There were frightening wars and harsh administration of the law, cruelty of man-to-man, injustice and so on.

Born in a poor family, he must have felt hungry, sick, tired and shame from the contemptuous attitudes of the rich. As a son of the carpenter, he must have carried heavy logs and timber. He must have helped the father to do woodwork. In a nutshell, like any other ordinary man of his time, Jesus “had a sturdy body which was accustomed to prolonged physical exertion and lack of adequate food. There was no comfort in his life, and some things he could endure better than we can.”⁸¹ Amidst all these difficulties, he was calm and appreciative.

Immediately after baptism, he is led to the desert to be tempted in solitude. For forty days he ate nothing and he was hungry (Lk 4:1-2). He tasted the pain of hunger and weakness of the body. He suffered the humiliation of temptations and tribulations. Out of that experience, Jesus was kind and hospitable to the sick and the sinners. His “ability to sympathize with sinners is based precisely on the fact that he knew the temptation as they do, and was acquainted with the trials of human nature.”⁸² Whatever Jesus taught and gave was all that he is, has and does.

⁸¹ J. MCKENZIE, “The Son of man must Suffer”, in *The Mystery of Suffering and Death*, 34.

⁸² M. BOURKE, “The Epistle to the Hebrews,” 60:28, 929 of NJBC.

As we have seen, Jesus was both human and divine. “The Israelites missed that point and overstressed his humanity. Therefore, throughout his public ministry, Jesus was viewed as a sign of contradiction.”⁸³ He went round teaching and healing the sick (Mt 4:23-24). “He performed the Messianic signs which bore witness that he was the Son of God, but the very signs became occasions for offence. He was even accused of acting by the power of demons (Mk 3:22).”⁸⁴

The more he moved the more hostile the Roman authority became. They perceived Jesus as acting against the existing political, religious and social structures. He went to Nazareth his hometown and there he was rejected (Mk 6:1-6). He chose to go against the wishes of his relatives and villagers who wanted him to conform to the traditions, rather than to disgrace the will of his Father.

As he approached the critical moments of fulfilling the Father’s will, Jesus predicted his passion to the twelve (Lk. 9:18-27). He painfully elaborated what awaited him as the suffering Messiah and those who would choose to follow him. The gospel of Mark states that “the Son of man *must* suffer and die. This stress points to the fact that in the passion of Christ, it is the will of God that is to be fulfilled.”⁸⁵ On the other hand, although Jesus was troubled by the kind of death he would die (Jn 12:27), he expressed with tremendous effort his willingness to face it. He accepted to suffer and die if it was pleasing to his Father and to actualize his passionate love for humanity.

⁸³ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, No.576.

⁸⁴ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, No.548.

⁸⁵ E. LOHSE, *History of the Suffering and Death of Jesus Christ*, 20.

Therefore, Jesus is “a man who is well aware of the pain involved in his decision, but who has refused to allow that pain to divert him from his course,”⁸⁶ although he showed some weaknesses.

In his passion and resurrection accounts, “the gospel of John presents the whole life of Jesus as his passion, through which he is glorified.”⁸⁷ The chief priests, elders and high priest have plotted to kill Jesus (Mt 26:1-5). Satan has also engulfed Judas Iscariot and he is ready to co-operate with the authority for money (Lk 22:1-6). Judas betrayed Jesus through the betrayal kiss (Lk 22:47-48), then he is arrested and “reluctantly Pilate finally yields to the wishes of the people [...] and agrees to the scourging and crucifixion of Jesus.”⁸⁸ Jesus is crucified on the cross (Mk 15:24) and at three o’clock he gives a loud cry and breathes his last (Mk 15:37).

The plan of God in Jesus does not end at fear and death, but Jesus is risen (Mk 16:1-8) and returns to the glory of the Father (Mk 16:19). His whole life then is precisely an offering to the Father (Jn 6:38-39). Basically, Jesus knew that he could not save humanity through a triumph or kingship, but through the shame of the cross. “His violent death was not the result of chance in an unfortunate coincidence of circumstances, but it is part of the mystery of God’s plan.”⁸⁹ However, “by overcoming death through his own death and resurrection, Jesus redeemed man and changed him into a new creation.”⁹⁰ Therefore, he transformed it through his own sacrifice out of love. This is our hope today.

⁸⁶ J. L. MCKENZIE, “The Son of man must suffer”, in *The Mystery of Suffering and Death*, 35.

⁸⁷ C. BROWN (Editor), *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Theology*, Vol.3, 723.

⁸⁸ E. LOHSE, *History of the Suffering and Death of Jesus Christ*, 92.

⁸⁹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, No.599, 167.

⁹⁰ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, No.7, 324.

3.2 Inner Suffering

We have seen that “Christ’s whole life is a mystery of redemption, above all through the blood of his cross.”⁹¹ So, within his whole life, there are experiences in which he suffered deeply within himself. These experiences are evident when he is troubled emotionally, mentally or spiritually. They happen especially when his inner desire of love is contradicted or misconceived. As a human being, he possibly struggled with the problem of interpersonal relationship ranging from minor irritations to motives of murder. But he mastered himself so that he had an emotional balance and self control.

During his baptism (Mk 1:9-11), Jesus was declared the son of God. Then immediately he was taken to the desert to be tempted. He suffered a lot by the fact that as the Son of God, he was thinking on how to do the will of his Father. Amidst that, his feelings and thoughts wandered beyond the realms of his Father’s will. Hence, he had to fight hard to retain the original plan of salvation.

In his public ministry, he encountered many sick people, the poor, beggars and sinners. He was compassionate to them and moved by their faith, he granted their needs. The term *compassion* here simply means, co-suffering. He fed the five thousand for he saw the vast crowd, and his heart was moved with pity for them, they were like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36; Mk 6:34). His friend Lazarus died and people were weeping. He was perturbed, deeply troubled and wept (Jn 11:33-35). It is clear that out of his love and generosity of heart, Jesus offered himself to satisfy the spiritual and physical needs of his people.

⁹¹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church, No.517, 146.

Besides that, Jesus was very sorrowful for the fall of Jerusalem (Mt 23:37; Lk 19:41). Other accounts indicate to us particular incidents that Christ described with feelings. In the parable of the weeds among the wheat (Mt 13:24-30), he describes the bewildered desperation of a man who sees that his wheat has turned out to be mostly weeds. In the parable of the lost sheep (Mt 18:12-13), we find the weariness of the shepherd who finds at the end of the day that one sheep is missing. Then for the jobless, a vivid picture of men whose life depends on the wages of the day, but here they are in the market from dawn to evening and there is no work for them (Mt 20:1-6).

Furthermore, the text of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-32) has a man who lies robbed and bleeding in the ditch, and sees those who would help him pass on their way. In the parable of the lost coin (Lk 15:8-9), we find the anguish of a woman so poor that she must sweep the whole house just to find the coin. The rich man and Lazarus have a shocking relationship by contrast (Lk 16:19-22). The starving beggar is dying at the foot of a man who is contented of himself, eats to the fill and whose desires are satisfied.

Towards his passion, Jesus reacts in a very human way. The traitor is revealed as being with him at table (Mk 14:8-21). He is deeply troubled by the fact that those closest to us can hurt us more than those far away. Being aware of what is ahead of him; Jesus is overwhelmed by sentiments and fears that are easily noticed. Consequently, he asked in his prayer that he might not undergo that suffering. At Gethsemane (Mk 14:33-36), Jesus is quoted as more deeply anguished, distressed and fearful than anywhere else. "The anticipation of the passion was so entirely human that the modern man finds it embarrassing,"⁹²

⁹² J. L. MCKENZIE, "The Son of man must Suffer", in *The Mystery of Suffering and Death*, 34.

While on the cross, he looked down and saw his mother (Jn 19:26) suffering on his account. As he was about to die, he cried out “my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”(Mk 15:34). He deeply felt lonely and abandoned by his Father and everybody due to the desolation of the cross. Generally speaking, Christ’s reaction to the crisis of his passion was human and normal. He knew the pain which grips a person who has spent much time and labour on something which he believes is important, only to be ignored or frustrated by mere selfishness or hatred.

3.3 Physical Suffering

As a human being, “Jesus is the second Adam, the progenitor of grace, and was destined through the fruit of the tree of the cross to repair the damage brought by the first Adam.”⁹³ In his journey to our salvation, Jesus did not only suffer spiritually, but physically too. “The Lord willed his cross, he could have kept it away, but he willed it out of love, love for us as the gift of grace and salvation, courage and serenity.”⁹⁴ Therefore, from the beginning, he lovingly accepted to endure all forms of pain, sorrow, affliction and shame that accompanied his death.

While he was in the desert, for forty days he ate or drank nothing (Lk 4:2). He was extremely hungry and his body became tired and weak. The time came for his public ministry in which he moved from place to place proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. He possibly walked through the heavy heat of the sun and cold rains. Some of his errands were up the hills and down the valleys. Some were through the bushes, plains and rocks, and others along the shores of the lake. In one of the occasions he got very tired and slept in a boat with his disciples.

⁹³ A. DULLES, *A Testimonial to Grace*, 76.

⁹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Healing and Hope*, 150.

A great storm threatened their lives as they were sailing (Lk 8:22-23). Regardless of what mode of transportation he engaged in, Jesus must have experienced harsh conditions, tiredness and weakness of the body.

The greatest moment of his physical suffering is fully exhibited in his passion. More than being exhausted, the agony on the Mount of Olives resulted into sweats of blood (Lk 22:44). This was out of a great bodily struggle to submit to his Father's will. Eventually he is arrested and taken to court. In the act of arresting him, the soldiers must have ridiculed Jesus, pushed and beaten him prior to his trial. After Pilate had sentenced him to death, he had Jesus scourged before crucifixion (Mt 27:26). Jesus was bound to a pillar and given a brutal scourging until he bled. Before he is given the cross, he is crowned with thorns and insulted the more.

In all these, Jesus did not complain. He "saw the ultimate goal of his mission in suffering and death on the cross."⁹⁵ The journey to Calvary begins with Jesus carrying a heavy cross (Lk 23:26). Since Jesus had suffered throughout the night, he was already tired and weak. The executioners did not mind about that, but handed him the cross. The cross was heavy and he had to go through a rough and long road up the hill.

Along the way, he must have sustained several injuries against the stones as he walked and fell. At Golgotha, they crucified him (Mk 15:22, 24). Crucifixion was the worst torture a human being could be given. Jesus received it and endured tremendous pains of the nails hammered through his body. Imagine how much pain he experienced from the weight exerted by his tortured body. The hanging was extremely horrible so much so that even breathing was difficult.

⁹⁵ I. M. DAU, *Suffering and God: A Theological Reflection on the War in Sudan*, 191.

He died in great pains, but even after he had died, a soldier pierced his side with a lance (Jn 19:34). Looking at how much he was mistreated, “Jesus answered the question of how to suffer by doing it himself in humility, docility, obedience and joy. His utter and radical trust in the Father is at the root of how he suffered.”⁹⁶ Otherwise, his will was the will of his Father.

Conclusion

From the accounts of the suffering of Jesus, “we find a clear affirmation that Christ is the one saviour of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God.”⁹⁷ God moves all things in their nature. Thus he came to us in a human nature in and through his son Jesus Christ. While he was on earth as a person, “Christ’s whole life and message was not a cheap consolation or an empty hope for heaven or opium of the people. He faced our situation bravely and tackled it head-on. Hence in his life, death and resurrection, he showed us the boundless dimension of a new heaven and new earth.”⁹⁸ For that reason, the Word became man and dwelt among us. He encountered all the forms of suffering as a human being and went back to his glory.

⁹⁶ G. W. KOSICKI, *The Good News of Suffering*, 12.

⁹⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 10.

⁹⁸ O. HIRMER, *The Gospel and the Social Systems*, 119.

CHAPTER FOUR

TEACHING ABOUT CHRISTIAN SUFFERING

Introduction

We have analyzed the human suffering and Christ's suffering. Now we need to find out how the two relate or share with one another. To do that, it is important to attempt to understand the causes of this suffering. Regardless of the source, it is our task to grasp a glimpse of the meaning and fruits of any form of suffering. That will make it easier for us to witness to the whole world that our suffering is only a participation in Christ's suffering, destined for eternal victory and glory.

4.1 Sources of Suffering

The word suffering precisely suggests occasions of pain and discomfort. It is a negative word for it belongs to the category of sin and death. Therefore, "it is important that we be able to distinguish those forms of suffering that derive directly from the way of life occasioned by our faithfulness to the cross from those that do not."⁹⁹ In other words, suffering by the divine will or by human frailty. Christianity and the cost of discipleship are bound to face social ostracism, unjust judgments, persecution and death. But human suffering by selfish motives is grounded on moral evil.

The origin of suffering in the world raises profound questions about the nature of God. By faith we hold God as utterly good, a loving father, creator and ruler of the earth. Human beings are only objects of his love; his wisdom comes to offer supervision to our affairs and his powers to help us through our struggles on earth. If so, why then does he permit suffering and where will it end?

⁹⁹ S. HAUERWAS, *Naming the Silence: God, Medicine and the Problem of Suffering*, 85.

Sacred scripture and African traditions do not offer ultimate answers to these questions. What we experience is the fact that individuals suffer not only because of their sins, but also because of a sinful society in which they live. There are incidents of suffering due to evil spiritual powers (Job 1-2; Eph 6:12). Sometimes God may choose to send suffering directly through nature and sickness, like he did to Moses and the plague, Exodus Chapters 7-12. Or God may use human beings as his instruments to communicate to his people, for instance the mission of Cyrus (Isa 45:1) and the life of Jesus.

From the human point of view, there is a widespread perception that in the beginning God and human beings lived together on earth and were in harmony. But due to “some misconduct on the part of the humans, God left the earth and went to live in the sky, leaving humankind endeavoring to reach him in vain.”¹⁰⁰ This explains why human beings are always on the move, struggling to make ends of life meet.

Besides that, in the human nature there is a tendency for “man’s ability to bring suffering upon himself and upon his fellows by his own selfishness, greed, cruelty and lovelessness.”¹⁰¹ Such tendencies exhibit themselves in oppressive governance of many countries, evil-minded people and the like. Many people have suffered innocently because some others have thought themselves to be unmoved movers.

If a mother got burnt while rescuing her son from a house on fire, her suffering is for a good cause, motivated by sacrificial love. From the Biblical point of view, “ultimately God is the cause of all sufferings.”¹⁰² It sounds very absurd that from God who all knows, all good and all powerful, something evil can come.

¹⁰⁰ I. M. DAU, *Suffering and God: A Theological Reflection on the War in Sudan*, 159.

¹⁰¹ A. C. OUTLER, “Sad Facts about Human Misery,” in *The Mystery of Suffering and Death*, 25.

¹⁰² G. W. BROMILEY, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* Vol. 4, 650.

There is a definite mystery beyond human understanding about the conflict between good and evil under one sole creator. Otherwise God does not cause suffering as such, but allows it to exist.

The Christian community is always assured that God remains the King of the world and through the death and resurrection of Jesus; he overcame all evil and suffering. Therefore, “God does not enjoy suffering. Our God is a God of compassion and consolation. By his love, our Lord Jesus devoted a great part of his earthly ministry to heal and comfort the afflicted in order to relieve suffering.”¹⁰³ In his ministry too, Jesus repudiated the notion that “the source of suffering was the activity of malignant supernatural powers opposed to God.”¹⁰⁴ So, suffering is not always evil and negative. If it is taken with courage and dignity, suffering can contribute to maturity.

In fact, suffering exposes the existing paradox of contrast between the world full of challenges and uncertainties, and the valuable human characteristics that emerge from it. Since we cannot definitely unfold the mystery of suffering, we have to accept that suffering has no dominion of eternity over us. “Our world is engulfed with obstacles to be overcome, tasks to be performed, goals to be achieved, setbacks to be endured, problems to be solved, dangers to be met and life after death to be hoped for.”¹⁰⁵ All and above, God is good and all that he created is good.

He did not create suffering and threw it to the earth. Man’s suffering has connections with man’s sins. Otherwise, there is no sane artisan who labours to bring his art to existence in order to destroy it. God did not create to torture, but to nurture in love.

¹⁰³ JOHN PAUL II, *Healing and Hope*, 222.

¹⁰⁴ ALAN, R. – BOWDEN, J. (Editors), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, 555.

¹⁰⁵ A. C. OUTLER, *Sad Facts about Human Misery*, in *The Mystery of Suffering and Death*, 29.

4.2 Human Suffering and Christ's Suffering

Human beings have shared in the suffering of Christ and vice-versa. There is an inexhaustible list of documents and accounts of this sharing. In this particular perspective, we shall have just but a few examples to illustrate the fact that our suffering is only a participation in Christ's suffering and our hope to share in his glory too.

First and foremost, "the communion between God and his people finds its definitive fulfillment in Jesus Christ, the bridegroom who loves and gives himself as the saviour of humanity, uniting it to himself as his body."¹⁰⁶ The community of the faithful is the body of Christ. Then if we know confidently and believe that Jesus suffered, his body (Church) definitely must suffer. Besides that, it is important to know that the suffering of Jesus and his people has "a mystic union existing between Christ and his body the Church, that their suffering may be identified as one and the same."¹⁰⁷ So our participation in the suffering of Christ is in a mysterious sense. To conceive it fully, we must allow ourselves to transcend the sensual realms into the spiritual through faith.

Through the Paschal mystery, "Jesus assumes the pain of each one and transforms it into a regenerating power for the one who is suffering and for the whole of mankind, in the perspective of the ultimate triumph of resurrection."¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, St Augustine once said that Jesus became who we are, so that we would become who he is.

In this way, "having been tested by suffering, he is our pattern and example. His suffering requires us as his followers to tread a similar path."¹⁰⁹ For this reason, even if we suffer and die, we shall live because we shall only suffer and die in him who has won everything into glory.

¹⁰⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, No.13, 19.

¹⁰⁷ C. BROWN (Editor), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. III, 724.

¹⁰⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Healing and Hope*, 78.

Human suffering is inevitably encountered by all people. This is so because it is “the sacrifice of Christ himself, calling the members of his mystic body to share in his suffering, to complete them in their own flesh.”¹¹⁰ Suffering and hatred are a direct result of being the followers of Christ. During his ministry on earth, he warned his people that following him involve suffering (Jn 15:18-21; 16:2-4). Consequently, “suffering or persecution of the followers of Christ comes from the world as a natural response to their witness.”¹¹¹

Every human being experiences suffering in one way or another as part of human life. The whole of life from birth to death has a succession of moments of trouble. Thus, individuals turn to God for help and their only consolation is the revelation of Christ’s suffering and glory. “The believer is united with Christ in his death and resurrection, and also in the fellowship of his suffering and other aspects of life that he experienced.”¹¹² For this reason, those suffering participate in Christ’s suffering.

Christ taught about the value of fellowship. Through baptism, we accepted to enter into a covenant of fellowship with him. We clothed ourselves in Christ (Gal 3:27) and like him we became children of God. We become co-heirs of the kingdom of God (Rom 8:17). Our struggles then are our suffering as a share in who he is, he has and does. In order for suffering to be in fellowship with the suffering of Christ, here are some of the biblical texts suggesting what one must do. One must suffer for the sake of his office as a Christian. Suffering must be according to God’s will (1Pt 4:19), in the name of Jesus (Act

¹⁰⁹ C. BROWN, 724.

¹¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, No. 78, 130.

¹¹¹ I. M. DAU, *Suffering of God: A Theological Reflection on the War in Sudan*, 190.

¹¹² I. M. DAU, 199.

9:16), for the gospel (2Tim 1:8), for righteousness' sake (1Pt3:14) and looking forward with hope for the kingdom of God (2Thes 1:10).

The Christian communities looked at the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus as part of God's eternal plan of humankind as foretold in scripture. They believed that 'if Christ had to suffer, so must the Christian community too.'¹¹³ Consequently, Peter and John suffered in the name of Jesus (Act 5:41). Paul too rejoiced in the suffering for the faith and the gospel (Phil 3:8; Col 1:24). These people did not suffer simply as a pious desire to imitate Jesus, but as an open challenge to desire suffering and self sacrifice if it was the will of God. They drank the cup of Jesus and took his baptism (Mk 10:39).

Our lives and the world around us are as if suffering is inescapable. Christ himself came and did not explain about human suffering but dwelt in it and through it, he was glorified. Then "if it was right for Christ to go by the way of suffering to the final possession of his glory, it is right also for us."¹¹⁴ For This reason he said, 'whoever wishes to come to me, must deny himself, take up the cross and follow me' (Mk 8:34). Human sufferings are the basic points in which we taste the whole life of Jesus. These points are essentially participatory and uniting to the nature of man and Christ.

The Church emphasizes the principle of common priesthood as compared to ministerial priesthood. All are called to be a holy priesthood by having access to the sanctuary through the blood of Christ (cf. Heb 10:19). With this gift, Christians can offer living sacrifices of their own bodies to God (cf. Rom 12:1).

¹¹³ G. W. BROMILEY (Editor), *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. IV, 652.

¹¹⁴ D. HUBERT, *Suffering in Other Words: A Presentation for the Beginners*, 9.

Therefore, the Christians share in the life of Christ by believing in the mercy and providence of God and the Holy Spirit, and also by sharing their gifts with others. Then if we can share in the priesthood of Christ, can we fail to share in his suffering too?

According to the Catholic faithful, “in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread the unity of believers, who form one body in Christ is expressed and brought about.”¹¹⁵ Here we find the fundamental principle of our belief that we are intrinsically united with Christ. In return, “the Church does encounter alike afflictions by following in the way of the cross and as the body of Christ, it becomes a participation in the vicarious suffering of Christ himself.”¹¹⁶ Therefore, when Jesus rejoices or suffers, we do too.

So far, human suffering has found great similarity in the suffering of Jesus. “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.”¹¹⁷ This assurance does not mean that Jesus suffered in order to end our suffering, but to console it with joy and great rewards (Mt 5:11-12). He did not abolish our mourning, but ended it by offering a better alternative (Lk 7:13; 8:52). He did not suppress death either, but gave it a new meaning of partnership through our faith in the word (Heb 3:14-15). Christ’s assurance is in the fact that his disciples must experience pain by following him.

4.3 The Fruits of Suffering

Experience depicts that one cannot know the value of happiness if he does not know the pain of sadness. Looking for the values of suffering is an attempt to conceive the possible purposes of our suffering. Then if our suffering is for a purpose, we do not need to curse or despair, but rather to accept it and rejoice while suffering.

¹¹⁵ Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, No. 3.

¹¹⁶ A. RICHARDSON, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, 252.

Ideally, “when suffering is associated with Christ’s passion and redemptive death, then it has a great value for the individual, for the Church and for the whole society.”¹¹⁸

From the beginning people have struggled to understand the meaning of suffering. Different ideologies and traditions asserted that “all suffering and misfortune were the visible signs of the wrath of God upon human sin. The logical corollary of this would be that the wicked should suffer and the righteous should always enjoy prosperity.”¹¹⁹ Suffering then was considered as a punishment from God to the evildoers. This mentality transpired also in the Babylonian captivity. The Israelites “were overwhelmed by terrible experiences of misery. They reached a point of believing that there was no God, or their God, Yahweh, had been conquered by a stronger being than him.”¹²⁰ This desperation only increased their suffering.

Later developments came up with various thoughts about the problem of suffering. “Bruised by suffering but carried on by their faith, Prophets and wise men gradually discovered the purifying value of suffering.”¹²¹ Even what was believed to be punishment, was viewed with trust in God’s purpose and presence to his people. Jesus himself strongly rejected the notion that suffering was punishment for sin, especially in the case of the Galileans whose blood Pilate shed (Lk 13:1-3). He was very much concerned about how the work of God would be shown in those who were suffering, as in the case of healing the man born blind (Jn 9:1-3).

Both the Old and New Testaments have established grounds to believe that suffering has some sense based on divine order. First, there is a common belief that evil

¹¹⁷ L. RICHARD, *What are they Saying about the Theology of Suffering?* 35.

¹¹⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Healing and Hope*, 222.

¹¹⁹ A. RICHARDSON, *A Theological Word Book of the Bible*, 249.

¹²⁰ X. LEON-DUFOUR, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Second Edition), 588.

activities lead to divine retribution. This is rooted in the Jewish concept of reward for obedience and punishment for disobedience. Then we have the idea of educative and exemplary suffering. Suffering improves character (Pro 12:1; 13:1).

Just like the parents discipline their children as part of their upbringing, God the loving father chastens his children through testing by suffering (Heb 12: 7-11). Those who were tested include Abraham (Gen 22), Job (Jb 1-2) and Daniel (Dn 6). Lastly, there is suffering for vicarious and redemptive reasons. Great prophets suffered in a representative way for their people. Moses carried the burdens of his people (Num 11:1-15), Hosea suffered in his marital relationship (Hos 1-3), Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah and others felt the anguish of their prophetic vocation. The most powerful vicarious and redemptive suffering found its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.¹²²

Generally speaking, several lessons can be learnt from one's suffering and the suffering of others. "The tragedies teach the profound truth that through suffering we learn who we are and what station befits us in life."¹²³ At times of trouble, the dilemma of whether suffering is from God or not surfaces with different attitudes accorded to suffering. "Suffering has an important role in the purpose of life, which is to produce free, mature persons: overcoming obstacles is the only way to foster moral qualities of the highest order. It stimulates love and compassion of a deeper quality."¹²⁴ This is an appeal to the value of imitating Christ, to be more like the son doing the Father's will.

If by reason we cannot comprehend the value of suffering, then by faith God transcends all that we can dream about, and he lives within and with us. As a pilgrim

¹²¹ X. LEON-DUFOUR, 588.

¹²² Cf. G. W. BROMILEY, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. IV, 651.

¹²³ C. BROWN, *The New International Dictionary of The New Testament Theology*. III, 719.

¹²⁴ A. RICHARDSON, *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, 555.

Church, God journeys with us, and to be fully alive is to journey with God. This is a precious gift because God reveals himself and his work to us through suffering.

The grace of suffering produces the opposite effects. "Instead of fear, there is trust, instead of hopelessness there is hope, instead of revolt there is peace, and instead of defeat there is the sense of triumphant grace."¹²⁵ We can rejoice in our suffering because it reveals Christ's glory (1Pt 4:13-14). Through it we became confirmed in Christ's death and resurrection (Phil 3:10-11) and follow his pattern of life and will (Phil 1:29). It is a sacrifice to the service of faith to others (Phil 2:17-18) and through it, our faith is tested and brought to maturity (Jas 1:2-4) and to the praise and glory of God (1Pt 1:7).

All creation is from God and for God. He makes human suffering redemptive and transforms slavery into freedom. So we can assert that:

Suffering is not regarded as evil in itself, as something irrational or challenging to faith. Nor is it deliberately sought for or masochistically indulged in. It is an experience that brings the sufferer closer to Christ, causing an inward renewal and spilling over into benefits for others.¹²⁶

Otherwise, every suffering has a reason since out of nothing nothing comes.

4.4 Icons of Jesus' Suffering

The sufferers have a mission to the whole society. If we carry everywhere and always in our bodies the suffering and death of Jesus, then his life will be manifested in our bodies (2Cor 4:10). We are the ambassadors for Christ (2Cor 5:20) to the whole world in the sense that, we present Jesus in all he is, has and does.

Whatever happens to us, happened to the one sending us. Christians are invited to amicably share in one another's sufferings (Rom 12:15).

¹²⁵ D. HUBERT, *Suffering In Other Words*, 13.

¹²⁶ A.E.HARVEY, *Renewal Through Suffering: A Study of 2 Corinthians*, 129.

Moses lifted up the serpent (Num 21:8-9) and Jesus was lifted on the cross and brought man and all creation to perfection. Therefore, “looking at the one who was pierced, everyone whose life is threatened encounters the sure hope of finding freedom and redemption.”¹²⁷ With this assurance, all the suffering can courageously accept the fact that a life without suffering is unreal. As long as they live, “suffering must anyway occupy a fair slice of their life, hence meeting their sorrows as calmly and cheerfully as they can.”¹²⁸

The greatest task of everybody today is to restore our society into its original form, ultimate meaning and its fundamental values. We can do this by “taking courageous and prophetic stands in the face of the corruption of the political and economical powers, by not seeking our own glory, by serving the poor and imitating Christ’s own simplicity of life.”¹²⁹ When we accomplish that, then we shall be waiting in joyful hope for a New Heaven and a New Earth, in which God will dwell with us, he will wipe every tear and no more death or mourning (Rev 21:1-4).

Conclusion

The question of suffering is complex. To suffer with hope is not indoctrination or a methodology of minimizing suffering. It aims at capturing humanity in order “to handle everything in this life, whether pleasurable or painful, in such a way that it become matter for the love of God.”¹³⁰ Let our lives and bodies be for the love and service of God.

¹²⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 69.

¹²⁸ D. HUBERT, *Suffering in Other Words*, 13.

¹²⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 74.

¹³⁰ D. HUBERT, *Suffering In Other Words*, 12.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

Every human being comes to existence through birth. Regardless of how long one lives on earth, it is obvious that one time he will die. Jesus was born, lived with us and died into glory through the cross. We hope to be reunited with him in his glory after our suffering and death. Therefore, since God created a good universe, our selfishness spoilt it but Christ restored it in his life, then if we suffer and die, we are assured of the glory of God through Christ, in him and with him.

During their journey to the Promised Land, the Israelites suffered a lot. We too are on transit to the heavenly homeland. We are bound to suffer, for unless it happens, then we are not part of the pilgrim Church. We belong to no country but the new earth. We belong to no principality but the kingdom of God. We belong to no father but God. For this reason, even if we suffer and die, our hope does not end at death, but eternal life.

No matter how much evil is in our society, there is a lot of good things worth of appreciation. For instance, there are peace talks and ecumenical councils allover the world, modalities to sensitize and inform the people about the value of life and the dignity of a human person and so on. However, our task today is to make our society a better place to live. The Church has a big role since she makes the larger part of the society. There is need for internal healing and reformation in some aspects of the Church. Some leaders need total conversion before they convert other people. Otherwise, they will be make rules that they cannot obey and pile laggages that they cannot carry. For a better Church and Nation, there is need for collaborative ministry in all spheres of life. United with Christ, we shall establish the Kingdom of God here and now.

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