ShahidiHub International Journal of Theology & Religious Studies- ISSN (Online): 2788–967X, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2025), 22–36

Theology of Suffering and Hope: A Christological Perspective

Joyce Sila Nduku
Email: ndukujoyce170@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the theological significance of suffering and hope in the context of Christ's passion, drawing on Christian theology to explore the experience of human suffering in light of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Suffering remains a major existential problem for human beings and a problem that contradicts particular human faith in the loving and almighty God. The article argues, by reference to key biblical texts, particularly the Passion narratives and Pauline epistles, combined with the theological reflections of Jürgen Moltmann, Thomas F. Torrance, and Pope John Paul II, that Christ's suffering is not just a historical event, but rather is a richer and deeper revelation or disclosure of divine solidarity with human suffering. The redemptive nature of Jesus' suffering provides a healing and hopeful framework for understanding affliction, where believers are called to endure and find meaning, healing, and hope. Pastoral theology, trauma studies, and ideas from psychology and ethics are also considered in understanding how to feel suffering in the present, whether that be war, illness, or social injustice. The article concludes that a Christological theology of suffering is a hope in pain, not for life without pain, but in the life of suffering with the risen Christ who walks with human beings through their most searing trials.

Keywords: Redemptive Suffering, Suffering, Theological Hope, Passion of Christ; Pastoral Care

Introduction

Suffering is a universal human experience not dependent on culture, history, or form of misery. From personal illness, social injustice, war, natural disaster, and suffering, the individual or community faces existential questions about meaning, justice, and divine presence. An old question resounds through the Christian tradition: If a good and loving God exists, how can human suffering be a reality? Thus, this is the tension often referred to as the problem of theodicy, which presents a theological issue and, undoubtedly, a pastoral problem

prone to ceaseless angst unless further theological reflection into the character and purpose of God is undertaken.

At the center of Christian theology is Jesus Christ's crucifixion suffering. However, the God revealed in Christ is far from a detached deity; he cannot refrain from plunging into a human abyss. Sometimes, we need God to weep with us so that we might laugh with Him one day. Jürgen Moltmann (1974). Not only does Christ's passion, his betrayal, torture, and death become a way of salvation, but it is also an eloquent declaration of divine identification with human pain. The prophet Isaiah describes the Messiah as "a man of sorrows, acquainted with grief" (Isa 53:3, NRSV), fully identifying with human suffering.

This article examines how human suffering is understood within Christian theology through Christ's passion and how this interpretation offers instructive hope to believers. Draws from scriptural texts, patristic and modern theological voices (from sources such as Thomas F. Torrance (2008), Pope John Paul II (1984), and Miroslav Volf [1996]) to claim that the suffering of Christ not only offers a redemptive framework for responding to pain, trauma, and despair but also provides pastoral resources for doing so in contemporary situations.

This article employs a methodology that integrates theological analysis, biblical exegesis, and interdisciplinary dialogue. Theologically, it interfaces systematically with Christology and soteriology to explore the relationship between the incarnation and crucifixion. It exegetically examines some key biblical passages, including Isaiah 53, the Passion narratives, and Pauline reflections in Romans 8 and 2 Corinthians 4. Insights from pastoral, theological, and trauma studies also contextualize why the Christological hope remains relevant to modern believers who suffer.

Biblical Narrative on the Foundations of Suffering and Hope

The biblical witness offers a coherent and layered foundation for understanding suffering and hope, as outlined in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) and the New Testament. Not simply a human burden, not merely the inevitability of all things, suffering absorbs the whole Bible, from prophetic anticipations to apostolic reflections, as a theological reality utterly bound up with God's redemption and hope.

The Old Testament

Isaiah 53: Redemptive Suffering and the Suffering Servant

The redemptive suffering of the Old Testament is one of the most profound portrayals and is found in Isaiah 53 (the 'suffering servant' dialogue). He is said to be 'despised and rejected

by men,' "For he was a man of suffering, acquainted with infirmity" (Isa 53:3, NRSV). He held this image, bearing the afflictions of others. 'Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows' (v. 4).

Historically, this passage has been interpreted in Christian theology as prophetic of Christ's passion. Moltmann (1974) emphasizes that this identification with suffering reveals God's solidarity with the world, not as an outsider, but as one who suffers with and for the world. In Isaiah's suffering servant, Torrance (2008) sees the servant who prefigures the atoning work of the incarnate Son, where the suffering is not merely endured but transformed into an act of salvation. Similar to the above, this passage highlights the purpose, not void of usefulness for suffering, in the verses of the Creator Cosmos (John Paul II, 1984).

Psalms of Lament: Honest Suffering and Trust in God

In the laments of the Psalms, the expression of raw human emotion in the face of suffering coexists with declarations of hope in God's faithfulness. Psalm 22 begins with the haunting cry: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus would later repeat this lament on the cross (Matthew 27:46). Anguish and trust are embodied in this psalm. "Although you are holy, enthroning yourself on the praises of Israel" (Psalm 22:3).

According to Brueggemann (1984), lament psalms have a covenantal feel: they can open up things to God while remaining faithful. These texts confirm believers' pain while providing a way out of suffering to foster faith in divine deliverance again. Thus, in the most extreme expressions of their laments in the Psalter, there are still elements of hope founded on anticipating God's response.

New Testament Perspectives

Gospels: The Theological Significance of the Passion of Christ

Christ's passion is at the heart of the Gospels. According to Redemptive Suffering, Jesus's suffering, leading to his crucifixion, is not a tragic accident but one of God's deliberate means of redemption. In Mark's Gospel, Jesus repeatedly foretells his suffering: "...the Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously, and be put to death, and rise after three days" (Mark 8:31).

According to Wright (2003), crucifixion is central to the narrative and Jesus' identity and mission. Theologically, passion also signifies the cost of God's love and the depth of God's involvement in world suffering. In the synoptic Gospels, suffering fulfills prophetic expectations and demonstrates that divine power is most powerfully manifest in weakness.

According to Moltmann (1974), the cross is the center of all Christian theology, as it is in the cross that God took the world's suffering into God's being.

In the Gospels, Christ's suffering also models what makes discipleship. Jesus invites his followers to 'take up their cross' (Luke 9:23), showing that suffering is not just something he has to experience but something inherent in the Christian life.

Pauline Epistles: Sharing in Christ's Suffering and Resurrection Hope

The theological reflection on suffering in Paul's epistles, especially as one of participation in Christ, turns out to be rich. Romans 8:17–18, "So that we also may be glorified with him." For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us." Suffering is not conceived in this place as an obstacle to eschatological hope but as a condition for it.

Suffering is life-changing for Paul. "He speaks (Phil 3:10) of 'fellowship of his sufferings' where we have 'communion' with Christ in suffering." This is echoed in the theology of redemptive participation: the life, death, and resurrection of Christ are not merely passive events that believers simply experience but in which they are drawn.

According to Fee (1996), suffering is a sign of the true Christian life, and the Spirit uses suffering to form Christ's character in the believer. Additionally, the Spirit guarantees believers' resurrection in the face of suffering (Rom 8:23–25). Therefore, suffering and hope go hand in hand, with present affliction anticipating forthcoming glory.

Christological Interpretations of Suffering

Christian responses to suffering center upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Theology does not answer this question simply by attempting to explain why God allows suffering; it has also addressed it through Christological interpretations of how God enters into and redeems suffering. The suffering of Christ is understood in this way from the early Church Fathers to modern theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann and Thomas F. Torrance. This section reviews critical theological developments that read Christ's suffering as a unique human response.

Early Church Fathers: Salvific Significance of Christ's Suffering

According to the early Church Fathers, salvation was God's plan through Christ's suffering. The incarnation and passion of Christ were not abstract theological notions to the patristic thinkers but concrete affirmations of divine compassion and redemptive aim. Athanasius of Alexandria explains, "He became what we are, that he might make us what he is" (Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 54). This incarnational theology does imply that by taking

on human flesh, specifically the ability to experience suffering, Christ makes holy and redeems every part of human existence.

In *Against Heresies* V.19.1, Irenaeus of Lyon recapitulates humanity in Christ: humanity is redeemed to fellowship with God through Christ's obedience unto death. Consequently, suffering is not accidental but essential to Christ's redemptive mission. Jesus' suffering is the way to victory, inverting human notions of power with divine humility (Phil 2:6–8).

Parallels to the pastoral dimension of Christ's passion also appeared in the writings of the Church Fathers. For instance, Gregory Nazianzen claimed that 'Christ suffered as man, but healed as God' (*Third Theological Oration*, 20), emphasizing the paradox of an incarnate God. Christ suffers as atonement, and an example of endurance and divine compassion in the face of the worst people and life can offer.

Jürgen Moltmann: The Crucified God and the Theology of Hope

Jürgen Moltmann is undoubtedly one of the most influential modern theologians in the field of suffering and hope. In his seminal work, *The Crucified God* (1974), Moltmann argues that theology should place the cross at the center, not only as a symbol of atonement but also as a revelation of God's identity. For Moltmann, however, the crucifixion is not simply about Jesus' death itself, but rather God's taking part in human suffering. He says, "The crucified Christ is the image of the invisible God."

Moltmann proposes that the triune God experiences suffering. The Father leaves the Son on the cross, and the Father loses the Son there. It is in this mutual suffering within the Trinity, however, that God reveals the nature of its solidarity: a God whose walk of abandonment and suffering is not carried out from the outside, leaving it at a distance, but one who embodies the abandonment in every way, through suffering at its fullest.

This theology has profound pastoral implications. Believers can find hope in a crucified and risen Christ who bears their wounds and not in an entity that has nothing to do with the world, far away, in a place that has nothing to do with despair, war, and trauma. After Bonhoeffer, Moltmann insists that 'only a suffering God can help' (Moltmann 1974, 47). The cross is not only the symbol of pain but also the symbol of hope. Since Christ had suffered and triumphed, believers can know that suffering is not the last word (Romans 8:17–18).

This view is further reinforced by Moltmann's Theology of Hope (1967). This is not rooted in an optimism that human beings can cling to but in the hope of the resurrection of

the crucified. Suffering, which is validated by the resurrection, ensures the eventual transformation of creation. Therefore, Christian hope rests on Christ's suffering and is established in his resurrection, a feature that continues to sustain believers amid present trials (Moltmann 1967, 32–33).

Thomas F. Torrance: Divine Union and Human Suffering

Thomas F. Torrance's Christological reflections on the hypostatic union of Christ's divine and human natures provide a nuanced understanding of Christianity's attitude toward suffering. In Incarnation: In The Person and Life of Christ, he argues that in the incarnation, God took not only human flesh but the entire extent of human brokenness, that is, suffering and death. 'Torrence (2008, 203)' writes what we see in Jesus Christ: "God has penetrated the darkest places of our estrangement and taken up all we are in his redeeming love."

Torrance challenges the docetic view of Jesus, which saw him as only appearing to suffer while insisting on Christ's real and redeeming suffering in his true humanity. His pain in Gethsemane (Luke 22:44) and his cry of abandonment on the cross (Mark 15:34) are not performances but real suffering. However, because he was also fully divine, his suffering had infinite value and infinite capacity for transformation.

Torrance's theological method is a mediation of reconciliation. When Christ suffers, he closes the gap between God and humanity and transforms suffering itself. Christ assumes and conquers suffering, thus clearing the way for human healing, renewal, and participation in divine life. It is an experiential rather than a theoretical transformation. In this sense, it means that believers' suffering will not be in vain in pastoral theology. Instead, it becomes a matter of how they are unified to Christ and shaped to be like Him (Rom 8:29). He also considers the epistemological aspect of suffering. Therefore, human knowledge of God must be shaped by Christ's crucifixion, for that is how God has revealed Himself. In this view, theology must be cruciform, enacted in humility, vulnerability, and participation in Christ's redemptive suffering.

Synthesis: Christ's Suffering as the Paradigm and Promise

The unity of the views of the Church Fathers, Moltmann, and Torrance lies in their focused insistence on a specific fundamental point: the suffering of Christ is both paradigmatic and redemptive. With humanity and for humanity, Christ suffered. It is not that suffering is a detour in the road to salvation; it is part of the way to salvation itself. The clearest revelation of God's love, justice, and mercy is found in the crucified Christ.

Christ's suffering is not limited to the past. It did not go away in his life or in the lives of his fans. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 4:10, "We always carry around in our body the death

of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body." Therefore, Christian identity is formed through participation in Christ's suffering and resurrection.

Suffering offers a unique perspective on this problem through a Christological lens. It is not an explanation in a philosophical sense—it offers a person. It is Jesus Christ who came to suffer to redeem and transform suffering. Through his wounds, he heals the believers (Isa 53:5), and through his resurrection, he gives them lasting hope (1 Pet 1:3).

Theological Themes: Redemptive Suffering and Hope

Redemptive Suffering

Christian theology has long held that suffering has redemptive value when it is united with the sufferings of Christ. They approach suffering not out of a desire to glorify pain or misery but because of the transformational and salvific power of suffering borne in communion with Christ's passion and for the sake of serving others. This idea is based on Pauline theology: Instead of grasping after status in the early church, 'now I rejoice in what I suffer for you, and fill up in my flesh what is still lacking regarding Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, which is the church' (Col 1:24, NIV). Paul is saying here that believers can join Christ's redemptive sufferings, not by acting as if they were anything added to Christ's perfect sacrifice, but by their sufferings being put (by God who raises them) to the same purpose as his.

Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter *Salvifici Doloris* (1984) is a comprehensive—if not exhaustive—meditation on the theology of suffering, situating it within the mystery of redemption. "Human suffering itself has been redeemed in the Cross of Christ, where not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself is redeemed" (*Salvifici Doloris*, §19). In this way, Christ's suffering is redemptive, and all human suffering is redeemed. Instead of a meaningless burden, it is now participation in divine love.

John Paul II, among others, makes a critical distinction. Suffering is not inherently bad unless it is accepted and offered in love. "To suffer means to become particularly susceptible, particularly open to the working of the salvific powers of God, freely offered to humanity in Christ" (*Salvifici Doloris*, §23), he notes. However, painful and unwanted suffering can become an opportunity to deepen love, faith, and solidarity with others.

The Pope also stresses the role of those who suffer in the church. Consequently, instead of passive participants in care, the suffering becomes "subjects" of redemptive action—their endurance and faith witness Christ's victory over sin and death. The

implications of this reorientation have far-reaching pastoral consequences, commanding the community to discern and glorify the human dignity and vocation of those who suffer.

Redemptive suffering is an individual piety and a communal and eschatological dimension. Some, however, have seized on this gesture to argue that the church is suddenly a circus as if the liturgical action every Sunday were not reflective of the church's continued participation in the mystery of Christ's Passion to the end of time. According to John Paul II, 'Those who share in Christ's suffering have before their eyes the Paschal Mystery of the Cross and the Resurrection, whereby Christ descends to man's last extremity of weakness and helplessness:' Indeed, He 'dies nailed to a cross' (*Salvifici Doloris*, §22). In suffering, believers learn more deeply that the paschal movement into new life from death —the pattern of Christian existence —is an anticipation of their ultimate destiny.

The Virtue of Hope

The theological virtue of hope is inextricably linked to the theology of suffering. The Catechism of the Catholic Church would define hope as the confident expectation of divine blessing and the beatific vision of God, which sustains the believer amid trials. When hope faces suffering, it will not yield to despair but fix the soul to the promise that God will bring about future redemption. Romans 5:3-5 captures this interplay: And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God...and we patiently wait for it in cheerful hopefulness. For God's love has been poured into our hearts … And hope does not put us to shame.

Optimism is not quite hope. This does not depend on circumstances but on God's faithfulness and the certainty of the resurrection. In *Salvifici Doloris*, Pope John Paul II conveys this: 'In suffering is concealed a particular power which draws a person interiorly close to Christ, a special grace.' It is 'a hidden participation in the suffering of the Redeemer, and in sharing in His saving work' (*Salvifici Doloris*, §26). The hope this believer has ensures that his suffering is not the end of the story but a passing through into glory! Christian martyrs, saints, and ordinary Christians have suffered much, full of hope even unto death. Suffering is a testament to its purifying power, fostering deep compassion and drawing people closer to God. Consequently, suffering serves as the "school of hope"—where we are trained to see God's providence as radically trustworthy (*Spe Salvi*, §37).

Moreover, Christian hope is communal. That is what it holds out to the world and its people in need: a sign of hope in a suffering world. Already, but not yet —that is, the victory is already secured but not yet realized, which means the church waits hopefully as an expectant witness for the future reality in the present. As Moltmann says, hope is not something beyond what faith has believed God promised (*Theology of Hope*, 1967, p. 22).

This hope energizes action: Comforting the afflicted, standing with the oppressed, and advocating for justice.

Christian eschatology helps us understand the appropriateness of hope in suffering. Perseverance is fueled by the promise of a new heaven and earth (Rev 21:1–4), where now "there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain." If suffering is provisional, it is a part of a world that is passing away. Therefore, hope is the Christian's courage in the face of despair, the resurrection, and the coming kingdom.

Pastoral and Practical Implications

Suffering in Contemporary Contexts

Suffering is not an abstract idea but rather an acute experience of the modern world. The twenty-first century has been characterized by increased trauma, including pandemics, environmental destruction, political turmoil, war, and financial ruin. These problems exacerbate the existential questions that have haunted human suffering: Why does God allow this? Where is God in our pain?

Theology must not remain silent or merely academic in times of such crises. Instead, it has to provide a prophetic and pastoral solution for the cruciform character of the Christian hope. For example, COVID-19 highlighted weak points of human systems and revealed the vulnerable nature of global communities. Theologians, such as N.T. Wright suggests that lament, similar to that seen in the Psalms, is appropriate and essential following such collective confusion and sadness (Wright 2020). Psalm 13, "How long, O Lord?" is a bright cry of agony for divine aid while exercising faith.

Christian theology believes that suffering is not the end of the story. Christ's passion, death, and resurrection speak directly to the heart of global suffering, not sage platitudes but presence. John Paul II, Pope, declares, "Christ does not explain in the abstract the reasons for suffering, but before all else He says: 'Follow me!'" (*Salvifici Doloris*, §26). By embracing Christ, who went through the cross, believers find a way to move beyond suffering and towards healing, ultimately leading to restoration.

Wars and battlefields are worlds that further appreciate the relevance of redemptive suffering and Christian hope. In the Middle East, Sudan, Ukraine, and war zones everywhere, faith communities often serve as sanctuaries of peace and carry hope. The cross ceases to represent what has been saved but is an affirmation that love may conquer evil now. As Jürgen Moltmann notes, 'God weeps with us so that we may one day laugh with Him' (The

Crucified God, 1974, p. 252). Thriving is honorable when endured togetherness, and these pastoral wishes profoundly provide such association.

Pastoral Care: Offering Comfort and Guidance

The problem in pastoral ministry is not to explain why people suffer but to accompany the sufferer. This is a reiteration of Henri Nouwen's idea of the "wounded healer"—a pastor or caregiver who is empathetic through their own experience of grace amid brokenness rather than detached with answers.

Effective pastoral care understands the complex nature of suffering. The Book of Job is an excellent pastoral resource that demonstrates how simple theological answers often do more harm than good. Job's friends failed not to sit and be silent with him but rather a later attempt to explain his pain rationally. Pastoral theology must value presence over explanation and compassion overcorrection. In this respect, the ministry of Christ itself is instructive: despite the resurrection having a near-imminent future, He wept at Lazarus' tomb (John 11:35). His tears make grief necessary and holy to suffer.

Additionally, Christ's suffering lays down a template for empathetic pastoral care. Hebrews 4:15 reminds us: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel compassion for our failings, but we have one who has been tempted in all ways like we are, but has not sinned." Christ's empathy with human pain equips pastoral caregivers to embody that same sympathy in their ministries. Pastoral caregivers manifest God's everlasting love to the afflicted through prayer, being present, sacraments, and Scripture.

Building Resilience and Hope among Congregants

Redemptive suffering and Christian hope, as shown in theology, must be incorporated into a living faith. In congregational life, this is achieved by developing a spirituality that is unafraid of pain but learns to embrace it faithfully. Paul's words in Romans 8:18 provide a staunch basis for resilient Christian living: "I reckon that our present sufferings are by no means worthy of comparison with the glory that shall be revealed in us.

The ability to suffer without an attitude of stoicism does not mean one is stubborn but rather spiritually enduring, rooted in the hope of resurrection. Moltmann emphasizes that hope is not optimism, which overlooks the true situation in the world. "The hope despite the world's suffering" (*Theology of Hope*, 1967, p. 34). Therefore, churches need to become places of hope – places where lament is a legitimate expression, joy can be shared, and where the resurrection is proclaimed not just at Easter but every week.

Spiritual activities, such as communal prayer, liturgy, testimony, and mutual support, are crucial for sparking hope. For instance, practices such as *Lectio Divina* and the daily office keep believers rooted in God's Word and help them recollect His promises. Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, strengthen Christ's presence in suffering and triumph. Breaking bread is an occasion of solidarity with the crucified and risen Lord, whose shattered body is a means of restoration to our shattered bodies.

The church must question cultural narratives that equate suffering with failure or weakness. In a world obsessed with success and ease, Christian teaching reorients the imagination: suffering can be where God meets human beings. The Apostle Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:9) exemplifies the gracious acceptance of vulnerability. "My grace is sufficient with you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness." Christian strength is found in the paradoxical nature of this power – the power of weakness.

Lastly, pastoral ministry should involve teaching the congregants about the theology of suffering. Sermons, workshops, or study groups enable believers to handle life's trials with theological acuity and emotional maturity. This is especially vital to youth and young adults who confront mental health issues and disillusionment. Rooting them in a robust theology of hope can be like emotional ballast in an uncertain world.

Interdisciplinary Connections

Psychological Perspectives: The Role of Faith in Coping with Trauma and Suffering

Modern psychology provides poignant evidence about how people deal with trauma in acute or chronic suffering. At the core of psychological resilience are meaning-making frameworks – beliefs that help individuals integrate painful experiences into a coherent narrative of their lives. To answer the question, Christian theology, viewed through Christocentric lenses, presents a framework that sees human suffering as not devoid of meaning but rather salvific when associated with Christ's passion.

Faith is both a cognitive and an emotional asset. Psychological research has shown that individuals with robust religious attachments tend to be less depressed and anxious when confronting suffering, partly due to their conviction in divine providence, a supportive community, and eschatological hope (Pargament, 2001). The Apostle Paul's promise "suffering produces perseverance;" "perse... inebriated by psychological theories of post-traumatic growth, hope" (Romans 5:3–4).

The Christological focus is therapeutic to an even greater extent. Our identification with the suffering Christ is more than an emotional solidarity; it is also a spiritual mirror in

which the sufferers see their pain reflected and dignified. Nouwen (1979) claims that Christ as the "wounded healer" is a turning point for trauma survivors, presenting them with sympathy and the idea that they can be healed. In this manner, the Christian faith serves as a psychological safeguard against existential despair through spiritual perseverance.

Additionally, habits such as prayer, reflection on Scripture, and sacramental living contribute to psychological stability. These practices engage emotional regulation and develop resilience through divine connection and reframing of the narrative. According to Wright (2020), lament, as seen in Psalms, provides psychological purging and faith-informed handling of grief by changing the question, "Why?" to "How long, O Lord?"

Sociological Insights: Community Support and Collective Hope

According to the sociological perspective, suffering is not a singular event in a person's life but rather a communal one. Communal suffering, particularly in times of crisis for society, such as wars or pandemics, produces a sense of communal vulnerability. Religious communities typically become important institutions offering hope, coherence, and direction (Durkheim, 1912/2001). The church, in its capacity as the *ekklesia,* is a theological and sociological healing agent.

The communal dimension of suffering and hope is constantly affirmed in the Biblical narratives. Galatians 6:2 urges the believers to "bear one another's burdens" (which underlines a moral obligation to care for one another). Acts 2:42–47 describes the early church as a community of mutual support, prayer, and economic sharing that continues to provide a paradigm for Christian response to suffering.

Sociologists have noted that faith communities increase resilience by providing people with rituals, social networks, and moral structures that enable them to endure suffering as a group. During the COVID-19 pandemic, churches conducted virtual services, prayer chains, food assistance, and mental health support, serving as a reservoir of practical help and theological hope.

The concept of collective hope, i.e., the hope for a better future for the community, is inscribed in the eschatological vision of Christianity. Moltmann's *Theology of Hope* (1967) describes this as a "future-oriented community" that does not live only by current realities but by the promises of God. Such communities survive suffering and become the locations of prophetic imagination and transformation.

Christian communities are called to alleviate suffering and address its systemic causes. Liberation theology, for example, emphasizes the church's involvement in social

justice, imposing the task of protecting the oppressed and identifying with the people crucified from a historical perspective. This sociological methodology lies at the intersection of theology by its interest in structural healing and communal flourishing.

Ethical Considerations: Moral Duties in Improving Suffering and Encouraging Hope

The topic of suffering is not merely a theological dilemma but also a moral call. Christian ethics, based on Jesus' life and teachings, require active compassion, justice, and solidarity with the suffering. It may be safe to add that the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37) is "a moral injunction to relieve suffering irrespective of social, ethnic, or religious discriminations."

Ethically, the church has the duty of presence and protest: being present in ministering to the suffering and resisting the circumstances that cause suffering. The active love of a human being, created in the image of suffering yet redeeming God, must bear responsibility to redeem suffering, not just passively endured but also actively (*Salvifici Doloris* 1984: §§30).

Furthermore, the ethics of suffering must struggle with the temptation of indifference. This problem of compassion fatigue exists in a globalized world, where images of tragedy are prevalent. Still, Christian morality holds that any mercy work (serving the hungry, visiting the sick, standing up for the marginalized) is neither solely moral nor even Christological (Matt 25:31-46). The Christian voice is to incarnate hope in the activity that defines God's kingdom.

These ethical dilemmas persist today regarding access to healthcare, human rights during wars, and ecological destruction. They need theological discrimination and prophetic bravery. For example, calls for mental health support, protection for refugees, or ecological justice are not optional. However, these are organic add-ons to Christian ethics—they are central to the church's proclamation of hope to a suffering world.

Additionally, ethical suffering entails the capacity to suffer alongside others. Bonhoeffer's prison writings speak to this ethic of incarnation: "Only a suffering God can help" (Bonhoeffer 1953, 361). The following of Christ is to bear the cross, not singly but communally. Ethical discipleship entails only entering the world's pain with retrogressive love.

Conclusion

Exploring suffering and hope from a Christological perspective reveals a richly complex theological narrative that transforms pain into meaning and despair into expectation. There is

no less a part of Christian theology than the belief in the suffering of Christ: voluntary, redemptive, and very human, which gives more than a theological explanation of the reality of human suffering but rather a practical source of hope. As Isaiah 53 evocatively explains, Christ suffered for the people of the world to cure us through His wound. This suffering is not abstract; it is deeply personal, as Christ plunged into the depths of human pain and emerged victorious through resurrection.

Armed with biblical foundations from Lamentations and the Psalms, as well as Paul's assertions in Romans 8:17–18, one can conclude that suffering is not only a part of Scripture but has also been woven throughout the spiritual narrative of life and the spiritual fabric of God's plan of salvation. The suffering of Christ demonstrates that suffering is not pointless but shares in God's redemptive work (Pope John Paul II, 1984). This theological truth provides deep comfort to believers in that no matter what is inevitable; aching is never wasted when it is in the light of the crucified and risen Lord.

Theologically, the believer is never left to suffer alone. The test, through the presence of hope as a virtue, promise, and lived reality, becomes the supporting impetus. Moltmann (1967) asserts that Christian hope is not based on present realities but on God's ultimate promise in the *eschaton*. This is not passive expectancy but an active experience of the world's pain, empowered by the Spirit so that He can bear witness to the redemptive power of Christ.

Moreover, the interdisciplinary vision of psychology and sociology deepens a theological perspective, demonstrating how faith enables healing, community fosters resilience, and ethical accountability calls for compassionate involvement. In combination, these disciplines regard the theology of suffering and hope as not theoretical but very practical and pastoral.

Future studies can research global dimensions of suffering, especially in those contexts of interreligious conflict, environmental conflict, and post-traumatic spiritual growth. Moreover, a field remains to be explored: the assessment of Christ's suffering and the promise of hope in non-Western theologies, particularly in indigenous, African, or Asian settings.

Bibliography

Moltmann, Jürgen. *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology*. Fortress Press, 1993.

Plantinga, Alvin. *God, freedom, and evil*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977.

Wright, Nicholas Thomas. *The Resurrection of the Son of God.* Vol. 3. Fortress Press, 2003.

Fee, Gordon D. Paul. *The Spirit, and the People of God*. Baker Books, 2023.

Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Fortress Press, 1984.

Torrance, Thomas F. *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ.* InterVarsity Press, 2015.

Paul II, Pope John. *Salvifici doloris*. Ediciones Paulinas, 1984.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Scm Press, 2013.

Rahner, Karl. "Foundations of Christian faith: An Introduction to Christianity." *Religious Studies Review* 5, no. 3 (1979): 190–199.

Goldingay, John. *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah*. InterVarsity Press, 2014.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology.* 1977.

Swinton, John. *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil*. SCM Press, 2017.

Louw, Daniël Johannes. *A Pastoral Hermeneutics of Care and Encounter: A Theological Design for a Basic Theory, Anthropology, Method and Therapy*. Lux Verbi, 1998.

Keller, Timothy. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. Penguin, 2013.

Yancey, P. Where Is God when it Hurts/What's So Amazing About Grace? Zondervan, 2009.