

May 2003

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### Recommended Citation

Boyle, Patrick (2003) "The Theology of Suffering," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 70 : No. 2 , Article 2.  
Available at: <https://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol70/iss2/2>

# The Theology of Suffering

by

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Moralists get some pretty interesting questions, some of which are quite simple to answer, for example: "Do dogs go to Heaven?" There are others, though, which require a little more thought, for instance:

Why is it morally unacceptable to terminate a human life of great pain and suffering, yet morally acceptable to terminate the lives of animals, when they are in a similar health condition?

An explanation is:

It seems that we treat animals more humanely than human beings. And the answer is, "Yes, we do." Many reasons can be given why we do not treat humans the same way we treat animals: the gift of life, the dignity of the human person. But the most accurate reason is that animals cannot do anything with their suffering whereas human beings can!

Hence, the topic, the theology of human suffering. Throughout the centuries, human suffering has been given a bad rap! It was, and is, looked upon as a condition to be tolerated, to be endured as a punishment for personal sins or the sins of one's ancestors. How many times have we heard the comment: "They are having such bad luck; they must have done something terribly wrong in their lives and this is God's way of punishing them?" Or, "I am suffering so much, God must hate me." This mind set was

certainly the Jewish understanding of suffering. Remember the blind man in the ninth chapter of St. John's gospel. The Apostles asked Jesus, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" Christ answered that neither sinned. He was born blind that the work of God might work through him. We know that our God is not a vengeful God. Hence, there is no causal relationship between human suffering and God. *Salva reverencia*, therefore, when we are suffering, might not the words of Jesus be applied to us as follows: "But this suffering is happening to you so that the work of God might be displayed in your life and in your suffering?"

Rightly used, human suffering, if Christofied, can be one of "The Pearls of Great Price." Looked upon the right way, chronic suffering is not a penalty, a punishment, it is more an opportunity, an invitation. I say one of "The Pearls of Great Price" because in our faith, are there not many such pearls? Faith itself — the Eucharist — the sacraments — Jesus — Mary — Christ's passion and death — the resurrection, etc.

Before proceeding, a few definitions of terms are in order:

- Suffering — to undergo, be subjected to, or endure pain in a generic sense.

There are two categories:

- Physical — pain in a real sense, immobility
- Psychological — loneliness, fear, anxiety, old age, abuse, disappointment

(These are "bad" sufferings. I do not include spiritual suffering [guilt for sin] because that is a good suffering!).

Duration:

- Transitory — temporary, passing in time  
For example, a headache, a toothache! Avoid it or get rid of it. Take aspirin, bufferin, novacain. There is no sense in making oneself miserable, or the dentist or the ones with whom you live.  
To suffer when one can find relief could be interpreted as a form of masochism, "love of pain." I say "could be" because there can be legitimate reasons why one refuses remedies for suffering.

- Chronic — suffering that is long-standing, constantly reoccurring, incurable. This is the suffering that has the transformative capability.

Remember the Kevorkian scenario! Doctor Death, the physician who helped people who were unable to cope with their suffering to commit suicide. Ignorance abounds in this entire scenario:

- Ignorance on the part of the doctor — ignorance of the real meaning of care, ignorance of the sanctity of life, ignorance of the Hippocratic oath to “inflict no harm, do no evil.”
- Ignorance on the part of the sufferer — One’s blindness in judging one’s suffering as senseless and being unable to see in one’s suffering the real opportunity for spiritual growth. This is not meant to be judgmental. I do not mean to cast aspersions on such poor people. Who is to say that any one of us might not entertain the same thoughts in similar situations?

From a human standpoint there is nothing more senseless than human suffering. On the other hand, from a faith perspective, there is nothing more meaningful than human suffering that has been “Christofied,” i.e., joined to the sufferings of Christ, accepted in solidarity with the suffering Christ.

Since suffering will certainly be part and parcel of our lives in the not-too-distant future, it behooves us now to analyze human suffering to see whether or not, when it does come, we can make the time profitable for us — to see if we can make it a time of peace, not confusion; to see if we can make it a time of joy, not sorrow; to see if we can make it a time of merit, not merely a time of endurance.

I do want to acknowledge that the thoughts and ideas that I present to you in this paper are taken from the writings of Pope John Paul II, found in his Apostolic Letter, *On the Christian Meaning of Human Suffering*, 11 February, 1984. He concentrates in this letter on the “suffering experience”, i.e., the “meaning” and “mystery” of human suffering.

Joseph P. Whelan, in his article “Salvation Through Suffering,” states that no mystery assails the heart of the human person so immediately or so scandalizes one’s faith in God and in oneself as does the mystery of suffering. Nothing casts more doubt upon the nature of salvation or upon the value of this world as does the mystery of suffering. It is thrust upon every person. It is carved into the marrow of one’s bones and spirit. If one is pastorally inclined, one confronts it even more fearfully in the lives of

others. The human person cannot escape the ravages of suffering. It is omni-present: a battering experience, the history of which one fears and the future of which one can be certain.

Pope John Paul II writes that there is something very unique about human suffering that distinguishes it from animal suffering. He says that human suffering possesses a quality that animal suffering lacks. In some mysterious way, human suffering seems rooted in the very essence of human personhood and manifests in its own way that depth which belongs to a person's transcendence: it is one of those points in which a person in a certain sense is "destined" — is called — in a mysterious way, to go beyond oneself.

### **Basis in Scripture**

Notwithstanding the fact that suffering is the result of original sin and, in a sense is thrust upon mankind, still, according to the pope, it is something more for the Christian. There is a requirement, a mandate, a *sine qua non* for every follower of Christ. Father Thomas Hand, S.J., in his article, "If Any Man Will Come After Me," states that we must go to revelation to substantiate this. Nothing is more clear in the New Testament than the call of every disciple of Christ to follow their master in suffering and death. Suffering is part and parcel of a Christian's life. It is something to be embraced, not discarded.

The synoptic gospels are most insistent on this point. The importance that the Lord gives to this call and its embrace are inescapable. After St. Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus proceeded to inform His disciples that suffering would be part of their lives also if they intended to be His followers. "Jesus then said to his disciples, 'If anyone wishes to come after me, let that person deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.'" This suffering theme and its embrace occur repeatedly in the synoptics and are expressed in much the same fashion from gospel to gospel. The only variation shows itself in the gospel of St. Luke, where he adds the word "daily", which seems to imply that this suffering, which is the mark of the follower of Christ, looks not only towards martyrdom, but is extended also to include "all dying to self" through suffering. In other words, Luke says that in all suffering, great or small, we are partakers, we are imitators of Christ.

The call to follow Christ in suffering is most evident in the gospel of St. John, in the writings of St. Paul, and in the witness of the early Christians. The underlying theme of the whole New Testament is the common belief, namely: The Risen Christ — Christ, the Lord — is the suffering servant, proclaimed by the prophets of old, who suffered death and rose from the dead so that all might follow Him in dying to this world,

to self and in rising to a new life — union with Him. The theme of St. Peter's first sermon, the words of Christ in the synoptic gospels, the writings of St. Paul all stress the same conclusion — that suffering is essential to the vocation of a follower of Christ and that it be willingly accepted by the follower.

In the book of *Isaiah*, Christ is described as the suffering servant who suffered in a totally voluntary way. "He was oppressed, and He was affected, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth." Personal commitment to Christ is unthinkable without complete acceptance of all that was integral to Christ's own living out of His divine sonship in human terms. Suffering was an integral and necessary part of Christ's life. "Did not Christ have to suffer all these things so as to enter into His glory?" Thus, as Christians we are born to suffer and to suffer voluntarily. It is written as a necessity in nature. It is written as an invitation in revelation.

### The Question

But why? Why suffering? Every chronic sufferer inevitably asks the question: Why? And it is an important question! It is a question about the cause, the reason, and equally about the purpose and meaning of suffering. Why do the good suffer? Why does God allow a young child to die of leukemia? Why does God allow a young father to be struck down in the prime of life? Why does God allow a young woman to be a victim of a murderer's knife? Is God a loveless god? Is God a vengeful god? Is the afflicted person a sinner being punished? Is suffering the result of one's past sins? Is the suffering the result of their forefathers' sins? Without addressing these questions seriously, many frustrations and conflicts in one's relation with God can arise. They can easily lead one to reach the point of actually denying the existence of God, to despair, or even to suicide.

So, back to the question! Why suffering? There can be no doubt that suffering has meaning as punishment when it is connected with sin, but that's not to say all suffering is the result of one's sin or is punishment for one's sins. The story of Job in the Old Testament confirms this. The story of this just man who, through no fault of his own, suffered great tribulations, is well-known. You recall how he lost his sons and daughters, his possessions, and finally was afflicted with a grave sickness. In this horrible situation, three of his old friends came to him with the expressed purpose of convincing him that his misfortune and sufferings were the result of some serious sins that he must have committed in the past. They said this because they were convinced that misfortune and suffering always

strike a person as punishment sent by God for sins he or she had committed. They saw it as sent by the absolutely just God and rooted in the order of justice. This opinion of Job's friends manifested a conviction found also in the moral conscience of humanity, namely: the objective moral order demands punishment for transgression, sin, and crime.

From this point of view, suffering appeared as "justified evil." This theory of explaining suffering as punishment for sin found support in the order of justice which, in turn, was reminiscent of the statement of one of Job's friends, "As I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble, reap the same." Job, however, challenged the truth of this principle which necessarily identified suffering with punishment for sin. He did this on the basis of his own life. He was aware that he did not deserve such punishment. In fact, it was quite the opposite. He had led a good life. He spoke of the good that he had accomplished during his lifetime. Job was perplexed and asked God the cause of his suffering. God answered, not by justifying His actions before mankind – God does not have to do that. He answered Job by declaring that he was innocent. Job was content with this. He recovered his attitude of humility and trust, which he had lost because of his friends who accused him of sin – that is, he was being punished, therefore, he must have sinned. In reality, Job's suffering was the suffering of someone who was innocent. The Book of Job gives us no answers to the "why" of suffering. That was not God's purpose. God just wanted to show that suffering is not necessarily the result of one's sins. In other words, the innocent can suffer.

Another extremely important aspect of suffering and another possible explanation for the "why" of suffering is from a medicinal/educational perspective. Such an insight has its foundation in the Old Testament where the educational value of suffering is emphasized. For instance, as one reads the Old Testament, one can observe that in the sufferings, which God inflicts on His chosen people, an invitation of His mercy to turn away from their sinful ways is proffered. We read this in the Second Book of Machabees, "...these punishments were designed not to destroy but to discipline our people." One can see in this a personal dimension of punishment. According to this dimension, punishment has meaning not only because it serves to repay the objective evil of transgression, but also because it creates the opportunity for the subject who suffers to rebuild the damaged goodness within his or her person. As stated above, this is a very important aspect of human suffering, which has its roots both in the New and the Old Testaments. Suffering from a personalist's view must serve for conversion, that is, for the rebuilding of goodness in the subject, who can recognize the Good Shepherd in this call to repentance. This conversion can also mean the "enhancement" of goodness within the person.

However, this is not all we can learn about the mystery of human suffering. This mystery can be further unraveled through faith. No one can gain a real understanding of human suffering without recourse to revelation and, more precisely, to Christ's salvific work. It is through revelation that we see human suffering linked to love. In the Old Testament, human suffering is rooted in God's justice, in the New Testament it is rooted, grounded in God's love. It is through Christ's salvific work that we see that human suffering takes on a new meaning. In a sense, human suffering becomes "supernaturalized" or, better, "Christofied." Because of Christ's salvific work, the human person can look with hope to eternal life and holiness. Even though Christ's victory over sin and death, and His glorious resurrection did not abolish temporal suffering from human life nor free the historical dimension of human existence from suffering, nevertheless it threw new light upon this dimension and even upon all human suffering. At the very core of this light is the truth uncovered in the conversation which Jesus had with Nicodemus. That truth is, "God so loved the world that God gave His only Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." It is a truth that radically changed the face of mankind's history and earthly situation. It gave new meaning to life and especially to human suffering, which until His time was merely to be endured and tolerated as part of the human condition, certainly not to be sought after and joyfully embraced. This love of God for mankind was so great that the Father sent His only begotten Son to the world that His Son may draw close in a salvific way to the whole world of human suffering, in which every human person shares. Notwithstanding the fact that sin, which is the cause of all suffering for the human person, took root in the history of the world, both as an original inheritance and as the sum of personal sin, St. Paul still wrote that "Christ became like us in all things except sin."

Jesus came into contact with human suffering not only through the good that He did and the message that He taught, but He also drew close to that suffering by experiencing it Himself. The gospels relate that during His public life He experienced fatigue, homelessness, and misunderstanding from those who were closest to Him. This misunderstanding, buttressed by the hostility of His enemies, became progressively more and more unified. He accepted and went to His passion and death with full awareness of the mission that He was destined to fulfill. And, it was precisely through this human suffering which He experienced that He accomplished His mission. Jesus suffered voluntarily and He suffered innocently.

With that suffering, He was confronted with that same question that was posed and left unanswered in the *Book of Job*: Why this suffering? In the garden, He called out to His Father to let that chalice of human suffering pass. He pleaded to the Father to take away the human suffering. In the midst of the suffering like us, He saw no reason for it. It was only when He

recalled to His mind the total picture, it was only when He, with His rational will, saw that His human suffering was the key to salvation for all mankind that He responded with the perfect prayer, "Father, not my will but Thy will be done." This and only this can give any meaning, any rationality to the "why" of human suffering. It is a way, it is a means through which we can work out our own salvation and help in the saving work of Christ in the salvation of our neighbor. Thus, one could say that Christ not only carried in His own person the same question posed by Job – "Why does one suffer?" – but He also carried within His person the answer to that question.

### **Christ's Answer to the Question**

He answered that question by "what" He taught and "why" He suffered. This answer can be summed up in one definitive phrase: "The Word of the Cross." One could hardly deny the fact that human suffering reaches its culmination point in the passion and death of Christ. At the same time, this human suffering entered into a new dimension and a new order. It has been linked to love, to that love which creates good, which is drawn out by means of suffering, just as the ultimate good of Christ's suffering – the redemption of the world – was drawn from the wood of the cross and from that cross constantly renews itself. It is in the cross that one must pose anew the question concerning the meaning of human suffering and read in that same cross the answer to that question. It is in the cross of Christ that not only is redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed. Every human being is invited to share in the redemption of mankind by preaching and living the good news. Everyone is also called to share in that suffering through which the redemption was accomplished. In bringing about the redemption through suffering, Christ has raised human suffering to a redemptive level. Thus, each man by joining his suffering to the sufferings of Christ can become a sharer in the redemptive efforts of Christ.

In St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians we read: "Now I rejoice in my suffering for your sake, and in my flesh – I complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of His body, that is the Church." This means that the redemption, accomplished through satisfactory love, always remains open to all love expressed in human suffering. In this dimension of love, the redemption which has already been accomplished is, in a certain sense, continually being accomplished. Christ achieved the redemption completely and to the very limit, but at the same time He did not bring it to a close. In His redemptive suffering, the redemption of the world was accomplished. Christ opened Himself from the beginning to every human suffering and constantly does so. It seems to be of the very essence of Christ's redemptive suffering that this suffering requires unceasing

completion. In joining our suffering to the redemptive suffering of Christ, we in a sense become sharers in the redemption of mankind.

Who better exemplifies the “redeeming” dimension of human suffering than our Blessed Mother? Throughout her lifetime, as predicted by Simeon, many swords pierced her soul. The sufferings that she endured were not only a proof of her indomitable faith, but they were also a contribution to the redemption of all mankind. From the time of her secret conversation with the angel, she began to see in her mission, as the mother of the Lord, a share in the very mission of her son in a singular and unrepeatable way. It was on Calvary that Mary’s suffering, right alongside with the suffering of her divine son, reached an intensity that can hardly be imagined from a human point of view, but which was mysterious and supernaturally fruitful for the redemption of mankind. Her ascent to Calvary and her standing at the foot of the cross with the beloved disciple were a special sort of sharing in the redeeming death of her son. With statements such as these, how far can the Church be from assigning Mary the **title of Co-Redemptrix**?

The Apostle is quick to point out that salvific suffering is not an end in itself, it is not without hope. The eloquence of the cross is completed by the eloquence of the resurrection. It is in the resurrection that man finds the strength to persevere. The light of the resurrection helps the suffering person to go forward through the thick darkness of humiliations, doubts, hopelessness, and persecution to victory with Christ. Thus, St. Paul wrote in the Letter to the Corinthians, “For as we share abundantly in Christ’s sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.”

*Cui bono* suffering? What good is suffering? Granted that it has redemptive qualities, what effect does it have on the one who is doing the suffering? Human suffering which is united to Jesus’ salvific suffering has a transforming effect on the sufferer. Throughout the centuries it has been proven that in suffering there is a concealed power that draws an individual interiorly close to Christ. It is a special grace. St. Francis of Assisi and St. Ignatius of Loyola received this special grace and it was responsible for their profound conversions. As a result of such a conversion the individual certainly discovers the salvific meaning of suffering. One can also discover something else. One discovers that because of one’s suffering, united with the cross of Christ, one becomes a completely new person – a better person. The person becomes more Christ-centered. A new dimension of life and vocation are uncovered. This discovery is a particular confirmation of the spiritual greatness which in the human person surpasses the body in a way that is beyond compare. This interior maturity and spiritual greatness are most evident when a person becomes gravely ill, totally incapacitated, and ominously close to death. What causes this interior maturity and spiritual greatness? According to the pope, it is the result of conversion and

cooperation with the grace of the Crucified Redeemer. It is Christ who acts in the heart of the sufferer. He discloses to the suffering brother or sister and gradually reveals the horizons of the Kingdom of God: that is, the horizons of a world converted to the Creator, of a world free from sin, a world built on the saving power of love. And, slowly and effectively, Christ leads the suffering person into this kingdom of the Father through the very heart of Christ's suffering because suffering cannot be transformed and changed by a grace from outside, but only from a grace from within.

### **Power to Transform and Source of Virtue**

Human suffering has the power to transform because Jesus, through His own salvific suffering is very much present in all human suffering and can act from within that suffering by the power of the Holy Spirit, His consoling spirit. Pope John Paul II believes that the Divine Redeemer penetrates the soul of every sufferer through the heart of His holy mother, who is the first and most exalted of all the redeemed. As though by a continuation of the motherhood which by the power of the Holy Spirit had given Him life, the dying Christ conferred upon the Virgin Mary a new kind of motherhood – spiritual and universal – towards all human beings. It was Christ's dying wish that every individual, during the pilgrimage of faith, might remain together with Mary, closely united to Him unto the cross, so that every manner of suffering, given fresh life by the power of the cross, should become no longer the weakness of man but the power of God.

This weakness, inherent in every act of suffering, can be the source of virtue. St. Paul, in his Letter to the Romans dealt more fully with this theme, namely, the "birth of power in weakness." He wrote, "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us." Thus, suffering, as it were, contains a special call to the practice of virtue. This particular virtue is the virtue of perseverance in bearing whatever disturbs or causes harm. In so persevering, the individual unleashes hope, which assures the individual that suffering will not be victorious, thereby depriving the individual of one's dignity as a human being. This dignity is linked very closely with the meaning of life.

This process whereby human suffering, united with the sufferings of Christ, transforms the sufferer, does not follow a set pattern. It often begins with great difficulty. Even the very point of departure differs because people react to suffering in different ways. Notwithstanding all this, it can be said that almost always an individual enters suffering with a typically human protest, "Why do I suffer?" The question is asked and the answer is

sought on a human level. Since the answer is not found on that level, the sufferer often turns to God, to Christ, for the answer. Christ answers, but it often takes time, even a long time before this answer begins to be interiorly perceived. We know that Christ does not answer the sufferer directly, nor does He answer in the abstract. The answer to the question of "why?" suffering becomes more and more evident to the sufferer as he himself gradually becomes a sharer in the sufferings of Christ. This answer, which comes through this sharing by way of the interior encounter with the Lord is in itself something more than a mere abstract answer. Rather, it is a call, it is a vocation. Christ does not explain the reasons for suffering in the abstract. It is first of all an invitation. Before all else, He says, "Follow me." Come! Through your suffering take part in the work of saving the world – an ongoing redemption which was achieved through my suffering. Through my cross the meaning of suffering gradually unfolds before the sufferer, as the individual takes up his or her cross, uniting oneself to the cross of Jesus.

### **Discovery at the Higher Level**

The sufferer, therefore, does not discover this meaning of suffering at the human level, but at the higher level – the level of the sufferings of Christ. At the same time, however, from this level of Christ the salvific meaning of suffering descends to man's level and becomes in a sense the individual's personal response. It is then and only then that the individual finds, in suffering, interior peace and even spiritual joy. It is this joy and peace that makes human suffering reasonable and tolerable. St. Paul speaks of such joy in the Letter to the Colossians, "I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake." The source of this joy is found in making suffering meaningful, because there is joy, happiness, and serenity in overcoming the sense of uselessness which is present in all human suffering on the human level.

The feeling of uselessness, present in all serious human suffering, not only consumes the suffering individual interiorly, but makes that person feel burdensome to others. In other words, the person feels trapped, completely dependent on others for help and assistance, and at the same time seemingly useless to himself. The moment that one identifies one's human suffering with the salvific suffering of Christ, a transformation takes place. The suffering takes on meaning. The feeling of uselessness disappears because that identification brings with it the interior certainty that the suffering person "completes what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ." That identification brings with it the certainty that in the spiritual work of revelation the suffering person is serving, like Christ, the salvation of his brothers and sisters. This feeling that the sufferer is carrying on an

irreplaceable, monumental service dissipates all feelings of uselessness and depression.

Pope John Paul writes, "In the body of Christ, which is ceaselessly born of the cross of the Redeemer, it is precisely suffering permeated by the spirit of Christ's sacrifice that is the irreplaceable mediator and author of the good things which are indispensable for the world's salvation. It is suffering more than anything else that clears the soul for the grace which transforms human souls. Suffering more than anything else makes present in the history of the community the powers of redemption. In that 'cosmic' struggle between the spiritual powers of good and evil, spoken of in the Letter to the Ephesians, human sufferings, united to the redemptive suffering of Christ, constitute a special support for the powers of good and open the way to the victory of these salvific powers." According to the pope, the Church sees in all of Christ's suffering brothers and sisters multiple instruments of Jesus' supernatural power. Those who share in the sufferings of Christ preserve in their own sufferings a very special particle of the infinite treasure of the world's redemption and can share this treasure with others. In the midst of human weakness, divine power bursts forth.

Human suffering provides another opportunity for one to spiritually perfect oneself. Remember the story of the Good Samaritan. A man was making the trip from Jerusalem to Jericho. Robbers set upon him and left him half dead. A priest and a Levite were passing by. They spotted the poor beaten man and ignored him. A Samaritan came along and took compassion on him. He bound up the man's wounds, placed the poor man on his own mule, and brought him to an inn. When he left, he entrusted the suffering man to the care of the innkeeper, promising to cover all unpaid expenses on his return.

This parable of the Good Samaritan teaches us many things. It teaches us sensitivity. But most of all, it teaches us what our relationship towards our suffering brothers and sisters must be. We are not allowed to "pass indifferently on the other side of the road." We must stop. We must have concern. This stopping does not mean mere curiosity. It means more. It means awareness and availability. It means having compassion, just like the Good Samaritan in the parable. We must empathize with the suffering person. We must enter into his or her suffering. Every individual who is or who ever has been sensitive to the sufferings of others is the Good Samaritan. The follower of Christ must cultivate this sensitivity of heart towards the sufferings of others. The presence of this sensitivity manifests itself in compassion. Sometimes this compassion is all we can give to our suffering brothers and sisters because circumstances may so limit us that compassion is the only or principal expression of our love. The Good Samaritan of Christ's parable does not stop at sympathy and compassion alone. They become for him an incentive, a call to action to help the

injured man, if that is possible. In other words, a Good Samaritan is one who brings help, effective as far as that is possible, to those who are suffering, in whatever form that suffering manifests itself. The Good Samaritan is one who puts one's whole heart into helping one's fellow sufferer and does not spare any material means on providing support.

Pope John Paul writes that one of the key points of Christian anthropology is self-giving, the emptying of oneself for another. The human person cannot fully find himself or herself except through a sincere gift of self. The person who is capable of giving such a gift to others in need is the true Good Samaritan.

The Good Samaritan parable provides us with still another answer to the question of "why?" suffering in the world. As one analyzes the parable with this thought in mind, one could say that human suffering is present in this world under so many different forms so as to give the human person the opportunity to respond to those in need, especially the suffering. The world of suffering unceasingly calls for another world, namely, the world of human love. In a sense, mankind owes to those suffering that unselfish love which stirs one's heart and mind into action. The person who is a real "neighbor" cannot indifferently pass by the suffering of another.

In summarizing then, human suffering can be considered an experience just to be endured simply because it is part and parcel of our human condition. In other words, one can either grit one's teeth, take some painkillers, or distract oneself in some way or other, and hope for better times tomorrow. Or one can look at human suffering with the eyes of faith. True! All of us will suffer. We have no choice. But revelation shows that suffering can be looked upon as an opportunity. It is a call because it goes with the imitation of the Risen Jesus, Who entered into His glory precisely through suffering. It goes with the invitation to walk in His footsteps, which we are doing through our Christian commitment made at baptism. Suffering is also an opportunity for growth provided we "Christofy" it by joining it to the sufferings of Jesus. Only in this way can one put any rationality into human suffering! If we "Christofy" our suffering, we in turn shall be "Christofied" because we will grow more and more into the image and likeness of Christ.

This spiritual growth will be the result of our own "Christofied" suffering. The sufferings of others give us the opportunity to get out of ourselves and give of ourselves to others. And this is another source of spiritual growth for us. Finally, unlike the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we must never forget that the "Christofied" sufferer, like their master, must suffer so as to enter into one's glory.