

# **Theological Reflections about Adult Filipino Notions of Suffering Today**

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Since the biblical period, the question about human suffering has been raised countless number of times. The varied intensity about which it has affected people's lives has sustained its mark upon a people so hungry for comforting answers. Generation after generation, that question has never been fully answered, much less, fully satisfied. These pages are written not merely to revive the old question but to propose new insights extracted from the unarticulated mindsets of adult believers on the question of human suffering. Specifically they seek to point out that within the unarticulated adult notions clustered concepts lie waiting to be un-earthed for a re-reading of traditional perceptions about popular Christian views on human suffering. This work proposes a new critical discussion based on a conceptual map current among adult believers whose actual understanding and personal appropriation of the human experience of suffering remains mostly uncharted. The following shall be presented in view of this intention: a presentation of the traditional theological responses to the problem of suffering; a highlight of their notions of human suffering extracted through factor analysis; an analysis of their notions from a theological perspective; and, finally, a resolution of the issues that comes along with respect to Filipino cultural expressions.

## Theological Approaches to the Problem of Suffering

Theological reflections<sup>1</sup> and theological treatises<sup>2</sup> abound on the theme of suffering. Most of these scholarly works are either inclined towards a theological exposition<sup>3</sup> or an investigation of suffering in relation to Job's biblical experiences and other related biblical accounts. This is understandable since the issue of suffering had been the focus of biblical and theological reflection for a long time. Some theological essays edited by Tambasco<sup>4</sup> regarding the biblical stance on suffering offer this research some fresh and useful insights in integrating the scriptural position with the respondent's viewpoints. While the book was inspired by the tragic turn of events in North America e.g. September 11 attacks, this research also responds to the signals brought along by the ill effects of current dehumanizing situations<sup>5</sup> that create panic and feelings of helplessness among Filipinos. By exposing the biblical position on the theme of suffering, the book challenges the typical human reaction in the face of suffering: "What sin have I done to suffer unjustly?" The work inevitably covers the ever sensitive topic of innocent suffering and confronts the traditional mindset of Filipinos today.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Judith Gallares, *Praying with Job: reflections and prayer on human suffering* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1991); Carlo Caretto, *Why O Lord? The inner meaning of suffering*. Trans by Robert Barr. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Anthony Tambasco, *The Bible on suffering: social and political implications* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2001); John Thiel, *God, evil, and innocent suffering: a theological reflection* (New York: Crossroad publication, 2002); Pablo Richard, "The presence and revelation of God in the world of the oppressed." In, "Where is God? A cry of human distress," Duquoc, Christian and Floristan, Casiano eds. Francis McDonagh trans. Concilium SCM Press Ltd., 1 (1992): 27-37.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-talk and the suffering of the innocent* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Sonny Africa, "From Bad to worse" In *Towards stabilization or more conflict in 2006*, Antonio A. Tujan Jr., (ed.) *Birdtalk economic and political briefing*. PSSC Auditorium. (Quezon City: PSSC, January 12, 2006); Ciriaco Lagunsad III, "Worker's pay below living wage" *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 19 (149) A16, (Sunday, May 8, 2005).

Lucien Richard's<sup>6</sup> discussion of the theology of suffering in his book "What are they saying about the theology of suffering?" provides relevant theological grounding of suffering as a universal human experience. This he did through a masterful survey of selected theologians that included: Walter Brueggemann, Edward Schillebeeckx, Jurgen Moltmann, Johannes B. Metz, Dorothy Soelle, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Stanley Huerwas. These theologians viewed suffering according to their contextual lenses e.g. Bible, feminism, liberation theology. These theological treatises mark the insight that the concrete experience of suffering has become the locus of theological reflections. Theological reflections of this sort are necessarily contextual<sup>7</sup> and speak of suffering as an engaged human experience. Speaking from particular frameworks, theologians and the Bible expound on the unique features of the notion of suffering. (This study adapts the fundamental insights about suffering gathered from their theological reflections by viewing the concept in terms of its causes, nature and effects.)

Proponents of certain philosophical systems believe that the reality of human suffering and evil only affirms the limitations of divine power. For instance the death of God movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>8</sup> challenged traditional long standing presuppositions about the problem of evil and divine power. The movement insisted on the irrelevance of the traditional divine transcendence doctrine. Although the movement cannot be technically counted as a theodicy proposition, it stands as a critique to the issue of transcendence and immanence, a theme which is treated in traditional and current theodicy discussions. The movement critiques the constancy associated with the doctrine of divine immanence. It reduced the issue of transcendence as a divine quality conditioned by historical consciousness rather than as an ontological reality.

A similar work can be encountered in the work of Barry Whitney entitled, *What Are They Saying About God and Evil?*<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Lucien Richard, *What are they saying about the theology of suffering?* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid: 121.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. [www.time.com](http://www.time.com)

<sup>9</sup> Barry Whitney, *What are they saying about God and evil?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1989).

Whitney traces the various positions attempted with respect to the problem of evil and suffering. His work is an exhaustive discussion of the merits and weaknesses of the previous debate dating back to the Augustinian-Thomistic argument, followed by Hick's ideas as well as later positions. Whitney's work serves to provide this research with a good survey of the relevant theoretical positions useful for an analysis of adult mindsets. However, considering the rational advance of the process theodicy debates, this research will only engage in the exploration of the various perspectives rather than arrive at a critical position applying process thought.

The dominant traditional theodicy represented by Augustine acclaims divine transcendence and immanence as a fundamental tenet. It is a fundamental truth to the question of evil. Augustine taught that God is infinitely good and powerful. And that he created a world that is by nature good. However, God did not create evil. In the beginning, God created a world that enjoyed divine communion with God. It enjoyed God's presence. Augustine's position was based on the Genesis accounts. A world of harmony is presented as the ideal creation which is given as a gift to humanity. A world of sufferings is not the world that it was before. However, Augustine's position never runs without any shortcomings and limitations. With the advancement of research in biblical scholarship a number of issues were raised against Augustine's position. One of these is raised by process theologians who contend that his framework is based on a static definition of God. John Hick also countered this traditional argument by claiming that God in his goodness and power created the world and was to a certain extent enjoying "omni-responsibility"<sup>10</sup> for the existence of things on earth including those that may give way to evil. However, Rabbi Kushner<sup>11</sup> in his book "When Bad things happen to Good People" relieved God of any responsibility for the sufferings of people and hinted at the limits of divine power.

To explain the presence of evil in the world, the Christian teaching had until now been anchored on the concept of the fall

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<sup>10</sup> Robert Mesle, *John Hick's Theodicy: A process humanist Critique* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1991): 49.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Kushner, Harold, *When bad things happen to good people* (New York: Avon Books, 1981).

of humanity. This Augustinian formula explains that evil came as a result of the first sin committed in paradise. Such sinful action was an exercise of free will. Hence the “fall” refers to the fall of humanity from the privilege of communion with God to one of disgrace and brokenness. The evil that befall upon humanity and the world is the consequence of sin. This explanation turns the table upon humanity for full accountability. Today, this explanation is known as the free will defense which frees God of any degree of responsibility for the evils that is taking place in the world. This however is rebutted by philosophical arguments raised by Plantinga<sup>12</sup> among others, who argued that it is not impossible to think of a God who can be responsible for the existence of the world. Such responsibility may include the responsibility over the existence of evil. A more conservative variant of the Augustinian formula is presented by C.S. Lewis who considers that “pain is the instrument which God implements to rescue us from our fallen state and inadequate faith in order to bring us to a much more profound faith.”<sup>13</sup> Human suffering is seen here as a necessary component if one wants to reach salvation. Corollary to this understanding, the love of God which graciously leads the person in suffering, can be counted as the fundamental reason why humanity suffers.

The preoccupation with the fall of humanity inspired many others to work for explanations that provided alternative solutions to the traditional picture. This dates back to the time of the patristics where a new formula shall find its roots. This was the Irenaean alternative to the Augustinian explanation. Irenaeus departed from the fixed Genesis creation account. Instead, he built on a two-structure theory<sup>14</sup> which proposed that creation takes two stages till its full realization: first is the creation in God’s “image” and, second, creation in God’s “likeness.”<sup>15</sup> This proposition departs from the theory of the fall. Instead it presents an evolutionary approach to the creation of humanity and the world: from an imperfect creation to a perfect creation. Human suffering in this under-

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Robert Mesle 1991.

<sup>13</sup> Barry Whitney, 71.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Mesle 1991; Whitney 1989.

<sup>15</sup> Mesle, xviii.

standing is part of the unfolding realities of life's imperfections that should lead someday towards the perfection of the created being. In this view God exercises responsibility over human experiences of evil on earth. The eventual perfection is a future reality yet to be achieved. The Greek "eschaton" and the "new heaven and new earth" described by Paul in the New Testament somehow reveals the nature of this anticipated future reality. The eschatological orientation of this framework is that this theodicy points to the future as the "justifying end where God brings good out of evil."<sup>16</sup>

Process theodicy picked up from the Irenaean formula. The leading proponents for this view include Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne among others. Process theodicy subscribe to the evolutionary character of creation. Contrary to traditional Christian propositions, it rejects the idea that God created the world and humanity out of nothing since humanity "cannot be absolutely dependent upon God"<sup>17</sup>. Advocates of process thought believe that God suffers with humanity. In this view, the traditional view of divine perfection and absolute power is contested. God's power is limited at a certain point as demonstrated by the presence of evil on earth in varying intensities. The peak of creation ends up in the highest levels of "sensitivity to the divine."<sup>18</sup> Evolutionary thought is criticized for its proposition that considers the end time as merely "the end of the evolutionary process."<sup>19</sup> This thinking is vehemently rejected by Christianity. Process theologians insist that the notion of hell is not compatible with divine love<sup>20</sup> where love allows for the growing process to happen in an evolving human environment. They believe that the "experience and 'lure' of God are present and primary in the becoming of every

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<sup>16</sup> Jeff Astley, David Brown, Ann Loades eds. 2003. *Evil: A Reader* (New York, NY: T&T Clark Ltd, 2003): 61.

<sup>17</sup> Barry Whitney, 52.

<sup>18</sup> Mesle, 98.

<sup>19</sup> Neil Ormerod, *Introducing contemporary theologies today: The what and the who of theology today*. Enlarged and revised (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997): 128.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Mesle, 98.

creature.”<sup>21</sup> Process thinkers ultimately do not believe in a set of rewards in the afterlife or in the attainment of a life in eternity with God. Here they fully divert from the eschatological elements found in Christian doctrine.

A different point of departure is provided by Liberationist ideas which propose discourses within the context of evil manifested in enslaving human realities. In this discourse, evil is the product of human willing. It is contextually generated and enjoys historical grounding. In identifying the location of evil, Liberation theodicy strive to unsettle or dismantle the sources of evil and allow the human spirit to grow as God’s children. The only way for the good to prosper and human suffering to stop is to destroy the forces of evil manifested in structures that enslave and oppress.

Other than the issue of divine omnipotence being legitimized in theodicy, human suffering is also addressed using eschatological language. Pinnock<sup>22</sup> believes that any attribution of meaning to the problem of suffering must come from the perspective of the sufferer rather than from external formulations. Schillebeeckx points out his own positions along the lines of eschatological language. For him suffering, which is not redemptive in itself, is only redemptive when it is a “suffering through and for others.”<sup>23</sup> This is reinforced by Christian thought as enshrined in many New Testament writings which considers suffering as a means to a higher value e.g. Kingdom of God (Mk 8:35; 10:29), righteousness, etc. “The salvific meaning of suffering lies in the intention of the sufferer, namely the reason for which suffering is endured”<sup>24</sup>. “Now it is seen as a human task to bring about the *eschaton*... In this view, suffering is caused by corrupt persons, who ...impede the process that the basically good nature would otherwise initiate.”<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Mesle, 100.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Sarah Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

<sup>23</sup> Aloysius Rego, Aloysius OCD. 2006. *Suffering and Salvation: The salvific meaning of suffering in the later theology of Edward Schillebeeckx* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2006): 335.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Lars Reuter, “Euthanasia and the meaning of suffering.” *Theology Digest* 43(4) (Winter, 1996): 343.

## Christian Scriptural Approaches to Suffering

The more classic approach to suffering is the biblical proposition. Within the biblical framework, human suffering is seen as divine retribution. This framework insists that it is sin that causes suffering in the individual. Hence human suffering is justified as a payment for the sins committed by the person.<sup>26</sup> Every human suffering amounts to a justification of the goodness of God. God is cleared of the malice involved in the malady. This position is deemed as a defense of divine goodness. It supports the idea that there is a consequence to every human action committed. Out of the unfaithfulness of humanity comes the consequence of people's sins. The Bible in general speaks about divine vindication due to sins committed by the people. "It was he who sacrificed himself for us, to redeem us from all unrighteousness and to cleanse for himself a people of his own, eager to do what is right" (Tit. 2: 14).

A different variation of this perspective is provided in the shift from the concept of retributive justice to "redemptive" justice. In this formula the greater good is the "correction and transformation of the person."<sup>27</sup> Suffering in this instance, no matter how painful, is interpreted as necessary for the attainment of the greater good namely, the correction and conversion of the person. In the Old Testament certain accounts speak of human suffering either as a test or something to be endured. In the New Testament several Pauline writings (Rom. 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 10:13) and other letters (Heb. 12:11) refer to this thinking. Paul asserts how humanity should endure their sufferings in anticipation of a greater good which shall come as promised (Rom 8:18-23).

Another framework that maintains its popularity is the notion that suffering is a sacrifice and atonement for people. The whole idea of "suffering for and through others"<sup>28</sup> constitutes the

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. Richard Vieth, *Holy power human pain* (Blomington, IN: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> Vieth, 44.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ* (New York: Seabury Press, 1980a): 795; and, Schillebeeckx, *Christ: the Christian experience in the modern world*. Trans John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1980b): 120.



fundamental idea in the New Testament message. This position cites Christ's death as "an atoning death for human beings, as a vicarious propitiatory sacrifice whereby human beings are redeemed."<sup>29</sup> The view about Christ's death as having a significant contribution to human redemption is shared also by Kasper.<sup>30</sup> This manner of thinking is also shared in the documents of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines that reasoned: The center of the "Good news" focused sharply on "the redemption wrought in Christ Jesus. Through his blood, God made him the means of expiation for all who believe" (Rom. 3: 24f; *CFC* 446). This strand is also popular among some Christian scholars and in the Christian tradition. Church tradition has stressed this redemptive and sacrificial character of Christ's passion and death (*CFC* 448). The Council of Trent for instance provides this classic interpretation: "Our Lord Jesus was once and for all to offer Himself to God the Father by his death on the altar of the cross, to accomplish an everlasting redemption" (Trent; ND, 1546).

Suffering is also addressed in apocalyptic writings. Here human suffering is related with the realization of the Kingdom of God. The coming of the Kingdom is often associated with disasters and calamities of such magnitude that permits for human imagination to consider that everything is coming to a stop somewhere. Because of the anticipation that these disasters are going to end up with the realization of God's reign, the call for sobriety and patience is issued. Any experience of suffering in this regard is to be regarded as a worthy participation to the unfolding of God's Kingdom. In contrast to the evolutionary ideas of process thought, "apocalyptic eschatology takes seriously the possibility of an end to time, an end to history. How much longer must the poor suffer?..."<sup>31</sup> An attitude of openness is encouraged. In the Philippines, there were instances when the "three-days-of-darkness" phenomenon was very much publicized. It caused much uproar

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*. Trans. John Bowden (London: Collins, 1979): 291.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ*. Trans. V. Green (London: Burns & Oates, 1976).

<sup>31</sup> Ormerod, 128.

and fear among innocent people. Many went to the stores and bought enough reserves of candle sticks for the much anticipated three days of darkness which eventually never happened. In the Scriptures a Christian reading of this phenomenon can be gleaned from Jesus' message of the "basileia tou theou" or the kingdom of God. This notion speaks of a two-sided reality: "God's present saving activity...and the future final, eschatological transformation of "the evil world, dominated by the forces of calamity and woe, and initiates the new world..."<sup>32</sup> Seen from an eschatological framework, evil and the historical struggle against evil have to be seriously considered.<sup>33</sup> However unlike the apocalyptic discourse, the kingdom emphasizes the restoration of God's justice and love while it gradually unfolds in the present.

There are two strands of thinking within the belief that suffering is a mystery. The first looks at suffering as mystery in the sense that no direct answers can be formulated for suffering per se. However, this perspective believes that there are aspects of suffering which can be rationally understood. At best, one can only give interpretations and meaning. The other one suggests a re-valuation of suffering as an *ahistorical* reality. This reduction in meaning takes away the "causal"<sup>34</sup> dimension of suffering. It is often associated with pious references to the subjective experience. A classic example is the work of Hugh Hopkins<sup>35</sup> who asserts that any attempt to raise the question of suffering is indicative of a shallow faith. In this framework the suffering of Jesus becomes "a self-contained event"<sup>36</sup> devoid of its historical context. Jesus' suffering in this regard is no longer seen as a suffering meant for others but a suffering pursued for its own sake. This mistaken notion lingers in some popular religious devotions among Christians. The notion of associating suffering with mystery also

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<sup>32</sup> Schillebeeckx 1979: 141.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Ormerod, 128.

<sup>34</sup> Rego, 274.

<sup>35</sup> Hugh Evan Hopkins, *The mystery of suffering* (London: Inter-varsity fellowship, 1961).

<sup>36</sup> Rego 274.

brushes aside speculations aimed at a reasonable understanding of suffering for “suffering and evil are merely due to human inability to perceive God’s plan at work in the world and in the lives of human beings.”<sup>37</sup> Referring to the mystery of suffering and evil, Fischer and Hart’s<sup>38</sup> survey of the different attempts at a rational explanation, proved to uncover certain limitations.

The preceding discussion provided a brief survey of the various positions and frameworks that addressed the issue of human suffering. The question of why God permits evil had been addressed religiously or philosophically. Theodicy takes the latter while religious tradition takes up the former. More often the problem of evil in the religious tradition had never been assigned answers to the issue for these are the concerns which only God can fully determine. Any human attempts to uncover these solutions are deemed futile. In the philosophical platform, the proposed answers are highly varied and can only provide at best theoretical estimates using reason.

Realizing the urgency of the problem, the slant of contemporary theology today, either through theodicy or the biblical narratives, highlights the depth of the impact of suffering towards theological reflection. Referring to the Auschwitz experience, Johannes Baptist Metz<sup>39</sup> believed that theology, if it has to be meaningful at all, must confront the problem of suffering by humanity. Sharing perspectives from liberation theology, Gutierrez notes that “the place of theology is the suffering of the world...”<sup>40</sup> From the perspective of theology the question of suffering remains a fresh concern for all people. Kasper (1984) believes that a theological discourse about the human person meaningfully proceeds

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 275-276.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Kathleen Fischer & Thomas Hart, *Christian Foundations*, revised (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).

<sup>39</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, Johann Baptist, “God and the evil of this world: Forgotten, unforgettable theodicy.” Jose Oscar Beozzo and Virgil Elizondo, eds. John Bowden trans. Concilium (London: SCM Press, 1997): 3-8.

<sup>40</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *On Job: God-talk and the suffering of the innocent* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1987): 159.

with an articulation of the human experience of suffering. To understand the human person is to understand the personal experience of suffering. Discourses such as these are pursued no end by every generation and had never been laid to rest. For example, speaking from his Latin American experience, Gutierrez<sup>41</sup> raised the old question of divine providence in a situation that apparently promoted evil rather than the power of the good. Working in an inter-disciplinary mode, recent theological scholarship, addresses the whole question with greater vigor. The issue of human suffering is re-oriented towards new forms of associated meanings.<sup>42</sup> Human suffering is now articulated in terms of social exclusion and marginalization<sup>43</sup> and seen from the subjective angles of the victims as articulated in Liberationalist discourses. This theological slant goes hand in hand with the empirical sciences today. Protacio-De Castro's<sup>44</sup> study on youth notions of well being as well as Ponce's dissertation<sup>45</sup> to name a few, exhibits this orientation. Through a previous empirical study this paper provides scholarship with an empirical landscape of the construct in question.

### Adult Notions of Suffering: Some Highlights

With 300 adult respondents the internal consistency score for the items in the scale which measured adults' empirical constructs of suffering was recorded at 94.13% (Cronbach's alpha). Weak items (those with a score lower than .30) were distinguished over the rest of the items. Some 60 correlated items comprising four factor dimensions were identified in the instrument. The

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<sup>41</sup> 1987.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Dominador Bombongan Jr., "Social Exclusion: The new name of poverty?" Catholic Theological Society of the Philippines (DAKATEO). *A Theological Conversation on the New Forms of Marginalization, Exclusion and Suffering*. National Conference. October 26-28, 2007. De La Salle- Lipa, Lipa City, Batangas.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Elizabeth Protacio-de Castro, "Young people's notions of Psycho-social well-being in the context of armed conflict in the Philippines." (March-April 2006).

<sup>45</sup> Rico Ponce, O.Carm., *Spirituality and Quality of Life: an empirical-theological exploration among Filipino migrants in the Netherlands* (Quezon City: Institute of Spirituality in Asia, Inc., 2006).

scale was evaluated for its readiness for factor analysis using Bartlett's test (.000) and KMO to find out if sampling was adequate for this purpose. The results indicated a favorable assessment. Deliberating from the results of the scree plot and the table representing "total variance explained" four factors (observing factor components with eigenvalues above 1) were selected for extraction. The four factor components identified can explain 36.54% of the total variance.

***Factor One: Human suffering draws the individual to God***

With 29 items in all, the fundamental orientation of this factor is that suffering draws the individual to God hence; it speaks about the human responses to suffering. At once, the nature of human suffering is shown in this dimension. The religious bias appears to temper the whole notion. Human suffering is an experience through which the individual finds hope and meaning. It represents the quest about the search for meaning towards God who alone can provide the needed help. Besides the availability of meaning in suffering, the individual learns from life and learns to stand alone. Being able to provide for one's own is a fundamental trait of an adult. Maturing in age also requires passing over through the painful consequences of life. Hence the moment of suffering is a journey of testing and confidence building towards God. In being able to recover meaning in the context of suffering, the individual opens up to the invitations of hope, experience of relief and the promptings of peace. Only a good outlook can resound in the recovery of this three sided subjective experience that forms a union towards a good sense of well being which openly acknowledges the beauty that each day holds for people.

Coinciding with the search for meaning and hope in suffering is prayer to God, an essential aspect of the experience of suffering. It comes with faith in God who alone can provide the necessary help. Without prayer the individual may not have the necessary self-confidence to face the negative impact that is drawn from the outside. Since suffering is a test of faith and inner strength, it serves to strengthen the person rather than demean the self. Faith in God in this framework is a core element in the experience of suffering. Inversely, a person without faith who experiences

suffering may lack the necessary tool to confront the ugly experience. Here, a “testing” that leads to defeat in the form of giving up only typifies a loss. It implies that a person with faith experiences a loss when that individual gives up on God the sole provider of the needed help. The whole experience of suffering requires a considerable amount of effort on the part of the suffering individual. Persistence appears to be a key factor when individuals face the trials of life. Such giving up is characterized as a wrong choice. This whole travail with suffering makes it an experience that is never to be desired since it really affect human disposition but nevertheless must be borne patiently.

***Factor Two: Suffering is caused by corrupt human inclinations***

With fifteen items, the second factor unveils a unique character of the experience of human suffering as human undoing. While the first factor is focused on the divine aspect of the experience, this factor points to the human dimension. It directly identifies human responsibility as the key factor delineated by these clumped items. While the subjective experience is central to every articulation of human suffering, attention to the self is rendered upon descriptions made regarding the experience. Hence an account of human suffering must include an admission of personal accountability which is in fact given flesh by personal ambition, selfishness and pride. Human suffering is caused by corrupt human inclinations perpetrated by unjust man-made structures. The people are culpable for their participation in the unjust enterprise. Due to the significant space given to personal and human accountability, experiences of suffering in this regard reveal the urgency of a personal response to find God. The intensity of the subjective experience is magnified significantly by the amount of deprivation experienced. This whole cycle involving human activity is better understood within the back draft of a divine invitation.

Faith in God models a life that is free from the stains of corrupt tendencies. A person who suffers in faith may not essentially suffer after all. The experience being referred here when speaking about “not suffering in faith” does not necessarily mean being excluded from physical suffering. It is something like a “graced

suffering” that reflects the suffering of Christ. This is the suffering of those who are not accomplices to the malice of corrupt ways. It is a “suffering for” kind of suffering. Inversely, a life without faith only invites real physical suffering. Such a life is characterized by the person’s engagement in corrupt activities and in dehumanizing cycles of oppression. This is the suffering that calls for an urgent response towards conversion. Building up on the issue of faith raised in the first factor, the issue of suffering brings to the fore a distinction between a believing and an unbelieving person. Belief in this regard is qualified by one’s commitment to faith. Echoing the religious nature of human suffering, human culpability for the errors made must find its way as newfound responsible decisions made before God, who continues to issue the invitation to suffer like his Son. While the mode of this dimension speaks clearly of human responsibility, such can only be fully understood within the context of God’s invitation in faith. In this factor, the call to conversion (religious imperative) only appears to provide the context for understanding the human responsibility rather than being seen as an isolated ‘aspect’ which is irrelevant to the rest of the variables.

### ***Factor Three: Human Suffering is essential to human life***

Where suffering builds up on meaning as it draws the person towards God (first factor) and issues forth the religious invitation to conversion in the midst of irresponsible human activity (second factor), this factor identifies the basic attitudes towards human suffering. This dimension generally cites human suffering as essential to human life. The central place attached to suffering in life can be drawn from the significant affective response given to it as well as the ensuing value associated to the experience.

This dimension identifies human sentiments recognized by the respondents as appropriate for the experience. The joy that an individual holds in suffering assumes an understanding that suffering is not without meaning for the individual. Life in fact is dull without human suffering. A person is thankful in the knowledge that the experience will nourish life and provides an opportunity to live a disciplined life. The respondents identify thankfulness as a response to God, the Lord of life. It also reveals the

amount of acceptance that they nurture towards the painful realities of life. What is worth noting is that they nurture a very positive personal response towards the experience. Suffering is never disgraceful no matter how painful. It issues in them a living reminder that they cannot save themselves. Essentially, suffering in this dimension is a faith experience since the negative experience which is essential to nourished life is always constitutive of the divine presence through meaning making (factor one) and divine invitation despite personal irresponsibility (factor two).

***Factor Four: Human Suffering is the breakdown of relationships***

Within the experience of human suffering, the respondents hold the belief that relationships play a significant role. These items hold the key element that cuts across various unique individual narratives. Human suffering in this dimension is the breakdown of relationships that individuals are expected to nurture in life. Since these relationships are deemed essential any breakdown is considered highly significant. To that effect, the kind of response that an individual applies in relation to the breakdown is highly important for meaning making.

The significant place enjoyed by relationships is such that any description of suffering must include an account of its impact upon relationships. Adult narratives of suffering should describe the actual impact upon family life and the self. Beyond the tales of the breakdown in the human relationships are the relational experiences of the person in prayer. Prayer holds a special place in the confrontation of suffering. Suffering also constitutes the distraction of the individual's relationship with God for every infraction against the divine laws. If suffering is a journey of meaning making through which God issues his invitation, this infraction can be characterized as the height of the human pain. The very reason e.g. God's justice expressed through his laws, which brings suffering at its height is also the very consolation of the suffering individual. In every account of suffering, there exists a space where the heart finds the peace of God extending the invitation for conversion.



Earlier in the second factor unbelief in God is manifested in human corruption. Unbelief in God is articulated in the social setting, as an offense that runs parallel to oppressive social conditions. In factor four suffering constitutes in the subjective impact from familial ties as well as in 'not following God's commandment.' Due to the strong affinity given to family ties and God's laws, for this dimension familial relationships may represent those human relationships that the individual holds dearly including those that go beyond family life. There is a break down when God's laws are not observed. On the other hand, the breakdown in family life affects the individual. The first experience speaks of an active participation while the second refers to a passive experience (meaning, it may or may not be directly caused by the individual in the family) experienced by the individual. Both instances describe how the breakdown is realized. Specifically it describes how the breakdown is realized within the spectrum of relationships. In the first level, the experience speaks of the breakdown of relationships with human institutions and on the next, with divine precepts. By implication this breaking down of relationship is to be seen in the context of God's laws and society.

### **The Four Dimensions: Perspectives from Theology and Christianity**

The unique characteristics found within each dimension bring readers into dialogue with authentic mindsets that articulate the inner response of the person. This essay has shown that the four factor dimensions provide readers with a deeply religious interpretation of human suffering. Their thoughts somehow echo the characteristic biblical response to suffering. In his book *Compassion and Solidarity*, Baum expressed that the oppressed firmly believe "that God is on their side."<sup>46</sup> In post-conflict situations such as in the Philippines 'oppression' usually takes on different meaning. Gauging from their responses, 'oppression' refers to relational conflicts and difficulties brought about by issues of economic sustainability and survival. This idea of 'oppression' is conceived at a time when the

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<sup>46</sup> Gregory Baum, *Compassion and solidarity* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990).

days of military dictatorship are long gone although critiques of the Macapagal administration would insist that the old tricks of the old regime are gradually making their way again in disguised forms. Speaking from this different level of experience, they share in the common understanding that God is on their side. To say that God is on their side is to suggest that the individual holds a personal experience of God's solidarity in the human situation. Those who have this experience are invited to "extend their solidarity"<sup>47</sup> with others. A God who is in solidarity with humanity shares in humanity's struggle and pain.<sup>48</sup> That God is faithful to the human experience. That God is in communion with his people. God is where the people are located. God consoles the individual in his/ her personal anguish. However, their notions appear to have toned down the solidarity of God in the human condition (purpose of human suffering). This God whom Christianity<sup>49</sup> identifies as being in solidarity with people is fraught with great powers and is taking control of things. The God they know is one who acts in grandiose power ready to test the mettle of every individual. To this Being, the individual should prove worthy and unrelenting in character. This was also the kind of response which Dorothee Soelle<sup>50</sup> in her book *Theology for Skeptics* gathered from the stories of different poor people she had conversations with. Soelle could not believe that these people entertain an image of God which reduces them into "impotent nobodies, victims of an inscrutable divine agency beyond... control."<sup>51</sup>

Their reservation about God's solidarity could be contributed in part to their view of God's dominant presence in the world. It is short of saying that any claim of God suffering with the individual's suffering is presumptuous. It is surprising to note

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<sup>47</sup> Baum 1990: 77.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Priscilla Pope-Levison, & John Levison, *Jesus in global contexts* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Antonio Tagle, *Easter people: living community* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Dorothee Soelle, *Theology for skeptics* (London: Mowbray, 1995).

<sup>51</sup> Neil Ormerod, *Introducing contemporary theologies today: the what and the who of theology today*, Enlarged and revised (Maryhknoll: Orbis Books, 1997): 196.

this differentiation (their suffering is not necessarily a sharing in Christ's suffering or that God does share in their sufferings) despite the popularity of devotions that appear to nurture sentiments with the weak. One such example could be the devotion to the Black Nazarene in the Philippines. The "Black Nazarene" refers to the wooden image of Jesus that lay inside a glass encasement and dressed in purple robes. The image is reputed to have miraculous powers that have caused healing upon hundreds of devotees that flock to the Basilica of Saint John the Baptist (Quiapo church) every year for the feast day. The image itself does not project a suffering Christ but a dead Christ who has 'undergone' all the pain and is waiting for the justification of God. The purple robes do not appear to signify a defeated being mocked for its own weakness and suffering but a being identified with dignified leadership and command of people. What they are sure about is that only God can help them in suffering. Despite the New Testament accounts, it appears to be culturally indecent (at least in this study) to present a superior God as someone who suffers with his own. Such reaction appears to be culturally conditioned which shall be discussed in a later section. This hesitation brings the reader into the next difficulty. In liberation perspectives and Christian spirituality, no meaningful solidarity with others can take place if the fundamental religious experience of God is not basically one of solidarity. How can there be any meaningful invitations to be in solidarity with others when there is a significantly missing fundamental religious experience somewhere. Without this requisite experience, a "church of disciples", inspired by the experience of God's solidarity (also a church in communion) envisioned by the Catholic Church in the Philippines may yet be far from reality.

### **Underlying themes within adult notions**

Within this religious orientation, several aspects of their notion are found to be in dialogue with certain existentialist insights particularly those of Gabriel Marcel. This does not mean however, that their notions fully agree with Marcel's philosophy. Considering the long history of Philippine colonization and current dehumanizing factors that impact upon human life, it is not surprising that their notions should take the existentialist turn. It is highly possible that these respondents have felt deeply their

experiences of sufferings and that these experiences must have occupied a significant place in their journey through life. Reflecting from Marcel's thoughts on suffering, the following significant themes are found to provide a strategic dialogue with their notions: Religious journey, experience of grace, and the human response. First, Marcel believed that human suffering "gains meaning as part of a religious journey from isolation toward relation, from fear toward trust in others, from despair to hope."<sup>52</sup> Human suffering is not merely a claim of pain and agony. Although the theme of pain and agony is central in existential thinking, Marcel did not stop there. He proceeded with a religious exposition of the experience and incidentally crossed paths with the notions of a latter post-war generation of Filipinos. The articulation of the first dimension is all about the journey towards meaning. A distinctive trait of the Filipino notions is that they do not cite the dichotomy or the diametric opposition of two experiential poles e.g. isolation to relation in suffering. There is no clear reference to fear, isolation, despair, etc. in suffering. Hence the movement cannot be characterized as a "jump" or a shift but a progression towards something. At the beginning of the experience, the respondents already see suffering as one coming from (an invitation of) God and hence 'with' God. It must be clarified however that the invitation that they perceive is not about suffering 'with Christ' but to suffer 'like Christ'. This distinction is raised because of the weak indication that God is in solidarity with them in their suffering. This association 'with God' is probably responsible for the respondents' refusal to link experiences of suffering with fear and isolation.

Another example cites the distinct poles of experiences in reference to the apparent vacillation of North Americans between cynicism and credulity. John Hall enthused about the great challenge that North Americans face today before the world. His article dealt with the ramifications of a "debilitating realism of the cynic and the repressive unrealism of the credulous."<sup>53</sup> Again,

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<sup>52</sup> Sarah Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Continental Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002): 32.

<sup>53</sup> Douglas John Hall, "Beyond Cynicism and credulity," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* vol. 6, 3 (1985): 201-211, 210.

Hall's example cites two opposing experiential poles that bring us to the second factor dimension where instances of belief and unbelief were noted. Falling close to this parallelism, the respondents have identified that within human suffering two opposing experiential references can take place: the first is, 'unbelief' occasioned by pride and selfish ambition, and second, 'belief' marked by responsible willingness to go with Jesus in his journey. However, unlike the North American issue and the polarized experience cited by Marcel, the religious journey of the respondents is a "passing over the painful consequences of life." Such experience does not speak of a definite and immediate resolution (from death to Life) but refers to an ongoing struggle over pain where God is in control and where God will lead them. However, when the pain comes to an end, the individual can only be so thankful for the privilege of journeying with God at the helm.

The second theme rests in the human experience of grace. Marcel believed that "the experience of grace in the life of the individual is the main factor that sustains faith and quenches complaint."<sup>54</sup> Grace is the individual's experience of God. In Thomistic thinking, grace builds upon human nature. Grace brings in the experience of relief and peace even in the midst of pain. Schillebeeckx is convinced that "God is to be found in the underside of even life's darkest, most threatening experiences... when all worldly evidence attests to the malevolence of reality, God is to be found as mercy at the heart of reality."<sup>55</sup> There is this Filipino penchant to make reference to God's mercy even in their daily conversations ("May awa ang Diyos," God is merciful). It is not merely a habitual exercise that they do it. It is a personal act of devotion that expresses their deepest sentiments about God at the very heart of life's struggle. Life has convinced them that "fragmentary experiences of salvation must be available in the present."<sup>56</sup>

Third is the theme about human response. The human response to suffering, asserts Marcel, is one of hope, availability

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<sup>54</sup> Pinnock, 35.

<sup>55</sup> Cathleen McManus, Cathleen, OP, "Suffering in the theology of Edward Schillebeeckx." *Theological studies* 60, 3 (September 1999): 476-491, 481.

<sup>56</sup> Rego, 327.

and fidelity.<sup>57</sup> For Marcel, “the person who hopes does not ignore or deny the brokenness of the world and the reality of suffering.”<sup>58</sup> Hope in this case is grounded on a realistic view of the world. It is not an escape to an “other-worldly” reality totally different from their current life situation. Probably with their encounters in family life and harsh conditions these adults have fully appreciated the world and have come to terms with it. This was also the case of Marcel who despite his earlier inclination towards idealism shifted to the more existential orientation after the world war. His negative experiences brought him in touch with his real world and all its pain. It comes with complete acceptance of the painful demands of life. Only in being fully conscious of this reality can the individual move in hope. There are those who have failed to realize this and have given in to despair. But suffering is to be confronted not only in hope but also in presence and faithfulness. Today presence has been tainted with many other connotations. Presence can be temporary, conditional or constant. The respondents’ persistent response is one of facing it, rather than stay away from it. There is dignity in facing it for in suffering one finds the invitation of God leading the individual to conversion. In the retributive framework, the justice of God is the greater good which justifies the suffering of an individual. Building up on the redemptive mindset, the redemptive model provides that human suffering is justified for the sake of personal conversion which in this case is the greater good. Within this thinking, human suffering serves divine justice either as a deserved punishment for the offender who offended God or as a necessary step towards the attainment of eventual personal maturation and growth.

The problem of suffering has more often than not, provided opportunities to learn from new insights for greater understanding. Truly, many philosophies in the past do have a way of assigning meaning to the human event. Even those that showed a reserved posture towards human suffering did not absolutely rule out any meaning. Foremost among these are the French existentialists. In response to life’s uncertainties and threatening situations, exis-

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<sup>57</sup> Cf. Pinnock, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 34.

tential theorists sought solutions aimed at responding to these dilemmas. Even among religious existentialists “authentic existence includes recognizing one’s relation to God.”<sup>59</sup> The existentialist attitude towards human suffering espoused by Marcel reflects affinity to the issue of weakness in human relationships highlighted in the second dimension. The issue reminds the respondents of the fragile condition of human life which makes humanity vulnerable to these harsh realities. Marcel views suffering as “resulting from pride and weakness, the vulnerability of the human body, the fragility of human relationships, and the risk that love will be shattered by loss.”<sup>60</sup> Ultimately, this issue of vulnerability brings them into confrontation with the limitations of the human condition and hence, their undeniable need for God.

### **Evil defined as an emergent concept**

A peculiar realization from their notions is that evil is not explicitly identified as an objective cause or even seen as a reality in the experience of suffering. Here evil lacks the social personality sufficient enough to move them to claim an urgent response for social transformation. It is simply expressed in declarative form (their statements) with no urgency attached to it. The closest that they get is to see suffering as being caused by the breakdown of relationships and weak human will. There is no direct reference of these causes as instances of moral or physical “evil.” It appears to this researcher that their pre-occupation rests more on God than on evil. And that giving “evil” a distinct place might negate or somehow weaken their claims that suffering is significantly a divine summons. Such a case allows one speculative angle to occur namely: that there is a diametric opposition between God and evil, something which Christianity has emphasized upon its adherents. Only by deduction shall one find an inkling of moral evil in their appropriation which includes among others: corruption, personal ambition, vice, etc. In the Bible, as it is common among contemporary Bible scholars, the absence of obvious solutions or non

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<sup>59</sup> Pinnock, 24.

<sup>60</sup> Pinnock, 25.

confrontation with the problem of evil is noted by Simundson<sup>61</sup> in his book "Faith under fire." This is in contrast to theodicy formulas which either try to reconcile the problem of evil with the issue of divine power or dispute divine authority with respect to the commanding presence of evil. Apparently for these people evil is a non-issue, or at least it is not the primary issue. The main issue instead, is the divine invitation raising every human will towards conversion and communion through meaning making. In contrast, Hegel's version of evil posits of a historical evil which is necessary to provide the "negative" elements driving the dialectic of history forward to its perfect fulfillment."<sup>62</sup>

Another strand of thinking within the issue of evil is Augustine's classic definition of evil as the absence of good. Judging from the lack of an explicit identity of evil as a cause of suffering, it appears that evil can only take the same place that Augustine used to place it many years ago: as an absence. This posture was followed by Thomas Aquinas in scholastic times. Even among the items, evil does not enjoy any significant attention. The social reality of evil in the Philippine context which has disturbed countless number of people has neither triggered a change of perspective nor altered the predominantly Christian presuppositions of these people. "Evil" remains boxed in the traditional personal vacuum inspired by Tridentine theology. Although they mention social maladies as causes of suffering (second factor), "evil" has not occupied the 'social' agenda in the same manner that it has caught the attention of theodicy scholars; and in the same manner that evil has claimed a place in "social sin" within contemporary discourses of moral theology which requires an urgent social response. Their handling of 'evil' has not matched the attention given it by liberation theologians who finds the urgency to address the sources of bondage for these are contrary to the gospel values. There is a felt hesitation to name it. This hesitation is revived in situations where cycles of violence are being committed. No wonder the cry against violence among many helpless individuals in the Philippines lacks character and motivation. If someone is suffering from oppressive forces,

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<sup>61</sup> Simundson, Daniel, *Faith under fire* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980).

<sup>62</sup> Pinnock, 28.



that person would rather keep the whole incident toned down especially when one's personal life is at stake. A related experience is affirmed by volunteers of a Hong Kong-based Filipino immigrant assistance center for Overseas Filipino domestic helpers who are victimized by unfortunate treatment. According to them these workers would rather not pursue the case if it means that having a case in court will jeopardize their prospects of earning for their families back home. "Home" for them is what gives them strength to go on in life; it is more important than the 'evil' brought about by maltreatment. If 'home' is sustained by the money that they can send from work, the 'evil' loses its sting upon them. Using the perspective of liberation theology, the struggle for justice has yet to commence considering the drawback in conceptions of evil and the lack of an experience of God's solidarity. Perhaps the appropriate act of the Filipino today is to search for the God who is in real solidarity with the lives of his/her people. When this is realized, the real cry for justice in solidarity with one another can commence as the cry of God's people. Without the experience of God in solidarity with them, their anguish will remain a 'distant' cry away from the pain of God. Outside the Philippines, the universal reality of evil including its disturbing symbolism remains the object of contention and debate among scholars. It appears that among the respondents, evil is like a minor disruption in the whole large process of growing where the one (God) who is supposed to be in full control of the situation has shown complete mastery and command. It entirely rests in God's hands to address evil, not them. Somehow the following passage relates to their thoughts: "It was he who sacrificed himself for us, to redeem us from all unrighteousness and to cleanse for himself a people of his own, eager to do what is right" (Tit. 2: 14). From a liberationist perspective this is an area where the task of liberation can start.

Today one finds several attempts to reconcile the problem of evil with the teaching of an almighty and powerful God. Reuters<sup>63</sup> observed that most of these attempts are defenses meant to free God of any accountability by focusing on the personal responsibility of the individual. Departing from Augustine's thought Process

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<sup>63</sup> 1996.

theology provides an alternative explanation to this reasoning. The argument is that while God is powerful and loving, his power is somehow limited by the exercise of creaturely freedom on earth; But not with the adults' notions on human suffering. They see a God who is powerful and one who may cause suffering upon one's life for testing and conversion. But in process thought, God do not exercise direct intervention over human free will in the form of control. Hence suffering cannot be regarded as a consequence of divine design or causation. God is present in human suffering not as "one who sends it, but rather as one struggling with us to bring some good out of it."<sup>64</sup> In the face of evil realities, God is one who is in solidarity with our sufferings.<sup>65</sup> Feminist theology finds agreement with this thinking. In the feminist framework, this divine limitation of power is not perceived as divine weakness but rather of "highest excellence"<sup>66</sup> marked by a deep involvement and compassion for humanity. But this is not what the notions are telling. Human suffering can come from God in the form of testing. That testing is necessary (looking from both redemptive and retributive frameworks). Being tested they look at God as the object of their hope and the source of their confidence. God is present with the individual to test rather than undergo suffering with the person. Christ has undergone this and it is their turn to do it in imitation of Christ. In this case, Christ's experience of suffering is deemed "accomplished" and it is now the turn of the individual to suffer the same for the sake of conversion and growth. With respect to that qualification, the notions refer to two different "moments": the moment of Christ's suffering and later, the moment of the suffering individual. Within the experience of suffering the individual experiences a "moment" which is different from Christ's experience. The person does not share the same moment with Christ. Against process theodicy, their perception of God's presence in human life is not one of receiving the experience so that God should "suffer with" the individual but

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<sup>64</sup> Kathleen Fischer, & Thomas Hart, *Christian Foundations*, revised (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995): 121.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion* (London: SCM Press, 2001).

<sup>66</sup> Fischer & Hart 1995, 122.

one of “giving suffering” to the individual. This supports the earlier difficulty posed regarding the lack of a religious experience of solidarity with God. In a sense their image of suffering is a conjured mixture of traditional biblical and Christian framework, the existential mindset and process thought.

What is the extent of divine responsibility over the individual as perceived by the respondents? There is good reason to believe that their God is the God of love and hope. Traditional Christianity and many contemporary Christian theologians agree on this point. Earlier it was mentioned that human suffering is sent by God to test the faith and strength of the person. . This idea is not in agreement with theologies e.g. process thought, which considers that God has no direct motivation to have individuals experience suffering. Human suffering is something given by God. It is interesting to note that the “gift” is received readily. And since it is no ordinary gift, the individual is thankful that the gift is presented. Resentment is not the response but gratitude. To this point, Reuter relates with this observation, “Speaking of suffering as a trial communicates the idea that God consciously offers us the opportunity to show the strength of our faith.”<sup>67</sup> This kind of response obviously reflects the active influence of the Christian insight where suffering is to be seen as an essential aspect of humanity’s salvation. From the viewpoint of process theology, this attitude is problematic in that it is difficult to reconcile the idea of a God who hands over suffering to an individual and yet remain loving and be the object of hope. The whole problem is made more complex by the claim that the God who gives them suffering is also “the only one who can help them.”

In conclusion this study has described the adults’ notions and investigated about the difficulties that have arisen within the theological and Christian perspectives. Sometimes the temptation of a theologian is to make judgments of a personal experience by critiquing it using categories ‘foreign’ to the person concerned (or frameworks attached to the theologian’s viewpoint). It is like telling that person, “Did you ever know that what you think is wrong and distasteful?” While it is fully understandable that the

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<sup>67</sup> Reuter 1996, 345.

point of reacting is to lead the people into realizing that their notion is enslaving or arguable and therefore should be re-framed, still the sanctity of one's personal appropriation of things no matter how limited, irrational and crude, need not be brushed aside immediately as something unreasonable. It is my personal conviction that before the theologian has ventured into doing theology upon a particular human experience, God has spoken upon the person through personal experience in a manner perhaps unintelligible but nevertheless spoken and heard. Can one therefore speak of a "crude Christology from below" that arise from the poor's muted ignorance? It is part of the task of a theologian to critique the human experience from a particular framework which that theologian espouses. Thus far, this study has sought to find areas where clarification and understanding are most needed. To benefit from a clarified understanding, it has not limited its judgment or evaluation to a single theological framework. Instead, it reviewed the notions as they reflect the delicate aspects of faith. However, certain theological insights have been utilized only to establish the location of the empirical ideas. Here the critiquing task is called upon to bring forth certain directions which clarify further the vantage points within which their notions are anchored upon. Human suffering, it is hoped, must become an experience of faith inspired not by ignorance or indifference but by an informed acknowledgment of a God who loves. Certainly the biblical revelation and the Christian vision on [the redemptive value of] suffering have much to offer to our contemporary man. □