



# PAIN AND BELIEF

- Case study of Rwanda -

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# I. Definition of Pain

Suffering or pain is an experience of unpleasantness and aversion associated with the perception of harm or threat in an individual. Its opposite is pleasure or happiness.

Once in while whether we like it or not, we experience pain, Physical or emotional (mental). Some people will be going through pain and trials while others are rejoicing and happily enjoying life. This is an unjust world. Is there any justice and equality in this?

Ours today is to confront this perception of pain with ones belief, especially when the recipient of this pain is a Rwandese Christian. My dear brothers and sisters might be accused of a shallow knowledge of theology but when it comes to faith we major on that.

## II. The Old Testament and Pain.

We shall take one or two references on pain in the Old Testament notably **Job**: A man of God, of whom God gave a vivid testimony of his righteousness ,yet he allowed Satan to put him on test. We read of him loosing his children, his possessions and his own body was affected with ulcers. The advice from his friends is that he has sinned and should repent. His own wife told him to curse God and die. None of these advices he took. Even in his complaint he became aware that God over rules.



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We actually see the origin of pain in the book of Genesis first book of the Bible when **Adam and Eve** ate of the prohibited tree. Man will eat at the sweat of his face but the woman will experience pain in child delivery.

I wonder you Medical Doctors when you are assisting a woman giving birth, you are aware of the curse on women who have to go through such pain because of this fruit. For Christian women, an heroic bearing of this pain is a perfect testimonial that we take the Bible to the letter. Patience is the fruit of the spirit and patience brings perseverance ( Rom 5:3 and 8: 5 ). Instead of the sufferer bearing his pain, an external agent wants to intervene: That is you and your medical knowledge. You have skills for it and this is what I take as secularism.



A friend of mine had to have a cesarean because she did not want to go through it. I have never heard of this in my village or my church of such a practice. What God would say about this? May be he might say something like this: Doctors you are trying to fix the unfixable. Even your knife there is causing pain and the healing wounds will be painful. I could equate this to the ethics which says : the lesser evil. You people you are trying to make this world a better place. You are half way to the truth.

# III. Pain in the New Testament

I will try to extend on this part because of the vicarious suffering of Jesus explains it all.

**“Come to me all who are heavy laden I will give you rest. My yoke is easy” (Mt 11: 28).**

So as believers we cast our burden on Him. Suffering is testimonial that we truly love God



**Steven** when he was stoned, he prayed for those who were throwing stones on him and said Father forgive them because they know not what they are doing. Yes, I , myself even in my liberal thinking I come to wonder such courage. Those of you who read the Bible will know that during the stoning of Steven Jesus was standing next to his Dad. Where as in the Apostles creed we say that He is seated at the right hand of the Father. Jesus had to stand up because one of his first followers was going through pain. When confronted with pain look back at such a biblical character and we will be amazed and pause in prayer, *the mia culpa, max maculpa or the Tedeum* will flow from your heart. Praise be to God

## IV. Is Suffering always a result of sin?

In **John 9** Jesus heals a man who was born blind. The question is the why? The disciples believed that either his parents has committed sin or himself ( how could he before he was born?). Anyway Jesus said that his blindness is not a result of sin but that the glory of God may be manifested in him. Either when you suffer you are receiving the reward of your parents or your own sins. Or the glory of God is going to be manifested in you. You must bear your pain stoically. The stoic people refuse to be moved by any sentiment. Don't show your emotions. ( Nzashira ingurugunzu ndi Ngagi).

I don't believe that it is what Christianity teaches. Jesus had a good character, did good deeds, but the end of it was his crucifixion. Of course Jesus is different from me and you, yet He is our perfect example.

# V. Pauline letters and suffering

I cannot recount how much pain, troubles that Paul went through. He was bitten, imprisoned, left out to die because of Christ. Some of the sufferings we go through must be accepted because our forefathers in faith went through it too. The Old John, carrying stones on the isle of Patmos yet he receives the Revelation of the things to come at the same spot. We should see also if the cause of our pain is not our faith. However the concept that suffering brings closer to God is not Christian but more Greek and neoplatonic.

## VI. Today belief and pain

Today's Pastors and so called "Born again" Christians spend nights and days in prayer rooms for the healing of the sick. It has also become part of our dominical service. Quotes like: "if you are suffering in any part of your body put your hand on the suffering and I will pray for healing. Or now and right now put your hand on the screen of your television and I will pray and you will instantly get healed."

This is a diversion of Christian teaching, not quite heretical because I believe in the ending part of Mark's Gospel about the signs which will accompany the believers but such teachings are usually unorthodox.

The wrong part of this group is the belief that all pain comes from the devil. So we must pray for you not just the communal exorcism recognized by the Holy church, but we must cast out demons in you. They put mats down and pray and pray and even fast ( ***Such a demon comes out by prayer and fasting***). If this does not work, they would beat the devil in the patient by beating the patient himself.

Strive for the things above, the visible is not real but the invisible is what we aim for .It is pure Platonism. Platon said that this world is an image of another real world. My students understand it better when I tell them that this chair I am sitting on is a projection of a real chair in the head of the carpenter.

The classical author Cicero famously argued that the main task of philosophy is to teach us how to face death ( ***in our case pain***). Someone else said:” Science can tell us what is but never what ought to be, that entails to philosophy and faith”

A government authority in the Congo went to a white Father of those days and asked him how he manages to call people to church meeting and they come when he himself delegate of the Leopold the King of Belgium has failed to get half of them in his campaign. He told him the secret. You are promising them the reward today, but for us the reward is in heaven. People value more the invisible more than what they see or have today.

The glory beyond description lies ahead, no matter how I suffer today, there are good days to come. Expressing your pain today is a lack of faith and could bring to you eternal condemnation. My pain today is a preparation for the eternal happiness with God. Therefore, the most important is to know how to maintain a life of purpose in the midst of painful adversity.

The **Muslims** will surrender to Allah's mysterious will without questioning and this is one of the central requirements of righteousness; apart from the five pillars.

The **karmic** sufferers may say " I must suffer and die but if I do it nobly, I will have a better life in the future and can be freed from suffering someday altogether. The karma says that the proportion of our suffering is due to the proportion of our sins.

The **Budhist** believers will say: “ I must die- but death is illusion – I will still be as much a part of the universe as I am now.

Jesus did not hide his pain on the cross he cried out “ Eloi, Eloi, ramaskatan : My God , my God why do you forsake me”. On the previous day he had prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane complaining about this cup, yet not my will but yours. My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow even unto death” **Mark 14: 34**

Let me come to my personal journey into suffering.  
Remember I am tainted of two traditions.

Grew up in a Christian home. Not so much confessing Christians as we would understand today but attending church regularly. My Dad was teaching in a church school, so children in the home should be raised up in a Christian manner.

We met the minimum standard of brotherly love and this helped me to shape my life; knowing that the truth is the truth. You will see that in later life my boldness to stand on the truth side brought a lot of trouble within the Anglican hierarchy.

In 1963, you heard of the tutsi killing in the southern part of Rwanda and this was the second stage of the genocide preparation. Many tutsi neighbours and friends from the church, God children and our house was full. We experienced lack of space and I remember that one old lady staying for 2- 4 years with her grand daughter. The only to get her out was that my Dad had to build her a house because she had a property not far from our place.

We were young to understand it but something was there in the back of our mind. Alfred, God bless him showed me once where his uncle Laurent was hiding. Many of my friends became fatherless in that year.

How then can a loving God and all powerful allow such things to happen to young boys and girls to be orphan and mothers to be widows.

Things happened to us and we survived, worse could have come. I remember once I was hit by a big public Bus and as I came out I was very angry and started yelling to the driver. But my wife got out quickly and challenged me. Darling you should be thankful that we are not dead. I said okay but we still had to go to the police though.

Coming up to 1994, I had a hard time, could not defend God for such atrocities happening to members of our parish and those doing it, are the so called brother in Christ , members of the same choir. Those who did not indulge in this, we were taxed to be coward, traitors and here in Rwanda the worse name one can insult you is to call you imbwa ( dog)

But let me say this again, on the stadium next door Christians gathered together and a grenade was thrown in their midst and they all died at once. Even the killers could testify that Christian are different.

Rejected by my own people, later on rejected by on Church but I ended up in the arms of CASA/CASR. God make all thing perfect even through hardship.

I have many reasons to tell you that God's hand is even more present and powerful acting in suffering.

A short while ago, 2<sup>nd</sup> Feb this year, I lost my old Mum. Do you know what, though I lost my three brothers, I found that I have brothers in Christ, very close to me than biological brothers. Murenzi came up with too many suggestions, with money to cover some expenses, Kanani was out in town to find the coffin, unfortunately another person had gone before him. I felt tears when Claudine handed to my wife the flowers to deposit on the tomb and she has been hiding then until then

Mvuge iki kindi ( What else can I say ? )

Conficius a dit : A ta naissance tout le monde rit, et tu es le seul a pleurer. Conduit ta vie de facon a ce que a ta ort tout le monde pleure et que toi tu sois le seul a sourire.


Amen.

# Conclusion

Today's people who are experiencing pain and suffering, through reading the Bible should realize how much Jesus cared for the suffers. He opened the eye of a blind man, he healed the sick, he cast out demons and even resurrected the dead. People were running from afar to bring to him the people in need.

From my every day work with patient in hospitals, I pit you medical Doctors. Most Christians will come to you when it is too late. When faith fails, we have traditional medicine, incantations, gri gri and herbal medicine to take away our pain. Market pharmacies are another alternative.

We have also another sect of seventh day Adventist who are advocating food medicine and proving it scientifically. Many books have been written by these people and translated into Kinyarwamda.



Be aware in your practice that most Rwandan will not express their pain because you have done your best in examining me, prescribing good medicine or even operating me. Asking you more is being ungrateful to what you did and it is not necessarily being unfaithful to the Lord who bore our pain on the cross of Calvary.

Once in a while we are subject to pain and this world is unfair because while some are enjoying life others are suffering (Summary) *Islam* will say accept it, *karma* says Pay for it; *Fatalism* says heroically endure it, *secularism* says avoid it and finally *Christianity* says that there is an element of truth in all these.

**Thank you.**

# Sources

- ✓ Bible and Bible notes
- ✓ Class discussions
- ✓ Internet
- ✓ Keller Timothy: *Walking with God through pain and suffering*, Hodler and Stoughton Ltd, London 2013, PP 235