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**Righteous Suffering: A Theological and Missiological Implication for Christian Faith in Context of a Postmodern and Globalizing Universe**

By

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**Abstract:**

No one enjoys suffering. Most people across the world recognize that suffering is normal in this fallen world. However, the westerners seem so glorified the values of safety, comfort, and convenience than anything less is now regarded as something peculiar to human rights violation. The concept that people have a right to a secure healthy life is an attitude that has unfortunately bled over into the church. The extreme example of this is prosperity teaching which communicates that God wants Christians to be wealthy and happy all the time. Even among more biblically orthodox Christians, there is an unspoken idea that God somehow promises to protect them from suffering. The result is an absence of teaching on the presence and role of suffering in the Christian life and the crises of faith that accompany that suffering. The Bible regards suffering as normal. Part of this suffering comes from the fact that we live in a fallen world, and this kind of suffering falls on Christians and non-Christians alike (Romans 8:18-22). The argument in this article concerning the subject is centered on a theological, missiological, philosophical and Biblical insights on how to absorb and global suffering that affects both Christians and non-Christians. The article kick starts with an introduction, globalization comes with human suffering, Statement of the problem, challenges of modernity, epistemology in context of theology and missiology, challenges of a pluralistic religious world, philosophical understanding of suffering, a Biblical example of righteous suffering and a conclusion.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Theology, Missiology, Suffering, Religion, Church History

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## **Righteous Suffering: A Theological and Missiological Implication for Christian Faith in Context of a Postmodern and Globalizing Universe**

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### **Introduction**

Towards the close of the twentieth century, new voices were raised in cautious evaluation and even criticism of what Samuel Escobar (2000:112) called “managerial missiology.” Lesslie Newbigin (1993:4) argues that “The experience of European churches suggests that the synthesis between Christianity and the Enlightenment, which was inherent in much of the missionary thrust of the last century is not sustainable forever.” Pocock (2005:11) explains that “A tension exists between the growing disillusionment with modernity and the increasing use of modern technology. Clearly, technology has facilitated missions in the areas of communication, distance learning, translation, and generally increased mobility.” An example of global migration is a major aspect of globalization. This is simply because churches established have customary diversity by reason of migration either homogeneous or heterogeneous in makeup can be pruned to global suffering.

In a globalized world in which suffering happen from all nations to all nations, it is fitting that the voices of those hurting should be heard. Pocock (2005:22) opines that “The dynamics behind globalization, its meaning and its implication for global (missiological concern) needs to be understood by everyone involved in living for Christ and making him known in a global context” in the midst of religious violence. World migration brings non-Christians into areas more strong Christians and more open to evangelism and religious change. For example, I can recall that when religious violence broke out in Jos since 2001, forced Christians from Jos North to migrate to the south of Jos where many new churches were planted. The same is true globally because migration also brings vibrant Christians from Africa to Europe and America where Christian immigrants plant churches. Thus, Douglas Jacobsen (2007:67) affirms that “Christianity was born in the Middle East and Jerusalem was the headquarters of the movement, but the new faith quickly spread beyond Palestine. From there, Christianity spread into Africa and Asia.” Jacobsen (2007: 67) concludes that “It was in Africa before Europe, it was in India before England, and it was in China before America.” However, globalization comes with human suffering.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Why does the innocent suffer? The existence of suffering and evil in our world seems to pose a serious challenge to the existence of a perfect God. Keziah who is named after the daughter of Job in the bible is a daughter of an evangelical pastor in West Africa who asked her father when she was aged 16 years old, “Why does God allow the innocent to suffer evil? This question is philosophical in nature. If God were all powerful, and all-loving, would he allow the innocent to suffer evil? For a medical student of her caliber who grew up from a very strong evangelical tradition, the challenge posed before her apparently conflicted with her reasoning on the problem of why would God allow the innocent to suffer? This essay examines one form of argument in the light of a daughter’s question why does God allow the innocent to suffer? First, it discusses the problem beginning with basic understanding of philosophical view on the question of suffering. Second, it looks at modernity and epistemological challenges in context of suffering. Secondly, a biblical example of insight

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from Job's suffering is used to help the questionnaire's understanding on the subject matter in the light of global suffering and missiology.

### **Globalization Comes with Human Suffering**

Thomas Friedman (2000:7) is of the view that "Globalization involves the integration of free markets nation-states and information technologies to a degree never before witnessed in a way that is enabling individuals, corporations and countries to reach around the world..." John Powell (2000:22) on the one hand, opines that globalization, "Refers to the process in which goods and services, including capital, move more freely within and among nations. As globalism advances, national boundaries become more and more porous and to some extent less and less relevant." From all indications, Powell and Friedman both focus on economics or the market to explain globalization. It is true that free market economic system has value because a global business expands and industrializes areas that that were traditional in economic activities. But the mobility of capital and the lack of consideration for the long-term well-being of workers can create hostility among societies that fall victim to exploitation. Consequently, missional agencies and practicing missionaries minister at both extreme to the beneficiaries and to the marginalized losers of globalization. If one theologizes and or does missional work in economically struggling community, you may be perceived with anger, not mainly for your religious faith, but because you represent a viable economic system that marginalized them. For example, this is the perception that fuelled anger of extremists such as Al-Qaeda, in global societies includes: Boko Haram and Fulani herdsmen who take joy in killing people at will in Nigeria.

Therefore, globalization is the new context. Theologians and missiologists need to understand globalization in order not to miss opposing factors that are at work with the kingdom of darkness. That is why Malcolm Watters (2001:5) calls globalization "A social process in which the constraints of geography on economic, political, social and cultural arrangements recede, in which people become increasingly aware that they are receding around in which people act accordingly." Pocock (2005:23) concludes that "Globalization is a trend of accelerating compressed interaction between peoples, customs, government, and transnational companies. It is a heightened multi-directed flow of ideas, material goods, symbols and power facilitated by the internet and other communication, technologies and travel." Pocock (2005:26,27) reiterates that "Globalization has developed over centuries as people have engaged in trade, conquest and religious expansion." Thus, globalization matters because it changes the context in which theology and missiology are done.

The way people and customs perceive each other and how people think and the resources available to reach them cannot dismiss the impact and effects of globalization by communicators of the gospel and theologians who desire to engage biblically based theological discussion in context of the southern hemispheres of the majority world. Thus, Friedman (2000:12,13) cautions that "I believe you dare not be a globalizer without being safety-netter and social democrat." There is therefore, a problem with globalization when it comes to human suffering. This is because the existence of suffering and evil in the world poses a serious thought-provoking question in the minds of thinking humanity.

### **Modernity, Epistemological Challenges in context of Theology/Missiology**

J. Dudley Woodberry (1996:71) remarks that "Some Christians observers contend that Church and mission stand at the frontiers of a new phase in their history. It is that of encounter and interaction with other religions." One can easily summarize that theologically,

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the Eastern church seemed to have emphasized certain aspects of the Christian faith that Western theology tended to have ignored either. This further has an important bearing on missiology as well in the light of modern and epistemology. Therefore, modernity and epistemological challenges form part of this contention. Michael Pocock (2005:11) opines that “Modernity was questioned for its overconfident assumptions about humanity’s ability to clear all obstacles in the way.” However, the Greek fathers understood the creation of human beings in God’s image and likeness in a variety of ways, never arriving at a precise definition of what constitute these.

Postmodernism is caught up in the epistemological challenges of confessing truth that the drift toward revitalizing of all values and truth of supremacy. By the time one enters the 1700’s the economic force of indentured servitude had turned into African slavery and one reinforced by a twisted interpretation of the Bible. Brad Ronnell Braton (2002:93) opines that “In Galatian Christian that the community that there are no longer ethnic and religious differences, no socio-political divisions of status and the oppressors, no gendered differences between men and women.” Michael James Oleksa (1996:85) opines that “The consensus, however, distinguished between the two terms image being the unique status of human persons as existing and eternally existing, as free, creative, autonomous creatures and likeness being those divine attributes human have distorted or lost through sin: kindness, gentleness, generosity, patience, joy, peace, love.”

Oleksa (1996:85) reiterates that “This likeness to God was not Adam’s static condition, but a goal he was to attain. Sin has redirected humanity in a harmful and self-destructive direction, but it has only distorted, not destroyed the image of God in humanity.” Oleksa (1996:85) continue to opine that “This distinction between image and likeness allows Eastern Christianity to be more open, more tolerant, and accepting of creative expressions and spirituality that may be culturally different, but not necessarily alien or antithetical to the gospel.” In Oleksa’s view, “Likeness to God is not only a goal Adam did not attain, but no people can now reach by their own efforts. God has revealed himself in these days as Father, Son, Holy Spirit. The divine uncreated, eternal, omniscient, almighty, transcendent Godhead united in love that is undivided.” In reality, I understand that the contemporary world today seems more than Paul’s ancient time. The world of today is religiously, ethno-culturally diverse and globally interconnected.

Human primary identity is rooted in God’s creation and in the Triune redemption as a new humanity (II Corinthians 5:17). By the oneness of humanity, means the universal citizens of one human family. This oneness of humanity is declared in God’s creation account as his image bearers (Genesis 1:26,12; Psalm 72:17). Paul Hiebert (2007: 97,110) opines that “The Oneness of Christianity refers to one body of Christ with many members and different gifts While the oneness of humanity rests upon God’s image-centered approach, it emphasizes the community of humanity withing the inter or intra religious context.” Hiebert (2007:98) reiterates that “The oneness of Christianity is rests upon Christ’s body approach which demonstrates the oneness of Christians within the intra religious context (II Corinthians 12).”

Hiebert (2007: 106, 108) explains that “Christians must learn that our primary identity is as human beings. When we meet the religious other, we must see them first as fellow humans, only secondarily as males or females...rich or poor. In reaching out to the lost other, Christians must meet them at the deepest level of their common humanity.” Hiebert (2007:110), further opines that “Our first context is as members of the human family. Secondarily, as a member of our national family.” Miroslav Volf (1998:208,209,210)

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theologically, explains that “The Church is the image of the Trinity.” Hence, missiology as a multidisciplinary field, should balance theologians and missiologists to focus mainly on God by bringing the exegesis of people to the table. In the face of global suffering, placing God’s Word in context should be guided by a thorough understanding of how the Bible describes and explains the incarnated Christ.

Jung Young Lee (1995: 42) argues that “Humans are created to be different, yet equal in order to copy the different characteristics of the Trinity within and each with mutual abiding and equality.” S. Mark Heim (2001:123,124,125,126,127) opines that “The Trinity with the same substance of one divinity provides the framework for rightly perceiving human diversity within the same substance of the imago Dei (Genesis 1:26,27) and calls for oneness of humanity.” Mark Labberton (2012:225,228,229) concludes that “Human existence including global theology involves a set of paying attention to God and paying attention to the world in God’s name... Ministry beckons God’s people to pay attention to the particular world of people, relationships, culture, economics, religion, sociology, power, art and land.” Millard J. Erickson (2013:309) theologically and soundly concludes that “There has always been Father, Son and Holy Spirit and all of them have always been divine. There has never been any alteration in the nature of the Triune God.” Therefore, how Christians, missiologists, theologians and others should think of their identity and how to engage and make non-believers embrace salvation matters.

Cosmologically, Alban Douglas (1989:8) opines that “The only sensible answer to the problem of the existence of the world is the existence of an intelligent Being whom we call God.” Teleological issues of mutual transformation through critical engagement and mutual acceptance of Christians and others in the name of Christ is paramount in a global world. Douglas (1989:8), therefore, affirms that “The examination of the world and the things large and small shows that each is designed by an intelligent mind for a specific purpose in life.” Thus, the mind of an Atheism which is only giant doubt and unbelief can only lead to darkness and despair for the one accepting it. But in a theological and missiological concept acceptance of Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning God,” leads a sincere seeker into the path of a fuller revelation of God himself.

There are two theological foundations that are important for helping people learn to love others and respond in ways that are glorifying to God and his universal church. First is to understand that humanity is created in the image of God and thus bearers of his mark in the world. Hence, Christians are image bearers, created in God’s image to reflect his nature. Douglas (1989:8) opines that this is the reason why “Man has an intellectual and moral nature showing that the Creator must not be merely an inanimate force but a living, intelligent moral Being,” (Genesis 1:26,27). Second, God has created humans as individuals with unique gifts and talents to participate in redemption in our unique way. Thus, Leslie Newbigin (1995: 54,110,139) remarks that the reign of God is present in the midst of this sinful weak and divided community, not through prayer, or goodness of its own, but because God has called and chosen this company of people to be the bearers of his gift on behalf of all people. This has theological challenges for theologizing in a pluralistic religious world. This period begins with seventeenth century enlightenment in which knowing became based on objective rational observations and the scientific method.

A modernistic approach may be characterized by a quest for absolute truth using rational logic and a scientific method. It treats religion as unimportant in the quest. It values the individual and the material over the spiritual (for example, such as industrialization), democracy, free market economics, and universal truths. Beginning in the



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1980s, postmodernity is characterized by a system that claims certainty about its scientific conclusions but excludes spiritual realities. Postmodern people rely more on intuition, and are more subjective in their judgments and treat most truth claims as personal. Empirical is the concept that all knowledge is based on observation under the discipline of scientific method. Epistemology is the study of the basis of knowledge or the approach to knowing utilized by a particular culture.

Existentialism is a philosophical orientation that sees knowledge or the approach to knowledge as the product of a personal search for meaning that yields a subjective grasp of reality that cannot be verified by scientific or solely objective means, and stresses the responsibility of individuals to be true to themselves and thus free from or at odds with conventional expectations. Postmodernism affects theology and mission practice in two significant ways: It may affect those who become missionaries. It may affect the ways non-Christian postmodernists respond to missionaries. Christians are always influenced by the age in which they live. Postmodernity has caused some Christians to accept other religious opinions. Some have lost the conviction that Christ is unique and the only hope for salvation and new spiritual life. Some of such Christians may be less inclined to serve as missionaries or to witness Christ at all.

Though postmodernists may resist an appeal to authority of Scripture, they can sense God in nature and then in Scripture find God explained. This is the God who shows himself in Creation truly transcending in all creation (Psalm 19:1-4). Scripture indicates that unregenerated people do not independently draw correct conclusions about what they see in nature (Romans 1:18-32). But special revelation, the Holy Scripture is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17; II Timothy 3:16-17). This can be made understandable to the unregenerated person (John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8; 8:26-39). This has certain theological challenges worth in a pluralistic religious world.

### **Challenges of a Pluralistic Religious World**

The trend of multiple spiritualities creates a number of missiological challenges. Christian leaders must (1) communicate the gospel so that syncretism is avoided, and (2) contextualize the gospel for pluralistic postmodern peoples. Communicating the Gospel to avoid syncretism. A prevailing syncretism, the blending of Christian beliefs and practices with those of other non-Christian God is a missiological challenge of postmodernity. In such cases, Christianity loses its distinctive nature and speaks with a voice relative to its traditional religion. A significant area of syncretism involves perceptions about the nature and character of humanity. Modernity focuses on human ability. Human beings were understood to have rational abilities and to be capable of ordering their own world. Frequently, Christianity was attacked as illogical and superstitious. Christians were tempted to exclude the divine and emphasize the human. This confidence in human ability tended to enthrone humans as masters of their own world. A philosophical change regarding the nature of humanity has occurred during the postmodern era. Human understandings are thought to be culturally produced, formed by linguistic and social heritage rather than by cognitive, rational deduction. Reality is seen as being constructed arbitrarily and locally by participants of culture instead of having an ultimate, absolute essence. Life and experience are interpreted in terms of multiple narratives, each having its own meaning.

The use of mass media and the influence of consumer-driven technology have made it difficult for the postmodern mind to distinguish between truth and fiction. Since science and history are continually being reinterpreted, the postmodernist does not necessarily see them

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as truth-based. Thus, postmodernists live with ambivalence, supposing that objectivity and coherence in life can never be found. How can this syncretism be overcome? First, church leaders, pastors, missiologists, missionaries and theologians should be master teachers of the Word of God as well as effective listeners to what traditionalists or non-biblical voices are saying.

Rather than making decisions unilaterally based on their academic training and Christian experiences, church leaders and missionaries must partner with the body of Christ. They must work in collaboration with the Christian community to develop church patterns that are theologically responsible and responsive to context of the people. Second, church leaders must seek to communicate the gospel narratively according to the biblical themes of scripture. Story telling from gospel messages can be an effective way of communicating the gospel in context of Africa. Stories provide themes in real life, in living, in flesh and blood. Narratives provide the foundations for new, Christian categories of thought.

Since the Christian message is inherently narrative, Christian leaders must become storytellers. Finally, bringing Christ to postmodern era involves comparing existing ungodly structures to the Christian worldview. Always, missionaries are so intent in finding common ground and communicating Christ in terms of commonality that they do not contrast with Christian worldview. David Hesselgrave (2004:147) opines that “Both philosophically, and theologically, a communication approach that is over-dependent upon the discovery and utilization of similarities is open to question. Dissimilarities between beliefs and practices may, in fact, be more important and utilitarian in the long run... If one’s objective is to convert and disciple, both the number and importance of these differences will far outweigh the number and importance of supposed similarities.” Christian evangelists must focus on both similarities and dissimilarities between Christianity and the recipient context.

Incorporating Christian practice, for instance, does not necessarily help an aroma therapist understand the Christian message better. Frequently, syncretism develops because the Christian community attempts to make its message and life attractive, alluring, and appealing to those outside the fellowship. Over time the accommodations become a routine and integrated into the narrative story of the Christian community and inseparable from its life. A new contextualization of Christianity is needed—one that leads to the patterns of life and ministry of the early Christian (John 15:1-5). Postmodern must not only understand the gospel narrative but also feel it. They must experience the emotion that artists feel as they look at a classic painting or composers feel as they listen to an ageless composition. All parts fit together and sound intelligible to the rhythms and harmonies of life. Christian communicators, like musicians, must place the content of the Christian message within appropriate customary rhythms, which have both meaning and emotion that must be biblical. Christians must address practical life experiences. This is best done through faith stories and testimonies that glorify God’s work through life. Public dramas, role=laying, and skits can also communicate this message. Above all, Christians must communicate that Christianity is as unique as the God who created this world. One biblical example that addresses this issue of suffering is Job. This can serve as an encouragement to those suffering for the sake of the Gospel in the world today.

### **Philosophical Understanding of Suffering**

Some basic philosophical understanding on why God allows the innocent to suffer are inevitable. For a medical student asking an honest question about God and suffering, she needs to have some basic understanding for her quest to know that both philosophers and

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people of the bible have asked similar question. If God is all powerful, all knowing and perfectly well, why does he allow the innocent to suffer? Her question rises what philosophers call the problem of suffering and evil. Michael Peterson (1998:1) struggles with this issue of suffering and evil and he notes that “something is dreadfully wrong with our world. A pancreatic cancer patient suffers prolonged, excruciating pain and dies.

A pit bull attacks a two-spear old child angrily ...” Peterson (1998:9) claims that the problem of evil is a kind of “moral protest by asking how God can allow suffering and evil happen?” Like the pastor’s daughter, people often claim that it is not fair for God to allow the innocent to suffer. Some atheists try to turn the existence of evil and suffering into an argument against the existence of God. They claim that since there is something morally problematic about a morally perfect God, allowing all the evil and suffering we see, there must not be a morally perfect God. Popular among the views on this argument is Hans Kung (1976:432) who calls the problem of evil, “the rock of atheism.” This theory uses the logical argument to explain the problem of evil. Down through the second half of the twentieth century, a theologian- that is those who try to prove the non-existence of God by claiming that the problem of evil was a problem of logical inconsistency started to argue. For example, J. L. Mackie (1982:200,211,212) opines that “Were it can be shown not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational that several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another.” Mackie and those with the same perception claim that it is impossible to say that God is omnipotent, God is perfectly good, but to see evil and suffering exists at the same time (why)?

In an adolescent mind who aspired to be a practicing medical doctor at 24 years, wondered if God is omnipotent and all loving why would he allow even an innocent girl like her to suffer in a motor cycle accident? Did God not know that she was there, or he did not have the power to protect her? Thus, she could not understand why would God allow an innocent person to experience suffering and evil? How could she escape from this dilemma? Is it helpful to explain the missiological implication to the young girl the logical problem of suffering and evil which says God is omnipotence, omniscience and supreme goodness would completely rule out the possibility of evil and that the existence of evil would do same for the existence of a supreme being? Alvin Plantinga (1977:21,22,23,24,25) suggests, “God could not eliminate much evil and suffering in this world without thereby eliminating greater good of having oriented persons with free will and with whom he could have relationships who are able to love one another to do good deeds.” Sadly, Plantinga theory of free will would not help our student’s understanding because Plantinga cannot put all the blame for pain and suffering on human beings on the premise of choices people make. Otherwise, how would he explain the problem of cancer, Aids, famines, earthquakes, tornadoes and many other kinds of diseases or natural disasters that happen on earth? Rather, it is wise to counsel a dear daughter that Plantinga’s free will defence cannot serve as morally a sufficient reason for God to allow disease and natural disasters to come on the innocent. This leaves philosophical thinking with two kinds of evil and suffering “moral and natural.”

In trying to offer counselling help to people who are suffering, Daniel Symondson (1983:169) suggests, “If it is human to suffer, then the principal theological question when we are confronted by loss and grief, is not to ask “Why do we suffer, but who suffers with us?” According to Symondson (1983:169), it is the “Christian’s capacity to feel the pain of others transcends apathy and alienation. But in the last analysis, it is the assurance that God suffers with us that is the rock on which we stand in all the turbulence of grief.” Philip Yancey (1981:98) opines that “God does not condemn our moments of despair and unbelief.



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He Himself set the tone by diving into earth and enduring cruel, senseless suffering. Before the final moment, His own Son asked if the cup could pass from Him, and on the cross, cried out, “God, why have you forsaken me.”

Yancey (1981:98) admits that “the full range of anger and despair and blackness.... is present in the Christian message-complete identification with the suffering world.” In his book, *Where is God When It Hurts?* Symondson (1981:29) concludes: “When we cry out to God in our times of suffering, we know that we will be heard by one who truly knows what we have gone through. It is a great comfort for a sufferer to know that the presence of an understanding and compassionate God, who not only invites every human prayer but also know what it is like to be in so much pain. God hears, God understands, and God suffers with us.” How can one help a person with a question about why does God allow the innocent to suffer evil? Is there really anything such as the innocent suffering? A Biblical insight from the book of Job who suffered might throw some light on the righteous suffering in a world full of wickedness.

### **Job: A Biblical Example of Righteous Suffering**

Since a daughter being a medical student may not fully comprehend what our seniors in philosophical thinking could offer in the context of her question, let us turn to the pages of a bible book that appears to represent a person who went through suffering and evil without a cause. Job is a mixture of divine and human wisdom that addresses a major life situation on why does the righteous (in our daughter’s view, innocent) suffer undeservedly? Turning to this bible text will help the pastor’s daughter and other contemporary students of hers who may have asked similar question. Why does God allow the innocent to suffer? Job (1:1) is described as, “A man in the land of Uz who was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil.” But from (Job 1:6-22) onward, Job experienced suffering and evil. Like a twinkling of the eyes, he lost everything he ever owned in life: “wealth, money, houses, and worse yet, were the crown of his marital blessings, all ten children, 7 boys and 3 daughters died in one day.” Job struggled with the question of integrity relating to the justice and righteousness of God in the light of the evil, unjust and underserved suffering during the period of his life.

There is no doubt Job is a book dealing with human suffering. However, the suffering of the innocent in this context does not encompasses the overall reason for an answer to a medical student’s question. The book of Job is equally, more than a mere ancient portrayal written to the absurdities of life, weaknesses of man and the prominence of the sovereignty of God. This poetical book shows that the sufferer is allowed to question and doubt, faces the hard question of life and faith, maintains an unbroken relationship with a loving God and still come to a satisfactory resolve for a personal and collective unjust and underserved suffering. These examples that run through the book is of value that needs to be applied only within the context of the suffering by the righteous and or innocent person as a medical student asked and also in view of the reality that there are many believers out there in a contemporary West Africa today who can identify with Job’s position. Francis I Anderson (1976:64,65) notes that, “The problem of suffering, human misery or the larger sum of evil in all its forms is a problem only for the person who believes in One God who is all-powerful and all-loving.” From this thought, suffering is the prominent issue that forces a consideration of the deeper question posed by people such as the young pre-medical West African daughter when it affects the lives of those who have a loving intimate relationship with the true and loving God.

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The medical student thought she shouldn't have experienced a motorcycle crash in June 2000 since God knew she loves him. Therefore, it was a legitimate thing in her mind to ask dad, why does God allow the innocent to suffer? One might agree with L. D. Johnson (1971:8) that, "The basic concept of wisdom has always been connected with skill and "know-how" because wisdom was the art of achieving and the emphasis was on omnipotence." If this is applied, it would challenge a medical student in context of Africa and any other person to discover the "know-how," in the book of Job so that they might achieve completeness in dealing with the question of global suffering and evil missiologically. From there, she and others can learn how to challenge unbiblical concepts with regards to suffering and how to maintain their loving and meaningful relationship with the sovereign God in the midst of mixed feelings on the question, why does God allow the innocent to suffer? (Job 28:23). Robert L Alden (1998:41) argues that, "blaming the devil for suffering and evil is an all- too-common activity of many Christians."

Alden (1998:68) reiterates that "Nothing happens to us that is not ultimately controlled by the knowledge, love, wisdom, and power of our God of all comfort." However, there is need to be careful in holding this idea absolutely because this principle usually leads to blaming God for suffering. While Satan is the prime mover behind the suffering and evil recorded in Job, it is also correct to point out to a younger mind that one cannot ignore the connection between Satan's desire and God authorizing him to carry out those desires. Alden (1998:41) explains that "Satan was the cause and Job felt the weight of suffering and evil. But God was also at work in Job's suffering. But it does not mean God is unconcerned about what happens to his people." Alden (1998:41) reiterates that "We must admit that God plays in a higher league than we do. His ways are far above our ways. God is greater in intellect, power, and knowledge that we are. So, God's ways are usually past our findings."

Alden's view is not far from two bible passages which read, "God understands its way and He knows its place. Therefore, justice is far from us and righteousness does not overtake us. Humanity hope for light, but behold darkness, for brightness, but humans walk in gloom" (Job 28:23; Isaiah 55:9). Insight from Job 1:8-11, it starts with Satan's accusation about the reason for Job's righteousness, his fear in God and separation from evil clearly recorded. Why does Job live righteously, fear God, and separated him from evil? Satan alleged that Job fears God only because God protects and prospers him. Who knows if the girl was asking why does God allow the innocent to suffer partly in the light of Pentecostal prosperity phenomenon and its teaching of result and retributive-recompense theology which had been a major focus and featured prominently in West Africa?

Pentecostal theological understanding of suffering and evil are tied to the sin of the believer. They teach that prosperity and wellbeing go to those who are righteous: good health, long life, wealth. Two of Job's counsellors and friends held to the Pentecostal view of retribution and recompense. They held the view that the righteous never suffer; but the unrighteous always do. So, they called on Job to consider his sins and repent from them that God may restore his prosperity. Job, if you want good health, family, and prosperity which you had back, accept our counsel so that it will be well with you. They told Job, "Remember now, whoever perished being innocent? Or where was the upright destroyed? (Job 4:7). Similarly, that medical student pondered on why would an innocent person suffer? In her quest to know the right solution to her question, she was curious to understand if God is unfair to allow suffering to come to the righteous? This is the position in Job! "Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert what is right? Lo, God will not reject a man of integrity, nor will He support the evil doers" (8:3,20). Indeed, Job's instance on innocence

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was an affront to the justice and righteousness of God. But a careful study of Elihu's concept appeared different from the debate concerning why does God allow the righteous to suffer. Elihu sees it differently from his other three colleagues.

Steven J. Lawson (1994:220) argues that "Elihu presented a totally different perspective on suffering from the three. He said Job's suffering was not because of past sin, but was designated to keep him from continuing to accept sinful premise of suffering, to draw him closer to God, to teach him that God's sovereignty is in control of the affairs of life, and to show him that God does reward the righteous, but only on the basis of grace." It was as if Elihu were saying, "You insist on justice and righteousness, but do you really want to be treated justly? Have you really considered what would happen if God took you at your word?"

Insight from Elihu's statement shows that a person cannot have a relationship with God as long as one thinks that there is something in oneself which makes one deserve God's relationship-or for that matter, a genuine relationship with another human being on such terms ...God never withdraws from the just, no matter what and how deep the frustration, the bitterness, the darkness, the confusion, the pain. Here, Elihu identified himself with Job. He was a fellow sufferer, not an observer. Elihu appeared on the scene... He confesses that he too is involved. He admits that Job's problem is humanity's problem and he realizes that Job's question is basically the same as his own. He says, "Behold I belong to God like you; I too have been formed out of the clay" (Job 33:6). His view is different. In contrast to Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, who rejected Job, Elihu identifies with him and speaks to him out of inner solidarity. He helped Job realize that a relationship with God is not based on, nor maintained by his insistence on loyalty, purity, or righteousness, but is wholly of God's grace.

Elihu did not see the primary basis for Job's suffering as sin. However, he did not minimize Job's move toward sin in the dialogue as we see from internal evidence. He says, "Job ought to be tied to the limit, because he answers like wicked men. He adds rebellion to his sin. He claps his hands among us, and multiplies his words against God. So, Job opens his mouth emptily; he multiplies words without knowledge," (Job 34:36,37; 35:16a). Elihu was drawing attention that suffering was a preventive measure to keep Job from perpetuating that he was suffering because of sin.

God's sovereign control over the affairs of Job's life were not restricted by a theological system of punishment and reward, but were acts of grace and mercy. God therefore rewards the righteous in grace, not because of some human action seeking a deserved response. This is what a medical student would need to begin to assimilate in her mind with respect to why does God allow the innocent to suffer? Matitiah Tseva (1966:95,100) notes that "Acting unknowingly as agents of Satan's philosophy, the three friends (of Job) increased the suffering of an already hurting man. However, even though Job found inconsistencies with the application of the doctrine, he shared the view of the friends that the world is based on a reward and punishment scheme." Speaking out of a windstorm, God began by charging Job with darkening His counsel by "words without knowledge," as Elihu had said twice," (Job 34:35; 35:16). God did not address Job's suffering directly during this discourse, nor did he answer Job's attacks on his justice. After attempting to find answers to unanswerable problems, Job and his friends were now forced to return to God. God spoke of his sovereignty and omnipotence as demonstrated in the creation of the earth, the sea, the sun, the underworld, light and darkness, the weather, and the heavenly bodies (Job 38:4-38). God affirmed his justice without defending or explaining it. God said, in essence, that he is and always will be just and fair to his creatures. God alone- not Job, nor his three friends, and

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certainly not Satan- administers and regulates justice. God’s own wisdom and power is in opposition to that of man and Satan.

Speaking of the Poetry in chapter 40:15-24 and 41, James L. Crenshaw (1978:180,772,773) opines “Since man has no power over these creatures, he can find strength and power only in God. God is sovereign, omnipotent, just, loving and perfectly righteous.” It is an interesting observation to note that God did not tell Job to repent so that his pain may be explained, vindicated, or his prosperity restored. Rather, God brought Job to a face- to –face dialogue. What did Job learn from this encounter? Job repented of his misconception of God and not of any alleged sin on which his three friends had focused. Crenshaw (1982:124,125) concludes that “God taught his servant the error in assuming that the universe operated according to a principle of rationality.”

What should humans do when they are suffering, hurting and or grieving? Biblical account shows that Job finally rejected human approaches of tradition, logic, and all wisdom that was foreign to what he learned about God and himself. All attempts to explain God and his actions, either logically, historically, and or traditionally, failed. Job was left with God and God alone. His prosperity was returned only after everyone involved understood that all blessings come by God’s grace alone and not because of an individual’s piety nor because of accepting a punishment or reward. While God is just, it is also not good reason to think that humans have a perfect universe. The failure of traditional wisdom to answer Job’s complaint reveals that we live in a world which has been subjected to futility. That is not to suggest to our daughter that a person has no obligation to moral and righteous living or to a commitment to truth and justice in the face of suffering. What every person needs to learn is that the believer has an obligation to examine his or her motivation in coming to and serving God especially during times of trial and suffering.

The lesson from Job does not support the mistaken idea that all suffering is for discipline or that suffering always results from sin and evil. God is not obligated to persons under any conditions. Once this is understood, our daughter and other believers elsewhere are encouraged to examine their suffering on the basis God’s grace. Positively, is a phenomenon that fulfils the creation mandate of God (Genesis 1:26-28). Covenant people of Israel (Genesis 11:1-9). Before a covenant people of God, or body of Christ, people were to move out from the creative center into the entire earth to establish stewardship over all creatures and things. But idolatry, pride, and failure to spread out were condemned by God at Babel (Genesis 11:1-9). The Non-Positive elements (Genesis 1:26; Psalm 139:14) shows that globalization bears a bad image left by those who were made in God’s image. Since the fall, the image has been marred. The wicked are like tossing sea and waves (Isaiah 57:20). The people of Babel were anti-global (Genesis 11:4-6). It resulted to linguistic barrier. Hence the need today for effective cross –cultural communication skills (Genesis 11:9). All people must come to the understanding that, “The Creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it in hope;” That the Creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God; For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now” (Romans 8:20-22).

Christians must always bear in mind that God authorizes suffering because believers all share in the fellowship of suffering. Paul to the Philippians (3:10) says, “That I may know Him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings being confronted to his death.” God himself has embraced and absorbed the underserved consequence of all evil is the final answer to Job and all humanity. As an innocent sufferer, Job is a companion



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of God. The question, why does God allow the innocent to suffer; cannot be clarified by only one answer and it is hard to pin it to a conclusion.

Pain and suffering remain a phenomenon that humans struggle to answer. All true science and history, if rightly understood, support the fact that God is the cause of pain and suffering. However, it is only “the fool says, in his heart there is no God,” (Psalm 14:1a). So, suffering can be faced with faith and trust in a loving God, gracious even when there is no immediately satisfying logical or rational reason to do so. In all trials and affliction man should first of all run to God; he should realize and accept the fact that everything is sent by God, whether it comes from the devil or from man,” (Psalm 6). It takes us people of the book who are concerned about what philosophers call The Problem of Evil and teaches human beings to side-step theodicy’s theory by running to God, first, last and always. It equips believers to help their fellow sufferers to do same. Paul maintains that God is the Global God who created mankind and prompts their movement around the world (Acts 17:16-34).

In sup up, the following may assert: (i). Bill Stearns (1999:4) opines that “It is true that as many as 150,000 Christians die annually for their faith.” Pocock (2005:13) affirms that “To those unacquainted with the broad sweep of history, these tragedies of the new millennium may signal a trend toward greater persecution and struggles have always been a part of the Christian experience. (ii). The new millennium also began with significant loss of life. Suffering like persecution, a continuing mark of Christian life and witness.” Thus, Jesus predicted for those who follow him that “In the world, you will have trouble. But be of good cheer! I have overcome the world,” (John 16:33; c.f John 15:20,21). (iii). Positive global suffering brings different people together. God’s people; the church live among the rest of the nations as God’s priestly nations (I Peter 2:9-12). (vi). The godly people of the church therefore, are from all the nations, tribes, languages (Revelation 9:7) and are brought together to glorify God among the nations (Psalms 96), and the witnesses of the gospel among pagans (I Peter 2:13). (v).

The spiritual realities behind global suffering have foundational basis. God is the creator of cultural distinctiveness and who supervises the spread of humanity in the world. But sin affects globalization. (vi). Satanic work against god’s glory (Romans 8:19-25). (vii). What is the appropriate response to non-positive aspects of globalized commercialization? It is to look at humanity as homo spiritualism rather than economics. The status that global economy reduces humankind to nothing. It is to refuse to quantify ministry progress in numerical terminology (Acts 4).

## **Conclusion**

I have discussed in this paper that first and foremost that global trends encourage human suffering. Second, it is real that no human being enjoys suffering. But suffering is inevitable because it is normal. Suffering is a part of fallen nature after creation. Thus, third, the church universal is pruned to suffering. Therefore, global expansion comes along with human pains. Theological and missiological perspectives help in placing modernity and epistemological elements for better theologizing and sharing the gospel in a world that needs Christ in a pluralistic religious view. Fourth, church history lay foundation that as Christians, suffering for the sake of Christ, builds strong faith in a Christian to perseveres and ait for the eschaton. Fifth, the creation account proclaims that in the beginning everything that God made was very good (Genesis 1:31). Yet, in today’s world there is an enormous problem of evil. Timothy Palmer offers and biblical and theological conclusion to the problem of suffering and evil today in the world. Palmer (2015:54) explains that “The biblical record in Genesis

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tells us that Adam and Eve were created good, but at some point, in time they decided to do evil. In other words, Adam and Eve had free will, which means that their will was free to choose good or evil. At first, they will choose the good path of service to God. Later, they willed to rebel against God and to follow Satan.” Mipo Dadang believes that all forms of evil violence against humanity is replaced by creative nonviolent alternatives (Romans 8:20-23). Dadang (2022:13) categorically affirms that “It is absorbed with patient suffering and forgiving love already realized in God’s established kingdom through Jesus Christ.” (Luke 24:39; John 3:16; 4:24; and Hebrew 9:15). Dadang (2022:14) ends this discussion noting that “Jesus Christ has fully exhibited God’s will in a violent world (John 19:30); calling Christians to peace making and patient suffering. Jesus Christ is the peace of Christians, who has made them one and ended hostility (Ephesians 2:14). Therefore, a violent ending awaits Satan and his cohorts at the end of human history” (Revelation 19:11-15; 20:1-10).

### **Recommendations:**

In the first instance, response to suffering and religious violence the cross is God’s ultimate response to the brokenness of humanity and that of includes human pain and suffering. This is partly responsible to what Dadang (2022:129) notes in context of Nigeria that “The fear of Christians suffering appears to be the first burden among Christians... It appears their understanding of God’s kingdom is not sufficient for them to come to terms with the fact that the gospel is not that they can save themselves from danger, but rather that God loves them and that with his divine help, they can love others and die for their love in Christ.” In the second instance, the theology of the cross and suffering would be a good area Christians in Northern Nigeria and other parts of the world to have a better focus on responding not only to Islamic provocation that often results in religious violence, but other social crises of life. Articulating an adequate theology of suffering will help the church worldwide in working out biblical ways in which members should respond to the regular forms of suffering and religious violence that occur. In the third instance, from a biblical perspective, the ultimate experience of God’s response to suffering, is coming soon when he will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, mourning, crying, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away,”(Revelation21:4).

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