

## **Attending the Suffering: A Struggle for Existence In the Context of Burma**

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*And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). Mark 15:34*

*It requires more courage to suffer than to die. Napoleon Bonaparte (1769 - 1821).*

### **Introduction**

Suffering is the natural phenomenon. Logically, Jerome A. Miller examines it as “The Way of Human Suffering<sup>1</sup>” whereas Rod Burton’s “Spiritual Pain.<sup>2</sup>” Life cannot simply be escaped from suffering and death since human beings are animate with feeling, not because of inanimate. We tend to struggle, while animating suffering and death, between suffering and therapy, honoring the last breath. Attending the suffering in this paper is the focal attention to be paid in order to yield the right remedy to the people with assortments of sufferings in life. Having analyzed, the rational agony resulted the realization thorough the reasoning of heart according to Miller, my thesis is, the suffering, which tends to be a communicating agent of solidarity in its coping process on the one hand, for remedy of the sufferers, but energize rather all to tackle the subject of suffering closely in order to impart the meaning of the conquering existence of the sufferer yet through suffering. This paper shall focus on the objective of the suffering under which the people are undergoing through the experience of pain, affliction and death from the perspective of the suffered, victims in the context of Burma.

### **Attending the Suffering: Remapping the Conquering Life**

The emotional rationalization of suffering plays as the theory to analyze the experience of suffering and spiritual pain for Burton to redefine the meaning of the suffering and its life. The suffering, both physical agony and mental disruption due to despair and nothingness for Millers summons one to retrospect rather than looking around the wave of the suffering. This becomes the self-impetus to question whether the existence of universal creator objectively once rationalized totally malfunction of all therapeutic efforts for healing from dead-bed except nothingness within. However, being unbending law, the unyielding struggle to know the reason of existence by nothingness in mind instead of ending life without an answer displays the key idea to connect God’s creation out of *nihilo*.<sup>3</sup> The self-realization of nothingness on the account of God’s creation is a crossroad to embrace the gift of life coming out of nothing. The suffering

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<sup>1</sup> Miller, Jerome A. “The way of suffering: a reasoning of the heart.” *Second Opinion* 17, no. 4 (April 1, 1992): 21-33, ATLA0000850110 (accessed April 18, 2014). He is Professor of Salisbury State University, Salisbury, Maryland.

<sup>2</sup> Burton Rod, “Spiritual Pain: A Brief Overview and an Initial Response within the Christian Trading,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 57, 4 (Winter 2003): 437- 446, ATLA 0001469053 (Accessed April 12, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Miller, 10.

hereby depicts not just the package of sufferings, but is the navigator of oneself enabling to perceive the existence of creator, God,<sup>4</sup> realizing one's belongingness to God amidst suffering. It tends to be a vital power of existence, to understand the suffering.

Suffering challenges us to be alert and creative to combating any battle of suffering. Theo-philosophically, one's struggle to generate merely advanced "therapeutic cultures"<sup>5</sup> and spiritual remedy are made in ways to projecting the costly counter-action against the suffering. Suffering plays the natural law of the stimuli and response: it is the sustaining and homogenous relationship in terms of solidarity, love, sharing, peace and empowering life where there is none between the inside suffering-selves and outside tenders. The woman suffering from the hemorrhage for twelve years can unite with Jesus by presenting her body to him (Mark 5:25). There involves both individual and community roles played in responding to her suffering; the crowd sharing about the messiah Jesus seems driven the woman to get met him and be transformed anew. Likewise, Musa W. Dube Shamanah, stating the fifty years of bleeding Africa under the oppressive agencies describes "African as a bleeding woman who fully participate in the search for healing."<sup>6</sup> Suffering, generating the existential power, energizes the suffering individual and community to treat and not to be treated by it in search for security.

Suffering is endurance against self-rejection. The emotional feeling turns suffering worse because once one rejects the suffering reality. The physical pain and emotional suffering are the cause of the destructive power embodied by the suffering itself. Barbara R. Rossing views the suffering world under the global mechanism of injustice and violence which result the cry of the earth as the peoples of Exodus.<sup>7</sup> Markan Jesus tends to reject himself due to the suffering undergone on the cross lamenting "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Mark 15:34). One's rejection at the verge of suffering seems increasing more suffering since the self-realization of one's transcendental being can only be imparted the conquering power against the suffering one. Burton, deployed that spiritual suffering can be attended by "Logotherapy and Christotherapy"<sup>8</sup> for spiritual healing. In the light of Revelation, the healing and renewal of suffering is depicted to be done within the suffering body. Accepting suffering-self depicts subverting and overthrowing the destructive power of suffering instead. Likewise, earliest Christians went for martyrdom without fear for the cause of Being Christians and of the gospel. Once rejected, they would have been escaped from such plot. Self-remission unto the suffering denotes the rejection against the threat of suffering and the destruction appalled by the suffering. Brent D. Shaw in *Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs* describes the body being the ground of suffering yet defines self-endurance,<sup>9</sup> the spiritual norm of love for Paul and "endurance all things"<sup>10</sup> expresses the divine will. Enduring self in suffering is indeed, resisting the alien power.

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<sup>4</sup> Miller, 9 & 10.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, 5.

<sup>6</sup> Dube, Musa W. "Fifty Years of Bleeding: A Storytelling Feminist Reading of Mark 5:24-43." *Ecumenical Review* 51, no. 1 (January 1, 1999): 11-17 ATLA0000986839 (Accessed April 18, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Barbara R. Rossing, "For the Healing of the World: Reading Revelation Ecologically," *From Every People And Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective*, ed. David Rhoads (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2025), 168, 175-176.

<sup>8</sup> Burton, 443.

<sup>9</sup> Shaw, Brent D. 1996. "Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs," *Journal Of Early Christian Studies* 4, no. 3: 269-312, ATLA0001015420ATLA (Accessed April 18, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Ign. Smryn. 9.2: If you endure all things for his sake, you will attain to him.

Suffering rebreeds the cooperative struggle for the conquering existence. The suffering self represents not just individuals but as collective<sup>11</sup> representations according to Terence E. Fretheim in the light of the Exodus. According to Paul's anatomy, when one part of body is hurt, the whole body is in pain together.<sup>12</sup> The suffering is never alone yet tends to be thought so. Judith Perkins,<sup>13</sup> accentuating the representation of Christian suffering of the first century, demystifies the depth meaning of Christian persecution against Roman perpetrators in whom they submitted their bodies and be suffered with the endured spirit till their last breath.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the attention the suffering from this concept reminds of the spiritual power union with divine and the comrades of the dead and the living. The spiritual union causes the sufferers to inscribe the power of patience, endurance and fearless before the killing field. Attending the suffering and spiritual pain alike integrates the spiritual reunion in three dimensionally, with Christ and the dead, the living and the sufferers in order to operate the conquering cooperation in life.

The suffering ignites the sustenance for existence from the alien disruption in the form of suffering and pain. Theologically, the suffering purports the restoration of life, both physical body and soul. Jesus's suffering on the cross malfunctions the Roman's *pax*, but implicates the salvific mission, the remedy of body and spirit (Jn. 5:24; 6:40, 47). The Israelites' suffering in Exodus states as not just for the liberation from Pharaoh's oppression, it is also for the spiritual liberation to celebrate the eternal life according to John.<sup>15</sup> The suffering for the cause of liberating life is solely depending on self-choice. Christopher A. Frilingos<sup>16</sup> states the Roman domination over non-Romans, by the agent of punishment imposing the charges to any rebellious. Upon the Roman imperial systematization over the rest, the spectacular implementation for punishment, Christians should have opted for the path of public martyrdom for the truth and the salvation sake. In the path, the subversion of suffering is the decision to exercise the saving task against dominant decision which abandons others.

### **Ministry of Attending the Political Victims in the Context of Burma**

Attending the suffering is relevant to projecting the existential purport in the context Burma where the politics is the root cause of all sufferings for its own citizens.<sup>17</sup> The ethnic Christians and non-burman-buddhists have been under the political extermination under the Pro-

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<sup>11</sup> Terence E. Fretheim, *The Suffering God: An Old Testament Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 108.

<sup>12</sup> As one global community, I have symmetrically emotional and spiritual pain with those mourners who lost their love ones in those incidences: Boston boom blast on April 15, 2013, the vanishing of MH 370 with 239 passengers on board on March 8 2014, the sink of Korean Ferry left 6 dead, 290 missing and so on.

<sup>13</sup> Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 108-119.

<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, the suffering self, she says, is inspired by the power during the performance of endurance which is beyond the destructive power, once they realize that their undergoing pain and suffering is not alone, but with Jesus Christ, Christianity as assemblies of Christ and the dead who had previous suffered and gone before.

<sup>15</sup> "I am the resurrection and the life," John 11:25-26; 20:31; 3:16; 1 Jn 4.9.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher A. Frilingos, "Merely Players," *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 14ff.

<sup>17</sup> Particularly, non-Budhist Christians-ethnic peoples are the most affected under the Buddhist-rule without sharing of political power to the States, with in fact, promise and spirit the Union of Burma was jointly established between the Burmese and Ethnic Nations, the masters of their own states, from the colonial British. The political castration launched by the pro-buddhist military regime, eventually ignited a civil war for six decades eversince the independence, 1948.

Buddhist-centralized regime for five decades.<sup>18</sup> Meanwhile, the regime's counter reaction against the peoples' struggle for the restoration of federal union led by Kachin-Ethnic has been turned into Christian termination for the plot of political euthanasia. This suffering has been for survival as political being according Aristotle. A democratic insistence for the constitutional amendment with the federal democracy, the regime has resume civil war against Ethnic Armed groups since June 2011 for the legalization of the pro-Buddhist constitution, creating all sorts of human rights' violations, killings, atrocities and a half million IDPs inside and borderlines today.

Christian ministry in Burma today is critical. Thus, attending to the suffering audiences is to those political victims such as the IDPs, the survivals of war and all pro-democratic Christians. First, Kachin-Christians have come to revitalize the kachin-spirit/self, which formed Burma as the Federal Union in the past, of Kachin independent leaders, instead of merely cursing on Burmese perpetrators. The experience of death and suffering alternately revitalizes a congruent life of prayer in God's presence. It is a prayer of decry, lament and the feeling of longing(ness), confession, humility and being wretched demystify about God: how we will transform Burma into the right path instead of accusing them as our enemy. Third, we, have established the spiritual collectiveness, the inside solidarity and outsider incorporation through the humanitarian aids and technical supports internationally. This suffering also has yielded us, the pacification of the suffering life of Jesus Christ, for the democracy, political equality, justice and peace for all, which is contrary to AungSan Su Kyi calling for democracy disregarding the federal democracy for the political justice between the center/Buddhist proper and ethnic nations. Last, the suffering has rather energized Ethnic/Christians to represent a saving agent entangling of local-imperialism, the homogenized mechanism to the union-democratization in Burma.

## **Conclusion**

The suffering as a truism, challenges us how well Christian ministers are able to handle it. Thus, coping with this entire suffering situation entails the mundane systems yet, the passionate and professional counter reaction, enabling to the love and solidarity with the sufferers in all circumstance. Meantime, the result displays as we predominantly design as assortments of recovery and re-restoration of the suffering self/ves. However, as advocated, Christian ministries is all about the attending of the appalled suffering deals with matters of human life and soul even after death. The struggle for attending the suffering as a phenomenon has been pivotal for the suffering self and suffering communities to impart the transcendental meaning of life, to overcome the alien suffering through the unification of our suffering/spirit with the divine spirit of God in Christ, for the establishment of the conquering mission on earth. Thus, the suffering represents the mystical agent for the self-liberation and the salvific ground between the divine and human being for the continuous operation for the establishment of the liberated society in the world, especially in Burma, conquering all enslavement plots under the suffering mechanism. Thus, our ministry is identical with the suffering self while attending for the truth and also with the conquering agency while in the God's plan of life saving on earth.

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<sup>18</sup> In Burma, the re-advocating activities for the restoration of Federal-valued democratization in Union of Burma initiated by non-Buddhist Christian-ethnicities and the rest has been considered as the national betrayers, the instruments of the West and foreign products, who have been gone for jail, torture, persecution and killing implacably.