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**From Kerygma Toward Martyria:
The Meaning of Human Suffering as a Process of Transformation**

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Abstract

The Christian faith seeks to find meaning and value in the very real suffering that is present in human life. This study intends to find the deeper meaning for suffering than just viewing it as a misfortunate. This research will show that the Christian faith enables sufferers not only to overcome their own suffering but also to be transformed, becoming bridges of love to help others who are still struggling with their pain. The methodology used in this research is, literary study, biblical narrative on Gospel of Mark and Theology of Martyria of the author with his work serving the sick people. The suffering holds a transformative goal for those who endure it and the people around them. It takes enlightenment of the mind and heart for a person to discover and become aware of their calling as Christian. Analysis of the thought of C.S. Lewis and the story of demonic man in the Gospel of Mark present a theological perspective on suffering, the believers should not give up in facing of their pain. Finally, the presence of Rumah Teduh Suryo stands as a testimony that faith must be along with concrete action.

Keywords: discipleship; mercy; shelter house; theodicy; the poor

INTRODUCTION

The theme of suffering remains a perennially relevant subject for discussion, even among academic scholars. As Alvin Plantinga has noted concerning the faith, that people who believe in the existence of God are not always capable of answering the questions posed by non-believers: “If God is all-loving, then why does God allow suffering to exist in the world?”¹ Believers will be confronted with two fundamental realities at the same time: first, their own suffering; and second, the sovereignty of God.

Many theological books and journals have discussed human suffering in the various contexts, but human suffering remains a profound mystery. David Hume addressed the problem of theodicy concerning suffering and the sovereignty of God, a theme first raised by the Greek philosopher, Epicurus, through his famous question: “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is not benevolent. If he is both willing and able, then whence comes the evil that haunts human life?”² Johannes

Grossl observes that for non-believers, the complex issue above is merely a mathematical problem to be solved with whatever resources they possess. In contrast, for believers, resolving this issue is not about constructing a defense of God’s existence. Rather, people of faith are called to journey through the intricate paths of their suffering, where the grace of God works within them, leading each to discover meaning and purpose in the presence of the God of infinite love.³

C.S. Lewis presents the theme of suffering in a compelling way. He encountered a profound dilemma between his conviction in a just and loving God and the stark reality of the suffering he had to endure.⁴ Rene Wouderber, in his book “A Brief of Theodicy,” states that the pain and suffering on earth is God’s call to humanity to recognize the reality of a deeply hidden desire often unnoticed by human beings—the longing for a close and loving relationship with God. In theological and philosophical inquiry, the understanding of evil is closely tied to pain and suffering, though most reflections tend to concentrate solely

¹ Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil* (Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 10.

² David Hume, *Hume: Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion: And Other Writings*, ed. Dorothy Coleman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 74.

³ Johannes Grossl, “Introduction Suffering and the Problem of Evil,” in *T&T Clark Handbook of Suffering and the Problem of Evil*, ed. Matthias Grebe and Johannes Grossl (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023), 1-2.

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Harper One, 1940), 14.

on suffering. Building on this idea, Wounderber emphasizes that suffering can serve as a pathway for humans to encounter God.⁵

The ideas and thoughts about suffering from the philosophers and theologians quoted in the introductory section are indeed very interesting. They concern a topic that has been discussed from ancient times until today—namely, why God, who is believed to be all-loving and all-powerful, allows suffering to exist in this world. Their reflections essentially attempt to “defend” God. However, they lack in exploring in a greater depth how believers should cope with suffering and even transcend suffering just like Jesus did.

This study addresses the deadlock people face when confronted with personal suffering or the suffering of others. Faith-based attitudes, such as surrender and trust in God, often seem insufficient. Those who suffer rarely find peace if told simply to pray and surrender. Even devout believers may lose hope if they do not find meaningful answers to their pain. How can Christian faith help believers break free from the cycle of suffering and find renewed strength and direction through their transformations?

This research tests the hypothesis that suffering is integral to the maturing of faith. Behind every suffering lies God’s plan and presence, enabling Christians to transform through their pain. Every Christian can rise above their suffering and discern their calling to help others.

This study aims to accompany Christians in their suffering, examine its hidden meaning and purpose, and guide them through transformation from hearing God’s word (kerygma) to becoming witnesses (martyria). These perspectives enable them to account for their faith and continue living by faith, even when their suffering persists.

RESEARCH METHOD

This thesis employs biblical narrative methodology, literary study, and fieldwork focusing on ministry to sick children at “*Rumah Teduh Suryo*.” The core research question explores how interpretations of the Gospel of Mark and C.S. Lewis’s understanding of suffering provide a theological foundation for a humanitarian response to suffering in the world.

The first step in this research process involves employing a biblical interpretation method, particularly the narrative ap-

⁵ Rene Van Wounderber, “A Brief History of Theodicy,” in *The Blackwell Companion to The Problem of Evil*, ed. G. Justin P. McBrayer and Daniel Howard Snyder (London: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 185.

proach. Speaking of narrative analysis, Robert Alter occupies a very important position. His book in 1981, entitled “The Art of Biblical Narrative,” has captivated many scholars and continues to develop even today, including by Alter himself.⁶

Research on the narrative texts in the Bible is very interesting for exploring the power and meaning of a Gospel message. The narrative approach invites the reader to be attentive to the clues left by the narrator in delivering the biblical message. The reader of the Bible may gain broader access to uncover the profound meanings.⁷

A character-focused analysis will be applied to the minor and anonymous character possessed by demons in Gerasa, as recorded in Mark 5:1-20. Robert C. Tannehill states that, according to the Markan narrative, the reader of Mark is guided to consider Jesus' identity as Christ (Messiah). The narrative not only answers the question “Who is Jesus?” but also invites the reader to become a disciple of Jesus.⁸ In the Gospel of

Mark, Jesus always accompanies his disciples to understand his identity. During his ministry, Jesus prepared the twelve disciples and other characters to be witnesses (*martyria*) of Jesus as the Lord and Christ.⁹

In her book, “Mark's Jesus,” Elizabeth Malbon argues that the relationship between Jesus and certain characters in the Gospel of Mark marks a significant milestone for the reader to recognize Christology and foster a deeper relationship with Jesus. In the narrative program, every character in Mark has a significant role in exploring Jesus as the main character in Mark.¹⁰ David M. Gunn declares that the narrative analysis in the Gospels must be understood in a broader context than just one pericope. All narrative elements contribute to the theology of Mark, specifically, the discipleship.¹¹ From this perspective, the text of Mark 5:1-20 should be read within the broader context of Mark chapters 5-7. This narrative approach clearly reveals the transformation of the minor character in his process of suffering.¹² The sto-

⁶ David Rhoads, Joanna Dewey, and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999).

⁷ Wagner Floriani, *Benefit and Pitfalls of Narrative Criticism* (California: The Master's Seminary, 2019), 11-12.

⁸ Robert C. Tannehill, “The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology,” *Semina* 16 (1979): 57-95.

⁹ Suzanne Watts Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3-5.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, *Mark's Jesus. Characterization as Narrative Christology* (Texas: Baylor University Press, 2009), 1-3.

¹¹ David M. Gunn, “Narrative Criticism,” in *To Each Its Own Meaning: An Introduction to Biblical Criticism and Their Application*, ed. Steven L. McKenzie and Stephen R. Haynes (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 201-29.

¹² Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, “The Major Importance of the Minor Characters in Mark,” in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament*, ed. Elizabeth Struthers Malbon and Edgar V. McKnight (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 58-86.

ry of the demon-possessed man in Gerasa does not end merely with healing but continues into a process of discipleship, as the healed man is sent to become a witness of God's love in the following narratives in Mark 7.

The second step of this research involves library research, where the author analyses data sources from experts to find depth in discussing a topic. This step explores the thought of C.S. Lewis through his published works "The Problem of Pain, A Grief Observed," and "Mere Christianity." The author examines the development of Lewis's thinking from his early years as an atheist to his later life as a profound Christian apologist. Of particular interest is how this intellectual journey influenced Lewis's perspective and responses to human suffering.

The final step of this research presents a testimony currently being pursued by the author himself, bearing witness to God's goodness through ministry to the sick children. This initiative embodies theological reflection in concrete action, offering hope and presence to those in the midst of suffering. Jesus of Nazareth commissioned His Church to always have empathy for marginalized people and to concretely manifest the teaching of love. The Church's alignment must be clear: with the poor, the sick, the excluded, and those who have lost hope.

That is where theological reflection and biblical reflection gain its power.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Suffering and the Proclamation of the Kingdom of God in The Gospel of Mark

In the Synoptic Gospels, Christians can easily observe how the Lord Jesus in His mission engages with the marginalized people. Synoptic Gospels consistently present marginalized characters in their complex conditions—such as the sick (Matt. 8:1-4), the demon-possessed (Mk. 1:21-28), the poor (Lk. 6:20), the sinners (Lk. 7:36-50), widow (Lk. 7:11-17), the blind man (Matt. 20:29-34); children (Mk. 10:13-16), and even people from remote areas (Mk. 5:1-20). The evangelists depict the people at the time as living as limited, hopeless, and aimless. The Gospel writers not only focus on the suffering itself, but also on the transformative process through which they are delivered from suffering.

A minor character in Mark 5:1-20 seems to most vividly embody extreme suffering and the transformation brought by Jesus. The scene of the Gerasene demoniac appears as part of the conflict between the power of Jesus and the power of Satan (cf. Mk. 1:15, 34; 3:11-12, 26). The conflict began in Mark 1, which recounts the distur-

bance caused by an unclean spirit when Jesus teaches in Capernaum. The exorcism that Jesus performed at that time, followed by astonishment from the people, led to news about Jesus spreading immediately throughout the region of Galilee (Mk. 1:28). The Gospel of Mark develops this conflict in the rest of the Gospel.¹³ The writer of Mark combines the conflict between Jesus and Satan with the other conflicts, between Jesus and the people from his country, especially the disciples, the religious and secular authorities: the scribes (Mk. 1:6), the Pharisees (Mk. 1:16, 24; 2:6), Herodian (Mk. 2:6; 12:13).¹⁴ The series conflicts in Mark that culminates at the crucifixion of Jesus becomes the opportunity for the disciples to recognize Jesus as Christ.¹⁵

The Descriptions of the Gerasene, the Suffering Man

The anonymous character in Mark 5:1-20 is portrayed in extraordinary detail. This man, described as coming from Gerasa (a pagan people from the gentile region), was possessed by evil spirits and lived among

the tombs.¹⁶ This exorcism story marks the first attempt by Jesus to reach the pagan area, as described in the Gospel of Mark. Mk 3:8 describes that the people from Tyre and Sidon come to Jesus, but now, in Mark 5-7, Jesus himself comes to their areas. The story concludes with the rejection; the people of Gerasa ask Jesus to leave their area, and Jesus does not permit the healed man to accompany him.

At that time, the Gerasene demoniac came to Jesus after he disembarked from the boat. Jesus then took the initiative to open a dialogue with Satan, and the unclean spirit loudly proclaimed Jesus' identity as the Son of the Most High (Mk. 5:6-7). Malbon argues that, in this longer conversation (cf. Mk. 3:11), Satan uses another tactic by pleading for mercy.¹⁷ In comparison with Matthew and Luke (Matt. 8:28; Luk. 8:26-27), Mark vividly describes the suffering of the person possessed by an evil spirit in more dire circumstances than in the previous stories.¹⁸ The evangelist points out that no one had been able to bind the Gerasene demoniac, not even with chains (vv. 3-4). Mark inten-

¹³ Rhoads, Dewey, and Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel*.

¹⁴ Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).; See also Malbon, *Mark's Jesus. Characterization as Narrative Christology*, 47.

¹⁵ Malbon, *Mark's Jesus. Characterization as Narrative Christology*, 55.

¹⁶ David E. Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News About Jesus the Messiah*, ed. Andreas J. Kostenberger (Grand Rapids, 2015), 123-24.

¹⁷ Malbon states that the term "Son," used by a Legion, similar with the culture of Gentile. The pagan claims there is a hierarchical pantheon of gods. Malbon, *Mark's Jesus. Characterization as Narrative Christology*, 81-82.

¹⁸ Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News About Jesus the Messiah*, 123.

sifies this portrayal by explaining that the man had often been chained and shackled, yet no restraint could subdue him.

The Gerasene demoniac suffered physically and socially. Possessed by an impure spirit, he was no longer treated as human. Cast out from family and community, no one could accept his condition. He lived in a deserted area; the cemetery was his dwelling. He lived without hope, unable to help himself, and with no one able to help him. Is he destined for endless suffering? His plight mirrors the unresolved suffering of humanity.

The arrival of Jesus in Gerasa introduces a new paradigm: it is the Lord himself who approaches the man. Importantly, in Mark, this visit marks Jesus' first outreach to Gentile territories. However, this initial mission was met with misunderstanding from the people in Gerasa. Instead of welcoming Jesus, they expel him harshly. The rejection of Jesus by the people in Gerasa presents a bitter reality in this world: people valued the pigs, the expensive farming for the foreign nations, more than the life of a single human being. Yet from Jesus' perspective of compassion, one human life (including the demonized man), is of inestimable worth and cannot be compared to anything else.

The story of the Gerasene demoniac does not end with his healing. It continues with his desire to follow Jesus. In a surprising turn, Jesus refuses the man's request. Instead, he commissions him to return to his home with a mission—to proclaim all that the Lord had done for him and how he had experienced God's great mercy. Jesus introduces himself as the Lord as noted in Mark 1:3; 12:36-37. Joel Marcus mentions this rejection and mission to expose the identity of Jesus as Christ in front of the impure spirit at the idolatrous region. Based on his personal experience, the man of Gerasa proclaims Jesus as the Lord and Christ, who defeated Legion.¹⁹ This recognition makes a contrast with what is said by Satan, Jesus as the Son of the Most High God in Mark 5:7. There's a theological meaning between this contrast. At first Jesus forbid the devil to testify about His identity. From the beginning, Mark emphasizes how Jesus never compromises with the devil. There's always a conflict between Jesus and the devil who always attempt to toward Jesus' mission. This reaches its climax in Mark 3:20–30, where Jesus firmly asserts His position in opposition to Beelzebul. But, after the man of Gerasa was healed, He told him to bear witness of the miracle that He has done and

¹⁹ Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 346.

to proclaim God's goodness. A remarkable transformation occurs through obedience; the man begins to proclaim Jesus in the region of the Decapolis.²⁰

Although the story ends in v. 20 and it is not clear whether his mission was successful or not, Mark subtly provides a follow-up. In Mark 7, Jesus returns to idolatrous regions, beyond Galilee. Jesus enters the foreign areas (Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis), and he wants to remain distinguished (Mk. 7:24), but in this time Jesus meets with far greater fame. Still fresh in the memory of Mark's Gospel readers is the rejection by people from foreign regions that was previously experienced in Mark 5:1-20. A question arises: will Jesus fail again at this time? Or will something happen in these places?

Although Mark 7:24-30 seems to lead readers to see similarities to the previous story, the narrative that follows appears very surprising to notice the progression in Mark 5-7.²¹ Mark's readers can easily see the connecting thread between the story of demon expulsion in Gerasa and the story of demon expulsion in Tyre. The story in Mark 7:24-30 begins with Jesus' encoun-

ter with a mother from Syrophoenician by race, whose child was demon-possessed. David E. Garland declares that the Hebrew Bible notes there was hostility between Israelites and Syrophoenician in the past.²² This bears remarkable similarity to the event in Gerasa, which is hostility. The female character who appears here is also unnamed. She is only introduced by the narrator by mentioning her place of origin, the Syrophoenician woman.

A question arises from readers: how did the mother in Tyre and the people in the Decapolis come to know Jesus and know about His ability to cast out evil spirits and heal various diseases? Careful readers can immediately connect this with information from the previous story, how the healed man in Gerasa was commissioned by the Lord Jesus to tell his family and fellow villagers about everything that Jesus had done for him and how Jesus had loved him (Mk. 5:19). The reaction of that man was truly surprising, where in Mark 5:20 the narrator says he went to proclaim also in the other Decapolis regions. The reaction of the crowd that emerged at that time was amazement.

²⁰ Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News About Jesus the Messiah*, 124.

²¹ David Rhoads, "Jesus and the Syrophoenician Woman in Mark: A Narrative-Critical Study," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 2 (1994): 343-75, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1465270>.

²² The Syrophoenician attacked the Israelites as noted in Psalm 83; Isaiah 23; Jeremiah 25; Ezekiel 26-28; Joel 3; Amos 1:9-10. Garland, *A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News About Jesus the Messiah*, 133.

Breaking the Boundaries

The Syrophenician mother in Tyre comes to Jesus with a supplication. She believes that Jesus' power does not stop with the edges but can reach out to the other areas. Jesus erases the boundary, the separation between Jew and the Gentile.²³ In the beginning of Mark 7, the Pharisees and the Scribes created the division between clean and unclean. There is something new happening here. In Gerasa, dialogue occurred between Jesus and impure spirits (Mk. 5:7-10), now in Mark 7:24-30, dialogue occurs between Jesus and a mother who suffered because of her child's condition.

Mark seems to withhold the answer that is not found in the story of demon expulsion in Tyre. However, without delaying too long, that answer can be found in the following story in Mark 7:31-37. Jesus leaves Tyre, and through Sidon goes to the Galilee region, in the midst of the Decapolis area. This region was the destination where the man from Gerasa proclaimed news about Jesus (Mk. 5:20). The Gentile crowd in that area immediately recognized Him. They bring their sick and demon-possessed to Him (Mk. 7:24-37) and ask Jesus to place his hand on the deaf man. The story of a

Syrophenician woman plays a significant progression of the good news of the Kingdom of God.²⁴ Healing was not the sole purpose of his encounter with Jesus. He experienced a profound transformation: he was restored to his family, reintegrated into his community, and bore witness to God's mercy, helping people to know Jesus.

C.S. Lewis' Understanding of Suffering

C.S. Lewis is one of the most prominent modern thinkers who has explored the theme of suffering in a comprehensive manner. Lewis began his life as an atheist but eventually became a Christian apologist. His spiritual journey offers fresh and expansive insight into Christian perspectives on suffering.

Academically, Lewis studied a broad range of classical literatures. These studies prepared him for his education at Oxford, where he completed the "*Literae Humaniores*," a rigorous four-year degree program covering Greek and Latin, philosophy, and history.²⁵ Although Lewis lacked formal theological education, his works unmistakably reveal theological depth, and he is widely read and respected, even among theologians. C.S. Lewis, in his book "The Problem of Pain," says: "In a certain sense,

²³ Mary Cotes, "Following Jesus with the Women in Mark," in *Mark's Gospel in Action*, ed. John Vincent (London: SPCK, 2006), 81.

²⁴ Rhoads, "Jesus and the Syrophenician Woman in Mark: A Narrative-Critical Study."

²⁵ David G. Clark, *C.S. Lewis: A Guide to His Theology* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 18.

Christianity creates rather than solves the problem of pain, for pain would not be a problem unless, side by side with our daily experiences of a painful world, we believed in a real, ultimate reality—a God who is both omnipotent and good.”²⁶

From the quote above, there is a dilemma between Lewis's belief in a just and loving God and the reality of human suffering on earth. Such a difficult dilemma is not typically faced by those who do not believe in God and do not depend on Him. They tend to focus solely on finding solutions to suffering by relying on their own strength or on others they can count on.

Among all of Lewis's works, “The Problem of Pain” (PP) and “A Grief Observed” (GO) are the ones that speak most extensively about suffering.²⁷ The two books address two aspects of the problem: the theoretical aspect in PP and the practical/personal aspect in GO, which recounts his own experience of suffering. In PP, Lewis confidently defends the idea that the existence of suffering does not contradict a good and almighty God. However, in GO, all his thoughts seem to collapse after losing his wife Joy; he even doubts whether God is truly “good.”

According to Lewis, human beings were created so that God could love them. But due to the misuse of free will, humans fell into sin. As a result, humans became self-centered, turned away from God, and began to believe they could live by their own strength. Pain and suffering, then, are God's way of calling people to realize a deep longing they often do not recognize within themselves—a longing for a close, loving relationship with God.

The Idea of Human Suffering According to C.S. Lewis

Suffering is a reality in this world. If God is all-good, then all suffering must be necessary.²⁸ In the appendix of “The Problem of Pain,” Dr. R. Harvard, M.D. offers a medical perspective on suffering based on his experience as a physician. Physical pain in a person is easier to observe. However, observing the character or behavior of the sufferer is much more difficult. Through his experience, he observed that the effect of pain depends largely on its duration. Short-term pain usually does not produce a significant change in behavior, whereas long-term pain can have a profound impact on a person's behavior.²⁹

²⁶ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 14.

²⁷ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (New York: Harper One, 1961).

²⁸ Lewis, 43.

²⁹ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 160.

Lewis states that, in Christian doctrine, “man is perfected through suffering.”³⁰ Two things must be noted here. First, suffering can give rise to fear and compassion. The effect that suffering has depends on where it leads the person. Fear draws people into obedience to God, while compassion leads people to show mercy to others who are suffering. Compassion allows a person to love others not because of their outward appearance, but because they are our fellow human beings. Therefore, according to Lewis, “suffering will not stop until God sees us being remade—or until He sees that it is all in vain.”³¹ However, according to Stephen Saint, suffering is not something to be feared. Suffering enables people to sympathize with others in pain and gives God the opportunity to prove that God is able to meet human needs.³²

Humans are free beings, and everything God gives us has two sides—how it affects us depends on how we respond. For this issue, Thomas Talbott argues that if there are no limits to what God can do, then God could do something immoral and still be justified in doing it, simply because He is God.³³ Although suffering is often seen as something bad, but human with his free

will can see everything two edged. When we witness someone suffering, we must be careful with how we respond. Either we can encourage the sufferer to overcome the suffering, or else we can indulge in the pain and let suffering take over. A poor response might not offer comfort and instead might rob the sufferer of resilience and result in bitterness or anger. Suffering can make a person grow, developing perseverance and compassion.

How Suffering Works According to C.S. Lewis

Lewis asserts that 80% of the suffering in this world is caused by humans misusing their free will. Humans become wicked and harm each other; it is humans who invented whips, torture, slavery, guns, and bombs. But why would God allow humans to hurt one another? Moreover, much of human suffering is not caused by human actions at all.³⁴

The true goodness of a created being lies in the surrender of itself back to its Creator—intellectually, emotionally, and volitionally. Only in this way, the created can live in goodness and happiness. This surrender should not be seen as a hardship but as

³⁰ Lewis, 105.

³¹ Lewis, 105-7.

³² Stephen F. Saint, “Sovereignty, Suffering, and the Work of Missions,” in *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Illinois: Crossway Books, 2006), 121.

³³ Thomas Talbott, “C. S. Lewis and the Problem of Evil,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 17, no. 1 (1987).

³⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 86.

a form of goodness. As children, our will often appears uncontrollably through anger, crying, and rebellion when desires go unmet. Therefore, the first step in a child's education is for parents to teach self-control, sometimes by breaking the child's will—though not their spirit. This teaches the child obedience. In the same way, humans must "die" daily in order to surrender themselves to God. This process is impossible without pain—this is what is called *mortification*.³⁵

In the process of mortification, suffering is unavoidable. Lewis explains three ways suffering “works” in mortification. First, suffering destroys the illusion that everything is fine. Humans will not surrender their free will if everything seems to be going well. Sin has this characteristic: the deeper one falls into it, the harder it is to recognize it. Sin is evil in disguise.

Lewis says that suffering is God's way of awakening a deaf world: “God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” This quote is often cited by others and referred to as Lewis's theodicy.³⁶ There is a universal hu-

man instinct that the wicked must suffer. At its mildest, this appears as a sense of justice.

Punishment is not only meant to penalize but to encourage the wrongdoer to turn from their evil. At the most intense level, it becomes a desire for revenge. The goal of revenge is to make the wrongdoer experience the same harm they caused. But often, revenge causes people to lose sight of the end goal and become obsessed with the act of revenge itself. The avenger wants the wrongdoer not only to suffer, but to suffer at their hands, and to understand and acknowledge the reason for their suffering.

Lewis also warns that suffering—as God's megaphone—is a dangerous instrument. It can lead a person to rebellion instead of repentance. Still, it is often the only chance for change. Without suffering, even the wicked might never see their own sin. God, through suffering, “calls” the wicked to acknowledge their wrong.³⁷

This second function of suffering doesn't only apply to the truly wicked like the first one. It also affects people who seem honest, good, and simple. The illusion that “life is fine” is more often found in people

³⁵ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 89.

³⁶ Arend Smilde, “The First and Lowest Operation of Pain: C.S. Lewis and His Image of ‘God’s Megaphone’ for Human Suffering,” *Journal of Inklings Studies* 13, no. 2 (October 1, 2023): 225–47, https://doi.org/10.3366/INK.2023.0198/SUPPL_FILE/SMILDE.

³⁷ Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 93.

who live comfortably.³⁸ Everything will eventually be lost if one does not learn to know God. This is why God allows suffering to enter human life. Its purpose is to remind humans that everything they have is ultimately not enough.³⁹ Human life will end someday, and people must realize their deepest need: God Himself.

The third way in which suffering works is more difficult to understand. A person may choose to do good not because of a full awareness of the goodness of the act, but simply because they enjoy doing it. If a good act aligns with God's will but is not done out of love for God, then that good act is merely a coincidence. Therefore, to discern whether one's actions are truly done for God—and not merely for personal pleasure—pain is necessary. This means that the act of fully surrendering oneself to God requires pain. The illusion that humans can live without God must be destroyed for the sake of their own good.⁴⁰ This can be done through suffering, whether in this world or in the eternal punishment of fire after death. God allows this, even if it may cause Him to lose His glory in the eyes of humanity.

Lewis and Suffering

This section will explore Lewis's response to suffering after he became a Christian, particularly when he faced the painful loss of his wife to cancer. Here, Lewis's faith was truly tested. In “A Grief Observed” (GO), it is as if Lewis had to validate all the answers and arguments about suffering that he had previously articulated in “The Problem of Pain” (PP) and in his letters and other works. He wrote: “Not that there is no God, but that this is what God is really like. Stop fooling yourself.” In PP, Lewis had vigorously defended God amidst all the suffering in the world. In GO, however, he honestly revealed the emergence of doubt within himself.

Lewis admitted that after his wife's death, he began to doubt everything he had believed through the Christian faith. He realized he should not cling to worldly happiness. He acknowledged the words of Scripture: “Blessed are those who mourn,” and accepted them. Yet everything changed when he had to face that suffering himself. Lewis came to understand that God was not trying to test the quality of his faith—God already knew its quality. It was Lewis himself who

³⁸ Erik J. Wielenberg, *God and the Reach of Reason: C.S. Lewis, David Hume, And Bertrand Russell* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 31.

³⁹ Ciprian Iulian Toroczka, “The Problem of Suffering and Human Solidarity in the Thinking of C.S.

Lewis,” *European Journal of Science and Theology* 8, no. 2 (2012): 207–17.

⁴⁰ Toroczka.

did not. He also once believed he could chart a map for suffering, but later he realized that suffering is a history—one that he would never stop writing. The suffering he experienced was like a valley, with each turn bringing new surprises that might lead to different views. He would never know where suffering might lead him.

Suryo Shelter Home

John Paul II introduced the term “New Evangelization” in 1979. With this term, he invites every Christians, especially the Western culture, to find a new method to preach Christ to the world.⁴¹ Avery Dulles argues that in the modern world, it is not enough for the Church to only focus on missionary activities in the form of civilization, such as to teach the Gospel of the Lord, to catechize and to baptize people so that they may be converted to the Christian faith.⁴² The Church should bring the Good News into all the strata of humanity, transform humanity from within and make it new. As Canilang says, the Church must have the courage to reach out to those who have lost their sense of faith, those who live a life far removed from Christ and His Gospel, and even those who have yet to know

Christ.⁴³ It means that the Church should move from kerygma to martyrria.

In the author’s view, both Lewis and John Paul II do not see suffering as an end that renders human beings powerless. Suffering, when reflected upon through the lens of Christian faith, can become an extraordinary transformative force, which awakened human beings to their deepest calling as followers of Christ. The author himself has once experienced suffering that seemed endless when cancer became an extremely terrifying monster for him and his family. Amidst all the suffering, the author was determined to seek meaning in his suffering. This quest eventually led to the realization that every suffering has a purpose and a blessing, both for himself and for those who suffered.

Rumah Teduh Suryo (Suryo Shelter Home), founded by the author and his friends is a temporary shelter in Central Jakarta for child patients—infants and children—with cancer, non-communicable syndromes, or congenital heart disease from across Indonesia. Receiving medical treatment in Jakarta is extremely difficult for most families coming from rural or remote areas. They are immediately confronted by the harsh realities of Jakarta’s urban life. They are left

⁴¹ Robert Barron and John Allen Jr., *To Light a Fire on the Earth* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2017), 115-16.

⁴² Avery Dulles, *Evangelization for the Third Millennium* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 1-5.

⁴³ Canilang, *The New Evangelization: The Development of the Concept and Its Comprehensive Meaning* (Quezon City: ICLA Publications, 2013), 81.

stranded, struggling alone, seemingly trapped in unending suffering. From January to September 2025, this shelter recorded having served 226 child patients—102 boys and 124 girls. Among them, 153 were diagnosed with congenital heart defects, 14 with cancer/tumors, and 59 with other serious but non-contagious diseases. These children came from various regions across Indonesia.

From the data above, it is undeniable that the presence of shelters in Jakarta is an urgent need for families of underprivileged patients. The presence of this shelter has become a magnet, inspiring many others to get involved. Several volunteers offered their help for this mission.

CONCLUSION

Biblical message of Mark 5:1-20 and the thought of C.S. Lewis together deal with the reflection of the suffering in this world from God's perspective. The omnipotence God has given human beings the power and ability to face the suffering. Within love itself, the presence of suffering cannot be denied. Every Christian is called to love and have the courage to sacrifice for others who suffers. Rumah Teduh Suryo is the evidence that everyone is called and able to go beyond suffering and become the agent of love and hope. The author, through Rumah Teduh Suryo, has become a manifestation

of the face and love of God amid the suffering experienced by its residents.

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