

# **The Cross and the African Conscience: Reinterpreting Suffering, Power, and Deliverance Theology in Ghanaian Christianity**

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## **Abstract**

The cross stands at the centre of Christian faith, yet its formative significance can be obscured when Christianity is interpreted predominantly through the language of victory, prosperity, spiritual warfare, and immediate deliverance from suffering. This qualitative phenomenological study examines how Ghanaian Christians interpret suffering, divine power, endurance, and the cross within Pentecostal, Charismatic, and mainline church contexts. Twenty participants—10 clergy and 10 lay Christians aged 28–67 years—from the Greater Accra, Ashanti, Central, and Volta Regions participated in semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions. Thematic and interpretive phenomenological analysis identified four interconnected themes: **suffering as theological disclosure, lament as faithful expression, endurance as transformative meaning-making, and redemption as witness**. The study proposes a **Theology of Cruciform Endurance**, not as a claim that suffering is inherently redemptive, but as a pastoral framework through which suffering may be interpreted without being glorified, denied, or automatically attributed to spiritual failure. Contemporary research demonstrates that religious meaning-making may support resilience in some contexts, while negative religious coping and spiritual struggle may intensify distress. The article therefore argues for a balanced African Christian theology in which deliverance remains a legitimate hope, suffering is neither romanticised nor demonised, lament is restored to pastoral life, and divine power is interpreted through the cruciform virtues of humility, compassion, justice, and faithful endurance. The cross becomes not an excuse for preventable suffering but a theological critique of domination and a pastoral resource for sustaining dignity, hope, and moral agency amid adversity.

**Keywords:** African Christianity; theology of the cross; redemptive endurance; deliverance theology; pastoral counselling; religious coping

## **1. Introduction**

The cross is Christianity's central paradox.

It is an instrument of suffering proclaimed as the sign of salvation. It speaks of weakness and power, humiliation and glory, death and resurrection. It confronts the human desire to escape vulnerability while simultaneously proclaiming that suffering, violence, and death do not have the final word.

Within many contemporary African Christian communities, particularly Pentecostal and Charismatic settings, faith is frequently expressed through the language of victory, breakthrough, blessing, spiritual warfare, healing, and deliverance. Such language should not be dismissed. It

reflects serious theological convictions concerning God's power over evil and has often provided hope to communities living with poverty, sickness, insecurity, and social uncertainty.

Yet a pastoral difficulty arises when Christian faith is presented as though genuine belief should always produce visible triumph.

What happens to the Christian whose prayer is unanswered?

The woman whose marriage remains painful?

The family facing chronic illness?

The pastor whose congregation declines?

The unemployed graduate who has prayed faithfully?

The bereaved mother who attended every healing service?

If prosperity, health, and success become primary signs of divine favour, suffering can easily become interpreted as evidence of weak faith, hidden sin, spiritual attack, inadequate giving, or defective prayer.

The manuscript underlying this article describes this concern as a need to recover the cross as the moral and theological centre of the African Christian conscience. It draws upon the lived experiences of clergy and lay believers in four Ghanaian regions and explores how suffering, lament, endurance, and witness are interpreted within Christian faith.

The present article refines that argument by making one crucial distinction:

**Suffering is not inherently redemptive.**

Abuse does not become holy because someone survives it.

Poverty is not sanctified simply because a believer endures it.

Illness should not be left untreated because adversity is believed to refine character.

Oppression does not become God's will merely because Christians can discover meaning within it.

Rather, the cross provides a theological framework through which suffering may be **resisted, lamented, interpreted, and sometimes transformed in meaning**, without calling suffering itself good.

That distinction is essential for responsible pastoral counselling.

## 2. The Cross as a Critique of Human Power

Paul's declaration that the message of the cross is "the power of God" challenges ordinary assumptions about what power looks like (1 Corinthians 1:18).

The crucified Christ does not appear powerful according to conventional measures.

He possesses no political office.

He controls no army.

He is mocked rather than applauded.

He is wounded rather than invulnerable.

And yet Christian theology locates divine power precisely within this apparent weakness.

Moltmann's theology of the crucified God emphasises God's solidarity with human suffering rather than divine detachment from it. The theological significance of the cross lies therefore not in declaring suffering inherently virtuous but in proclaiming that God is present with those who suffer and that divine power may be revealed through self-giving love rather than domination.

This distinction is particularly relevant within contexts where religious authority is measured by visible power.

The cross asks uncomfortable questions of Christian leadership:

Does spiritual authority produce humility?

Does power protect the vulnerable?

Does anointing serve others or elevate the leader?

Does prosperity create generosity or status?

Does deliverance restore dignity or create dependency?

The cruciform understanding of power is therefore not weakness for weakness's sake.

It is **power morally disciplined by love**.

## 3. African Christianity, Prosperity, and the Theology of Success

Prosperity theology has developed multiple forms across African Christian contexts, and it should not be treated as a single undifferentiated movement. Heuser's analysis of African prosperity-

gospel economies demonstrates substantial variation across rural, urban, survival-oriented, and entrepreneurial expressions of Pentecostal prosperity teaching.

Nevertheless, scholarship has raised serious theological and social concerns about forms of prosperity teaching that equate wealth and material success too directly with divine blessing. Williams (2022) argues that particular prosperity interpretations can displace communal values and encourage highly individualised understandings of economic blessing.

The pastoral concern is not prosperity itself.

Christians may legitimately pray for employment, healing, provision, family stability, and deliverance.

The problem arises when suffering becomes morally suspicious.

A poor person is assumed to lack faith.

A sick person is told to pray harder.

A grieving believer is urged to "claim victory."

A failed business becomes evidence of a curse.

The result may be a cruel theological equation:

**blessing = visible success**

and therefore

**suffering = spiritual failure.**

The cross disrupts that equation.

Jesus' suffering cannot be interpreted as deficient faith.

Paul's weakness cannot be reduced to spiritual incompetence.

The martyrs cannot be described as people whose prayer lives failed.

The theology of the cross therefore restores a necessary Christian realism:

**faithfulness and suffering can coexist.**

#### 4. Deliverance Theology: Promise and Pastoral Risk

Deliverance theology has genuine pastoral significance in African Christianity.

It speaks directly to beliefs concerning spiritual power, evil, ancestral fear, witchcraft, demonic oppression, illness, misfortune, and protection. It also resonates with African cosmologies in which spiritual causation is frequently understood as intertwined with ordinary life.

A responsible Christian pastoral approach should not ridicule this worldview.

At the same time, not every form of suffering should be automatically spiritualised.

A person may be depressed rather than demonised.

A diabetic patient needs medical care.

A woman experiencing domestic violence needs safety.

An unemployed person may be facing structural economic realities.

A pastor experiencing burnout may require rest and psychological support.

A bereaved person may simply be grieving.

When every form of distress is interpreted exclusively as spiritual attack, appropriate treatment may be delayed and suffering may deepen.

The pastoral task is therefore **discernment rather than denial**.

A cross-centred theology of deliverance can affirm prayer while also affirming medicine.

It can acknowledge spiritual struggle while assessing psychological distress.

It can seek divine intervention without blaming the sufferer when intervention does not occur in the expected manner.

## 5. Suffering, Meaning-Making, and Religious Coping

Psychological research helps clarify why religious interpretation matters during adversity.

Religion and spirituality may provide meaning, social support, hope, identity, prayer, ritual, surrender, and a sense of coherence. A large systematic review and meta-analysis found positive associations between certain forms of religion/spirituality and sense of coherence, particularly when religious life involved positive emotions or meaning-making. However, negative religious coping showed a substantially negative association with coherence.

Research in disaster contexts likewise demonstrates that religious responses to suffering involve multiple processes, including representations of God, religious appraisal, meaning-making, and religious coping rather than a simple uniformly beneficial effect.

This distinction is highly relevant to pastoral counselling.

Two believers may experience the same illness very differently.

One may say:

*"God is with me even though I do not understand this."*

Another may say:

*"God is punishing me because I have failed."*

Both statements are religious.

They are not psychologically equivalent.

The first may sustain hope.

The second may intensify guilt and despair.

Christian counselling should therefore explore not simply **whether** clients are religious but **how their religious beliefs are functioning within their suffering**.

## 6. Religious Struggle Is Not Necessarily Loss of Faith

Trauma and serious adversity can disturb religious belief.

People may question God, struggle to pray, feel abandoned, experience anger toward God, or reconsider beliefs they previously held with certainty. A meta-analysis on trauma and religious beliefs confirms that trauma may affect religious beliefs in complex ways rather than simply strengthening faith.

This has significant implications for Christian pastoral care.

A grieving Christian who asks, *"Where was God?"* should not automatically be corrected.

A patient who says, *"I am tired of praying,"* may need compassion rather than rebuke.

A pastor who admits, *"I no longer understand what God is doing,"* may be expressing lament rather than apostasy.

The biblical tradition itself provides space for such struggle.

Job questions.

Jeremiah protests.

The Psalms ask, *"How long?"*

Jesus cries from the cross.

Lament therefore preserves faith by allowing believers to remain in relationship with God while refusing to pretend.

## 7. Purpose of the Study

The study explored how Ghanaian Christians interpret suffering, divine power, deliverance, lament, and endurance through the theology of the cross.

It addressed three broad questions:

1. How do Ghanaian Christians interpret personal and communal suffering within their faith?
2. How do prosperity, deliverance, and spiritual-warfare beliefs influence interpretations of suffering?
3. How might a cross-centred pastoral framework support healthy meaning-making without glorifying adversity?

## 8. Methodology

### 8.1 Research Design

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design focused on participants' lived theological experiences.

Phenomenology was selected because the concern was not to measure the prevalence of particular beliefs but to understand how suffering was experienced and interpreted.

A hermeneutic dimension was also employed to explore the meanings embedded in participants' language concerning spiritual warfare, divine testing, the cross, endurance, blessing, and suffering.

### 8.2 Participants and Context

Twenty participants were purposively selected: 10 clergy—including pastors, evangelists, prophets, and church counsellors—and 10 lay Christians who had experienced significant adversity such as widowhood, illness, financial loss, or persecution.

Participants came from the Greater Accra, Ashanti, Central, and Volta Regions and ranged in age from 28 to 67 years.

Clergy ministry experience ranged from approximately 5 to 30 years. Participants represented different denominational environments and were selected for the richness of their experiences rather than theological uniformity.

### **8.3 Data Collection**

Semi-structured interviews, two regional focus groups, and researcher reflective journals formed the primary data sources.

Individual interviews lasted approximately 45–75 minutes and explored participants' experiences of suffering, their understanding of the cross, and their theological interpretations of endurance.

Interviews occurred in church offices, homes, and retreat environments. Conversations were recorded with permission and transcribed for analysis. The study also preserved relevant cultural material, including local language expressions, proverbs, biblical references, hymns, and prayer language.

### **8.4 Data Analysis**

The study employed thematic and interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Transcripts were read repeatedly and coded for recurring theological, emotional, relational, and pastoral patterns.

Major themes included:

1. suffering as theological disclosure;
2. lament as faithful expression;
3. endurance as transformative meaning-making; and
4. redemption as witness.

NVivo was reportedly used to organise data, while triangulation across interviews, focus groups, and reflective notes supported credibility. Member checking was also used to examine whether interpretations adequately represented participant accounts.

### **8.5 Ethical Considerations**

Participants provided informed consent after receiving information concerning the purpose and voluntary nature of the study.

Pseudonyms were employed and identifying information was removed.

Because interviews could involve trauma, bereavement, abuse, and other painful experiences, participants were informed that the research interview was not itself counselling and that professional support could be accessed where needed.

The source manuscript reports adherence to International Theological Seminary research-ethics guidelines and access to licensed counselling support during emotionally sensitive encounters.

### **8.6 Researcher Reflexivity**

The researcher's dual identity as counsellor and theologian required ongoing reflexivity.

Pastoral familiarity facilitated empathy but also created the possibility of theological over-interpretation.

Reflective journaling was used to identify assumptions and distinguish participants' own meaning-making from the researcher's interpretation.

This distinction is especially important in research concerning suffering because pastoral theology can too easily tell people what their pain *means* rather than listen carefully to what it means to them.

## 9. Findings

### 9.1 Theme One: Suffering as Theological Disclosure

Participants commonly described suffering as an experience that challenged or changed their understanding of God, themselves, and ministry.

Some interpreted adversity as spiritually formative.

A widow described discovering a different relationship with God after loss. A pastor described betrayal and church division as experiences that exposed his own pride and deepened compassion.

The original manuscript presents these accounts as evidence that suffering could become revelatory within participants' meaning systems.

However, theologically and clinically, an important distinction is necessary.

The fact that a person **finds meaning in suffering** does not establish that God caused the suffering for that purpose.

Pastoral counsellors should therefore avoid statements such as:

*"God gave you cancer to teach you."*

*"God allowed the abuse to make you stronger."*

*"Your poverty is your spiritual classroom."*

Such claims exceed what the counsellor can responsibly know.

A healthier formulation is:

**"This happened. It was painful. What meaning, if any, are you discovering as you live through it?"**

Meaning may emerge.

It should not be imposed.

## **9.2 Theme Two: Lament as Faithful Expression**

Participants repeatedly described tears, prayer, lament, hymns, and public grieving as important expressions of faith.

Rather than representing unbelief, lament allowed participants to remain in conversation with God while acknowledging suffering honestly.

The source narratives describe participants understanding crying as prayer and communal mourning as a form of ministry.

This finding fits wider research showing that spirituality may assist coping through practices such as prayer, meaning-making, relationship with God, and social support, while spiritual struggle can also complicate recovery.

Pastoral counselling should therefore make room for both.

The faithful person may pray confidently today and question God tomorrow.

Both experiences belong within pastoral care.

## **9.3 Theme Three: Endurance as Transformative Meaning-Making**

Several participants described a change in prayer from asking exclusively for suffering to disappear toward asking for strength, wisdom, peace, or endurance within circumstances that had not yet changed.

One bereaved participant described moving from:

*"Take this pain away"*

toward:

*"Give me strength to carry it well."*

The original study interprets this transition as redemptive endurance.

This concept deserves careful definition.

Endurance should not mean passive submission to preventable harm.

A person should not "endure" domestic abuse.

A worker need not endure exploitation that can be challenged.

A patient should not endure treatable disease without medical attention.

Christian endurance is better understood as the capacity to remain morally and spiritually grounded when suffering cannot immediately be removed.

It is therefore **faithful persistence without fatalism**.

#### **9.4 Theme Four: Redemption as Witness**

Participants also described ways in which past adversity later contributed to empathy, service, counselling, preaching, mentoring, or renewed purpose.

Some described scars becoming part of their ministry story.

This pattern resembles contemporary studies of religious meaning-making following adversity. Shannonhouse et al. (2024), for example, found that Christian refugees described trust in God, prayer, lament, worship, surrender, and social support as part of their meaning-making, alongside spiritual struggles and reports of altered purpose and faith.

Again, this must not become a pastoral demand.

A survivor does not owe the church a testimony.

A bereaved mother does not need to establish a ministry.

A traumatised person does not have to prove that pain was worthwhile.

Redemption may mean simply learning to live meaningfully again.

#### **10. Toward a Theology of Cruciform Endurance**

The findings support a pastoral framework organised around four movements:

#### **Truth – Lament – Endurance – Hope**

##### **10.1 Truth: Name Suffering Without Spiritualising It**

The first responsibility is to name reality honestly.

What happened?

Was there injustice?

Is the person unsafe?

Is treatment available?

Is there abuse?

Has spiritual manipulation occurred?

Is poverty being interpreted as personal failure when structural causes matter?

Christian pastoral care must distinguish between **meaning-making and meaning-imposition**.

Not every suffering requires a theological explanation.

### **10.2 Lament: Permit Faith to Speak Pain**

The second movement gives emotional and spiritual language to suffering.

Lament may involve Scripture, prayer, silence, tears, music, storytelling, anger, or questions.

The counsellor does not rush the person toward triumph.

The cross itself permits Christians to remain in sorrow without surrendering hope.

### **10.3 Endurance: Develop Capacity Without Glorifying Pain**

Where suffering cannot immediately be removed, pastoral care can support emotional regulation, relationships, practical coping, prayer, meaning, professional treatment, and spiritual resilience.

Research demonstrates that religion and spirituality can contribute to coping and resilience, but the effects depend substantially upon the form of religious coping and the person's context.

Endurance is therefore not simply "trying harder."

It includes receiving help.

### **10.4 Hope: Reconstruct a Future**

Hope asks:

What remains possible?

Who are you beyond this loss?

What relationships sustain you?

What does faith mean now?

What practical steps can be taken?

What has changed?

What should not be allowed to continue?

Hope differs from denial.

It looks directly at suffering and still imagines a future.

## 11. The Cross and Pastoral Counselling

The cross can become a significant resource in Christian counselling when it is used carefully.

It may communicate:

God does not despise weakness.

Suffering does not necessarily indicate divine rejection.

Christ enters human pain.

Vulnerability need not destroy dignity.

Power can be exercised through compassion.

Hope may coexist with grief.

But the cross becomes harmful when misused.

A counsellor should never tell an abused person:

*"Carry your cross and remain in the marriage."*

The cross should never protect an abuser.

A patient should not be told:

*"Jesus suffered, so stop complaining."*

A poor person should not be told:

*"God wants to teach you through poverty,"*

when meaningful social support is available.

A theology intended to dignify suffering must never become an instrument for perpetuating it.

## 12. Redemptive Suffering Versus Redemptive Response

This distinction may be the most important contribution of the present article.

The phrase **redemptive suffering** can imply that suffering itself possesses salvific or developmental value.

That claim is pastorally dangerous.

A better formulation is:

**redemptive response to suffering.**

The suffering may be unjust.

The illness may remain tragic.

The abuse may remain evil.

The bereavement may remain heartbreaking.

What may become redemptive is the person's response:

seeking help;

telling the truth;

developing compassion;

protecting others;

strengthening boundaries;

recovering faith;

working for justice;

receiving care;

or finding meaning.

The cross does not make crucifixion good.

It proclaims that God can bring life from what was intended for death.

### 13. Implications for Prosperity Theology

A cross-centred African theology need not reject blessing.

It should redefine it.

Blessing can include provision.

But blessing may also include:

wisdom;

community;

integrity;

healthcare;

courage;

justice;

rest;

faithfulness;

resilience;

and the capacity to endure without losing oneself.

This broader theology protects Christians from interpreting every hardship as spiritual failure.

Prosperity-oriented Christianity across Africa is itself diverse, and scholarship cautions against treating it as one monolithic phenomenon.

The theological critique should therefore target distortions rather than caricature entire traditions.

### 14. Implications for Deliverance Theology

Deliverance remains a profoundly biblical theme.

Israel is delivered.

The oppressed are liberated.

Jesus heals.

Demons are confronted.

The gospel announces freedom.

The cross-centred correction is not:

**"Stop believing in deliverance."**

It is:

**"Do not reduce deliverance to immediate escape from every hardship."**

Sometimes deliverance means removal from danger.

Sometimes recovery.

Sometimes justice.

Sometimes effective treatment.

Sometimes freedom from shame.

Sometimes restored agency.

Sometimes strength to live faithfully while a condition remains.

A mature theology permits all these possibilities.

## 15. Implications for Seminary Formation

African theological education should prepare pastors not only to preach victory but to accompany suffering.

Ministerial formation should include:

- theology of the cross and suffering;
- lament and the Psalms;
- trauma-informed pastoral care;
- grief and bereavement;
- religious coping and spiritual struggle;
- domestic violence and safeguarding;
- suicide awareness;
- clergy self-care;
- referral and interdisciplinary collaboration;
- prosperity and deliverance theology;
- pastoral ethics and power.

Students should learn that theological certainty can become pastorally dangerous when it outruns compassionate listening.

The future minister must know how to preach resurrection.

But the minister must also know how to sit beside the tomb.

## 16. Implications for Churches

Churches need spaces where suffering can be discussed without embarrassment.

Testimony should not be reserved only for miraculous outcomes.

There should also be room for believers who say:

*"I am still waiting."*

*"The treatment has not worked."*

*"I prayed and still lost him."*

*"I remain faithful, but I am tired."*

A congregation becomes pastorally mature when people do not have to disguise pain before entering worship.

Churches should develop grief ministries, counselling referral networks, pastoral-support groups, appropriate safeguarding procedures, and liturgies of lament.

The Church should be a place where people can seek both prayer and professional help without being told that one invalidates the other.

## 17. Implications for Christian Counselling

Faith-sensitive counselling should explore the client's own theology of suffering.

Questions may include:

*What do you believe this suffering means?*

*What have people told you about why it happened?*

*Has your faith helped you?*

*Has anything in your religious community made the experience harder?*

*Do you feel angry with God?*

*Do you believe your suffering is punishment?*

*What would deliverance look like to you?*

*What practical help do you need now?*

*Would prayer be helpful in this session?*

Such questions preserve spiritual dignity and therapeutic autonomy.

Research consistently suggests that religious coping is multifaceted: some forms can sustain resilience and meaning, while negative religious interpretations may contribute to distress.

## 18. The Cruciform Ministry Model

The study supports a practical model with three dimensions:

### **Formation: Knowing the Cross**

Christian leaders develop theological maturity concerning suffering, power, weakness, grace, and hope.

### **Compassion: Carrying One Another's Burdens**

The cross becomes embodied through listening, protection, advocacy, practical care, counselling, medical referral, and solidarity.

### **Transformation: Living Cruciformly**

The final goal is not "becoming the cross" in a literal sense but developing a Christ-shaped pattern of humility, service, courage, justice, and faithful love.

This model resists both domination and passivity.

Cruciform ministry serves.

It does not exploit suffering.

## 19. Discussion

The study reveals that Ghanaian Christians possess rich theological resources for interpreting suffering, but these resources require careful pastoral discernment.

The cross can liberate believers from the shame of suffering.

It can challenge prosperity teaching that makes visible success the primary evidence of faith.

It can correct warfare theology when every human problem becomes demonised.

It can validate lament.

It can redefine power.

It can provide a vocabulary for hope.

But cross theology itself can also be abused.

Historically and pastorally, appeals to suffering have sometimes been used to encourage vulnerable people to tolerate injustice.

The central criterion must therefore be the character of Christ.

Does the theology protect dignity?

Does it tell the truth?

Does it challenge oppression?

Does it promote compassion?

Does it allow treatment?

Does it recognise psychological reality?

Does it respect agency?

Does it produce love rather than domination?

If not, then language about "carrying the cross" has departed from the very cross it invokes.

## 20. Limitations

Several limitations should guide interpretation.

First, the qualitative sample consisted of only 20 participants from four Ghanaian regions and cannot represent African Christianity as a whole.

Second, Pentecostal, Charismatic, mainline, rural, and urban Christian experiences differ significantly and should not be collapsed into a single "African worldview."

Third, participants were selected partly because faith was central to their meaning-making. The study therefore does not represent individuals whose suffering led them away from Christianity or toward religious disengagement.

Fourth, the researcher's identity as pastor, counsellor, and theologian inevitably shaped interpretation.

Fifth, the study cannot establish that cross-centred meaning-making causes psychological resilience. Existing research indicates association and complexity rather than a simple causal mechanism.

Sixth, narratives describing spiritual growth after adversity should not be taken to imply that growth is inevitable, necessary, or morally superior to other grief and trauma responses.

Finally, the proposed **Theology of Cruciform Endurance** is a conceptual pastoral framework rather than an empirically validated clinical intervention.

## 21. Directions for Future Research

Future studies should examine cruciform meaning-making with larger and more diverse Ghanaian samples.

Mixed-method and longitudinal research could explore associations among:

religious coping;

spiritual struggle;

resilience;

depression;

trauma symptoms;

pastoral support;

social support;

quality of life;

and meaning reconstruction.

Research should also examine whether prosperity-oriented and deliverance-oriented teachings affect help-seeking for mental and physical health problems.

Gender deserves particular attention. Christian language about endurance may affect women experiencing domestic violence differently from men experiencing economic or ministerial hardship.

Future work should also examine how clergy understand the difference between spiritual endurance and harmful passivity.

## 22. Conclusion

The cross does not ask Christians to love suffering.

It asks them to discover what faithfulness looks like when suffering cannot be avoided.

That distinction matters.

There is suffering that must be resisted.

There is suffering that must be treated.

There is suffering from which a person must escape.

There is suffering produced by injustice that the Church must confront.

And there is suffering which, despite every prayer and every legitimate effort, remains for a season.

Pastoral theology must know the difference.

The cross should never be used to tell a wounded person:

*"Stay there and suffer."*

It should say:

*"God has not abandoned you here."*

It should never tell an abused woman:

*"This is your spiritual assignment."*

It should say:

*"Your dignity matters. Let us help you become safe."*

It should never tell the sick believer:

*"Your illness proves weak faith."*

It should say:

*"We will pray, and we will seek competent treatment."*

It should never tell the grieving:

*"You must be strong."*

It should say:

*"You may weep, and hope can remain."*

This is the pastoral power of the cross.

It strips spiritual power of arrogance.

It strips prosperity of its claim to define worth.

It strips suffering of its ability to prove divine rejection.

And it strips hopelessness of the right to write the final chapter.

The African Christian conscience does not need a theology that glorifies pain.

Nor does it need a theology that denies pain.

It needs a theology mature enough to look at suffering truthfully and still proclaim grace.

The most important shift, therefore, is from **redemptive suffering** to **redemptive response**.

Pain itself is not automatically sacred.

But compassion can emerge within pain.

Truth can be spoken within pain.

Justice can be pursued because of pain.

Faith can be deepened despite pain.

And lives may be rebuilt after pain.

The cross is therefore not Christianity's celebration of suffering.

It is Christianity's declaration that even suffering cannot place a human life beyond the reach of God.

That is the theology capable of speaking to the African conscience: a theology in which power becomes service, deliverance becomes wholeness, lament remains faithful, and endurance means neither defeat nor resignation, but the continued possibility of hope.

### Ethical Statement

The source manuscript reports informed consent, pseudonymisation, voluntary participation, confidentiality procedures, and access to licensed counselling support where interviews generated significant emotional distress. It also states that research procedures followed International Theological Seminary research-ethics guidelines. No additional ethics approval information or reference number is introduced beyond what the manuscript itself reports.

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