

Understanding the Meaning of Suffering Among Catholic Students in Bogor, Indonesia

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Abstracts:

This study examines the understanding of suffering among Catholic high school students at Regina Pacis High School Bogor, Indonesia. Through focus group discussions, the research explores how thirty high school Catholics perceive and respond to suffering, both personally and in relation to the suffering of others and of Christ. The results are viewed in the light of the Church's teachings, specifically the apostolic letter Salvifici Doloris and various contemporary theological perspectives on suffering. Reflecting on these insights, the research reveals a significant transition in the students' understanding of suffering: from viewing daily challenges as suffering to recognizing them as transformative experiences; from avoiding suffering to embracing it; from self-centeredness to empathy toward others who suffer; and ultimately leading them to imitate Christ in their own suffering. The findings highlight the potential of young Catholics to deepen their understanding of suffering, aligning it more closely with its meaning as valued in the Catholic faith.

Keywords:

Young Catholics, Indonesia, suffering, resilience, Salvifici Doloris.

Introduction

In *Visi Indonesia 2045*, a long-term development plan document, the Government of Indonesia outlines the ideals of community welfare. The increased number of productive age —around 69,3% since 2012 and is anticipated to last until 2040—¹ makes the Government optimistic that it will obtain a demographic bonus and thus will be able to improve the economy, which has an impact on promoting the well-being of all Indonesian people. This optimism must be accompanied by educational efforts to prepare a qualified young generation both in terms of mastery of knowledge and skills, and in terms of character. One of the various characteristics of young people mentioned in *Visi Indonesia 2045* is having a strong mentality or resilience.

In reality, Indonesian youth, particularly those from Generation Z, are often labelled by society as the “strawberry generation.” The label implies that young people have beautiful exteriors but are fragile on the inside. This label arose from the perception that the younger generation is unable to face hardship and lacks resilience. Several empirical studies reinforce this perception; for instance, research conducted at SMK Santo Fransiskus Semarang found that significant portion of students exhibited low resilience.² These students frequently expressed complaints regarding homework and examinations, avoided participating in school activities that demand effort, and displayed disappointment when facing challenges.³ Moreover, many young people conceptualize an ideal life as a stress-free life where they can live as they desire without encountering

¹ Azmal Hali et al, “Optimal Strategies to Increase National Income in Realising Golden Indonesia 2045,” *Indonesian Research Journal on Education* 5, no. 2 (April 2025): 1010, <https://doi.org/10.31004/irje.v5i2.2416>.

² Elizabeth Gultom, Sugiyana, and Wuriningsih, “Hubungan Antara Pembinaan Iman dengan Resiliensi pada Remaja Katolik di SMK Santo Fransiskus Semarang,” *Lumen Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Katekese dan Pastoral* 1, no. 1 (June 2022): 11, 10.55606/lumen.v1i1.24

³ Gultom et al., “Hubungan Antara Pembinaan Iman dengan Resiliensi,” 12.

obstacles.⁴ This mindset cultivates unrealistic expectations, making them vulnerable to psychological distress when confronted with inevitable difficulties.⁵ A study by Tindaon et al. further elaborates this phenomenon. The research reveals that students in Yogyakarta often experience stress and difficulties in following the academic demands, particularly those who enrolled in undesired majors.⁶ Collectively, these findings indicate that Indonesian youth have a tendency to avoid situations that require sacrifice and give up easily when confronted with daily challenges and difficulties.⁷

The two dominant factors that influence Gen-Z's characteristics are the intensity of technology use and parenting styles. The heavy reliance on technology has fostered an instant mindset among Gen-Z.⁸ As a result, they tend to become bored more quickly and often seek immediate solutions. This habit makes them overly dependent on technology or on other people, making them less able to solve their own problems. Additionally, overprotective parenting has also become more common, particularly among middle and upper-class families. Parents do not allow their children to experience hardship, which prevents them from developing the necessary skills to handle problems independently.⁹ To a certain extent, this kind of parenting causes young people to lack resilience and often perceive daily challenges or difficulties as suffering. Unfortunately, this perspective indicates suffering as an overwhelming problem with no visible solution, leading to uncomfortable stress, despair,

⁴ Tri Sulastri and Perdana Kusuma, "Makna Kebahagiaan pada Generasi Z," *Indonesian Journal of Social and Educational Studies* 3, no. 2 (December 2022): 187, <https://doi.org/10.26858/ijses.v3i2.40526>

⁵ Riryng Fatmawaty, "Memahami Psikologi Remaja," *Jurnal Reforma* 6, no. 2 (December 2017): 58, <https://doi.org/10.30736/rfma.v6i2.33>

⁶ Ronika Tindaon, Kartika N. Fathiyah, and Yohanes E. Paji, "Religiosity and Resilience in Students of the Faculty of Catholic Religious Education," *Journal of Educational, Health and Community* 13, no. 2 (June 2024): 481, <https://doi.org/10.12928/jehcp.v13i2.27930>

⁷ Rhenald Kasali, *Strawberry Generation: Anak-Anak Kita Berhak Keluar dari Perangkap yang Bisa Membuat Mereka Rapuh* (Jakarta: Mizan, 2017), 237.

⁸ Syifa Hapsari, Tati Meilani, and Zachrah Nabillah, "Strawberry Generation: Dilematis Keterampilan Mendidik Generasi Masa Kini," *Jurnal Pendidikan* 31, no. 2 (July 2021): 241, <https://doi.org/10.32585/jp.v31i2.2485>.

⁹ Hapsari, Meilani, and Nabillah, "Strawberry Generation," 238.

and hopelessness. In their attempt to escape the feeling of discomfort, many young people resort to self-harm behavior or experience suicidal thoughts.¹⁰

Nevertheless, resilience is one of the human characteristics that is importantly needed to face global demands.¹¹ Resilience refers to a personal capacity to be stable in painful or suffering situations; thus, to survive and find meaning from experiences.¹² The development of resilience should commence in early childhood, particularly in the family, as family serves a fundamental role in cultivating the ability to find meaning in all circumstances.¹³ In light of this, individuals are encouraged to find meaning in their experiences, including those of trauma, disappointments, failures, and suffering.¹⁴ Even though many people may feel overwhelmed by hardship, the experience of suffering can, in fact, develop resilience.¹⁵

Empirical research from various contexts further elaborates the factors that contribute to resilience. A qualitative study conducted in the Philippines explored the experiences of seven students from public and private schools who had endured significant adverse life events, and found that the participants were able to transform painful experiences into meaningful sources of motivation.¹⁶ When the participants possess the ability to adapt positively and find meaning in adversity, they also

¹⁰ Thesalonika Tarigan and N. C. Apsari, "Self-Harm or Self-Injuring Behaviour by Adolescents," *Focus: Jurnal Pekerjaan Sosial* 4, no. 2 (February 2022): 218, <https://doi.org/10.24198/focus.v4i2.31405>.

¹¹ Prompilai Buasuwan et al, "Re-envisioning A 'Skills Framework' to Meet 21st Century Demands: What Do Young People Need?" *Frontiers in Education* 7 (October 2022): 2-3, Frontiers | Re-envisioning a "skills framework" to meet 21st century demands: What do young people need?

¹² Ali Javadpour, Peter Schofield, and Mohammad Motamedi, "Assessing Correlation between Psychological Resilience and Successful Ageing," *Mental Health & Human Resilience International Journal* 3, no. 2 (July 2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.23880/mhrij-16000129>.

¹³ Ann Masten and Andrew Barnes, "Resilience in Children: Developmental Perspectives," *MDPI Children* 5, no. 7 (July 2018): 6, <https://doi.org/10.3390/children5070098>

¹⁴ Buasuwan et al, "Re-envisioning Skills Framework," 11.

¹⁵ Zachari Siraj, "Embracing Pain: Suffering as A Catalyst for Growth and Resilience," *Biomedical: Journal of Scientific & Technical Research* 59, no. 4 (November 2024): 59, <https://dx.doi.org/10.26717/BJSTR.2024.59.009333>.

¹⁶ Arlyn P. Cailing and Amela Tadeo-Cayabyab, "Finding the Silver Lining: Student Positive Growth Amidst Adversity," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* 10, no. 2 (February 2026): 7673, <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10200549>

foster remarkable resilience.¹⁷ In addition, other research in the Philippines has underscored the significant role of faith in building resilience.¹⁸ The study reveals that faith strengthens adaptability, which also contributes to enhancing resilience.¹⁹ Furthermore, students who integrated their faith when confronting adversity not only demonstrated resilience, but also exhibited perseverance and emotional stability.²⁰

The role of faith as a developing factor of resilience is evident in predominantly Catholic societies, such as the Philippines. As a nation with the majority Catholic population, the Philippines' youth have moderate knowledge of Catholic doctrine and actively participate in religious practices. The studies in the Philippines show that faith serves as an important resource for coping amidst adversity and thus, positive religious coping—such as religious practices—enhances resilience.²¹ However, a study by Surzykiewicz et al. in Poland found that positive religious coping does not significantly affect resilience.²² The research further elaborates that the effect of religious practices in developing resilience only applied to older people, whereas the predominance of young people among the research's participants has a tendency toward negative religious coping.²³

Building upon these insights, this article presents the results of our study that involves high school students, aged 15 to 18 years, at Regina Pacis High School in Bogor, West Java, Indonesia. The school has a

¹⁷ Cailing and Tadeo-Cayabyab, "Finding the Silver Lining," 7679.

¹⁸ Noel P. Munda and Rey D. Metran, "Faith and Resiliency Among Senior High School Students: The Mediating Role of Adaptability," *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives* 4, no. 4 (April 2026): 282, <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2026.100>

¹⁹ Munda and Metran, "Faith and Resiliency," 290.

²⁰ Fremativo A. Vergara, Melvin G. Barete, and Evan P. Taja-on, "Rest for the Weary Soul: A Mixed Methods Psychospiritual Exploration of Faith as A Path to Mental Health Recovery Among Students," *Journal of Catholic Education* 29, no. 1 (April 2026): 71, <https://doi.org/10.15365/joce.2901042026>

²¹ Fides del Castillo and Marie A. Alino, "Religious Coping of Selected Filipino Catholic Youth," *MDPI Religion* 11, no. 9 (September 2020): 10, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11090462>

²² Janusz Surzykiewicz et al., "Exploring the Mediating Effects of Negative and Positive Religious Coping Between Resilience and Mental Well-Being," *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 16 (October 2022): 10, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2022.954382>

²³ Surzykiewicz et al., "Exploring the Mediating Effects," 11.

mission to cultivate attitudes of servant-leadership among its students, which includes fostering a spirit of self-offering and resilience in the face of suffering.²⁴ The school community believes that education serves as a means to transform lives and embodies the principles of living out the Christian faith through actions.²⁵ Therefore, Regina Pacis School prioritizes the internalization of values through both academic and extracurricular activities, aiming to develop students with strong characters. Ultimately, the goal is to nurture individuals who are ready to give himself/herself to serve others and who can become servant-leaders for the Church and the nation.

Method

This research employs a descriptive qualitative method to achieve a comprehensive exploration of high school students' understanding of suffering. The research was conducted at Regina Pacis Bogor High School in 2025. The participants were thirty Catholic students from grades 10 to 12, aged between 15 and 18 years old, who were selected through purposive quota sampling with the primary criterion of being Catholic students and were recommended by the teachers to represent their grades.

Data collection used focus group discussions (FGDs) that were divided into three distinct groups according to each grade level. Each FGD session lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, facilitated by the researchers using an open-ended interview guide. The discussion prompts were formulated around four key questions: the understanding of suffering, the response toward suffering, the view of others' suffering, and

²⁴ Adi Susila & FMM Authors, *Pedoman Pendidikan Karakter Berdasarkan Spiritualitas FMM* (Bogor: Yayasan FMM, 2017), 149.

²⁵ Susila & FMM Authors, *Pedoman Pendidikan Karakter*, 56.

the view of the suffering of Christ. All FGD sessions were audio-recorded with participants' consent and were transcribed verbatim.

The data were examined in the light of the Church's teachings on suffering as a framework for reflection to value all participants' understandings. This article also highlights the potential of young Catholics to deepen their understanding of suffering and align it more closely with the meaning of suffering in the Christian faith. In doing so, we hope that young Catholics will be better equipped to become part of a resilient generation that will be able to realize the vision of a prosperous Indonesia by 2045.

Young Catholics in Regina Pacis Bogor

The Church views young people as blessings of present and future that enrich and give hope through their presence for both the Church and the world.²⁶ Young people are called to make significant contributions to the world through their dedication, involvement, and even sacrifices, because being young does not mean seeking only temporary pleasures and superficial achievements;²⁷ rather, it includes facing hard work, hardships, challenges, and suffering.

Through engaging discussions (FGDs) with thirty Catholic high school students at Regina Pacis Bogor, we gained insights into young Catholics' understanding of suffering and how they personally respond to it. Our exploration extended to their view of the suffering of others and the suffering of Christ. We outline the results of these discussions in the following four sections.

²⁶ Cf. Francis, *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Christus Vivit* (2019), 64.

²⁷ Cf. Francis, *Christus Vivit*, 108.

Understanding of Suffering

At the beginning of discussions, many participants tend to classify daily challenges or difficulties as sufferings, such as: facing a burdensome task or difficult exam (particularly in math), something did not turn out to be what they wanted, being restricted from doing what they like, struggling with the demands to excel in academics, experiencing physical pain (specifically the monthly cycle, stated by female participants), dealing with rejection, grappling with insecurities, feeling overwhelmed or frustrated, experiencing loneliness, and sacrificing the lifestyle they desire. One participant answered, “The hardest thing was trying to understand why I had to be in a situation I did not like, while other people [my friends] were not.” The other said that every situation that made her feel under pressure and uncomfortable could lead her to think, “Why does it seem like I am the only one who suffers? Why am I *always* alone with no one to help me?”

Even though the discussions began with several forms of suffering that narrowed down only to daily challenges and difficulties, the flow of every discussion changed when some participants mentioned that suffering is a word that has a profound meaning. In the grade 11 discussion, one of the participants even said, “If you ask whether I have ever suffered or not, I will answer that I have not, because the hardships I faced were not so insufferable that they can be considered suffering.” After this statement, participants continued the discussion and offered more complex forms of suffering, such as: the experience of being bullied, losing a loved one, growing up without a father because her parents separated, moments when they need to take risks for the sake of others, being diagnosed with a serious illness, or suffering from mental health problems.

Responses and Reasons

Some participants argued that the depth of suffering is often influenced by how much they think of and respond to such situations. One of the participants showed how she usually measures the situation to react accordingly, not only focusing on the problem, but instead trying to find solutions. She said that if she did not overthink it, then suffering would not be unbearable. The majority of grade 12 participants explained that they normally respond to a problem by doing a thorough self-reflection and trying to gain lessons learned from anything they find painful or burdensome. Most participants believe that there will be something beneficial waiting for them after suffering, and that suffering is not the end of everything. This kind of belief convinces them to endure suffering. There were also answers like “Everything happens for a reason,” “The suffering I must experience would not exceed my capability to endure it,” and “I still have a lot of fight to keep me going,” which expressed the reasons why participants always try to find ways to endure or look for solutions when confronted with challenges. One participant said, “Experience of suffering will always teach us something. Even if it does not, suffering is not a waste because we are still able to reconcile with such situations and trust that God has stored better things for us.”

Nevertheless, there are some participants who thought that suffering only makes them suffer without any beneficial impact and preferred to avoid it. They attempted to escape their problems and responsibilities by doing things that they find enjoyable, for instance, sleeping and working on their hobbies. Such activities become vehicles for escapism, allowing them to momentarily transcend reality and immerse themselves only in enjoyment.

Views on the Suffering of Others

Participants had diverse views on the suffering of others. For them, the poor, homeless, those who are being treated unjustly, or those who have been victims of war are examples of people who suffer. Other categories include those who suffer from serious illnesses (such as cancer) or have permanent physical disabilities, people with mental disorders, and those who have experienced severe trauma. Participants claimed that, on a daily basis, they see or even encounter others who suffer. When participants witness the suffering of others, they often feel a deep sense of sensitivity and empathy. They try to put themselves in the shoes of those who suffer, allowing them to understand the situation better and offer appropriate assistance. At times, they even take the initiative to offer help. However, when faced with situations exceeding their capability to assist, participants choose to ease the person's burden only with what they have in themselves: presence, words of consolation, or ears to listen. They hope that even though their actions do not help to solve the problem, at least their presence can somehow help the person to endure whatever situation he/she is facing.

At Regina Pacis Bogor High School, there is a community service activity that is integrated with the subject of Catholic Religious Education. The objective of this activity is to provide students with an opportunity to reach out to the marginalized and try to understand their suffering, thereby increasing their sensitivity to the suffering of others. This project is an integral part of the "The Church in the World" course for 11th grade students, which also emphasizes the Catholic Social Teachings. Through this initiative, students participate in a variety of service projects at different organizations, such as local orphanages, schools for children with special needs, nursing homes, and foundations that support cancer patients. Working collaboratively in groups, students select the specific places where they want to volunteer. Each group makes visits to their

chosen sites, and there, they engage in meaningful activities, including providing emotional support and comfort to the residents, actively listening to their stories, raising funds and collecting donations to support the organizations, and distributing gifts. In addition to the hands-on service, there is a follow-up action that helps students reflect on their experiences.

Views on the Suffering of Christ

All participants agreed that the suffering of Christ is the manifestation of His unconditional love. “Christ suffered more than any of us ever have,” was the remark of one 12th grader participant, approved by other FGD participants. They emphasized that there were certain distinctions between Christ’s suffering and that of humans. His suffering was driven by love, aimed to bring our salvation, and was profoundly painful— “more than any of us ever have experienced.” In contrast, human suffering is often the consequence of their own actions and choices, typically motivated by self-interest rather than the intention of the betterment of others.

Moreover, the participants articulated that the suffering of Christ provides a deeper meaning to their own experiences of suffering. The cross serves as a source of strength and solace to those who suffer. It is a reminder of how Christ willingly endured immense suffering for the sake of humanity. Therefore, they concluded, “[Just like Jesus Christ], we must not give up when we suffer.”

Church’s Teachings on Suffering

Christians can find profound insights nowhere else but in the suffering of Christ. Through His suffering also, Christians can see Him as

the best model of resilience,²⁸ because there is no human suffering that Christ has not gone through.²⁹ What we are going to describe here does not encompass or summarize all the Church's teaching about Christ's suffering. However, we hope that there is nothing fundamental that we did not mention to the extent necessary in this study.

The main reference we use is Pope John Paul II's apostolic letter, *Salvifici Doloris* (1984). This letter is a response to the Holy Year of Redemption as the Great Jubilee in 1983. Pope John Paul II stated that redemption is closely linked to the theme of suffering for three reasons. The first reason is that man's redemption is fulfilled in the cross of Christ, through His suffering.³⁰ The second reason is that because every human being is not spared from suffering, the Church is expected to encounter and present Christ to people in suffering, especially during the Jubilee Year.³¹ The third reason is that human suffering can be a field where compassion and respect for others grow.³² Further Pope John Paul II's reflections on suffering are outlined in the following five sections, enriched with various contemporary theological ideas from other sources, including Pope Francis' message for the Celebration of the Jubilee Year 2025.

The Mystery of Suffering

Pope John Paul II said that suffering is fundamentally connected to the nature of humans as individuals and their existences in the world.³³ Furthermore, he explained that suffering is more than just physical illness

²⁸ Vanessa Rosa, "Suffering, Resilience and Spirituality: A Practical Theological Guide for the Clinical Psychologist," (dissertation, North-West University, Potchefstroom), 98, North-West University Institutional Repository.

²⁹ Rosa, "Suffering, Resilience and Spirituality," 117.

³⁰ Cf. John Paul II, *Apostolic Letter Salvifici Doloris* (1984), 3.

³¹ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 3.

³² Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 4.

³³ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 3.

or disease.³⁴ Every living creature experiences physical pain, but only humans—with their unique nature—experience suffering.³⁵ The Church identifies the root of suffering as the experience of evil, that is the absence of goodness in human life, either due to external factors or due to one's own choice.³⁶

Indeed, God never intended humans to suffer.³⁷ It is not God who condemns man to suffering; rather, it is man who condemns himself to suffering.³⁸ Suffering itself holds no redemptive power if it is solely perceived as a condition experienced by humans. There is no guarantee that a person who suffers is better than one who does not, as God prefers that we do not suffer.³⁹ In their suffering, people often question where God is. But also, through suffering, people realize how much they need God.⁴⁰ Thus, suffering does not have to pull us away from God; rather, it can draw us into Him. Mark Giszczak (2024) articulated it as follows:

*What we want is God to take away our suffering, but what He does is enter into it. What we want is to live without suffering, but what we need is to live through it. What we want is an explanation from God, what we need is a relationship with Him. What we want is a pill to take away our pain, but what we ultimately need is a story that gives meaning to our pain.*⁴¹

The Passion of Christ

Jesus Christ entered the world of human suffering and gives

³⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 5.

³⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 2.

³⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 7.

³⁷ Barbara Reid, *Taking Up the Cross: New Testament Interpretations Through Latina and Feminist Eyes* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003): 3.

³⁸ Hubert van Zeller, *Approach to Calvary* (New York City: Sheed and Ward, 1961): 11.

³⁹ Van Zeller, *Approach to Calvary*, 19.

⁴⁰ Steven Hemler, *Catholic Stories of Faith and Hope: How God Brings Good Out of Suffering* (Gastonia: TAN Books, 2021): 10.

⁴¹ Mark Giszczak, *Suffering: What Every Catholic Should Know* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, Greenwood Village: Augustine Institute, 2024): 12.

meaning to every suffering, thanks to His passion and saving cross.⁴² He is sensitive to every human suffering and suffers with those who suffer.⁴³ He aims to eliminate not only worldly suffering, as He did during His life among the Israelites—that is, to heal physical ailments, to comfort the oppressed, to feed the hungry, to free those possessed by evil spirits, and to raise the dead—⁴⁴ but also to remove the definitive suffering of man, that is, the suffering caused by the loss of the opportunity for eternal life with God.⁴⁵

Jesus Christ bore all the sins of man, and therefore, He bore every human suffering.⁴⁶ He was convinced that God's work of salvation could only be accomplished through suffering in His *persona* as a man, to save all mankind.⁴⁷ Therefore, He consciously welcomes the cross with love.⁴⁸ Through His suffering, Christ triumphed over sin, conquered death, and offered atonement so that humans might experience eternal life. His passion and resurrection give meaning to suffering, transforming it into salvation.⁴⁹

Christians find comfort and support in this notion, knowing that Jesus Christ fully understands our suffering because He Himself suffered.⁵⁰ It is in the incarnation of Jesus Christ that salvation is brought to humanity.⁵¹ Thus, the incarnation shows how much God cares for each of us⁵² and desires to save us from suffering.⁵³ The only thing Christ wanted to conquer was suffering. However, the only path to overcoming

⁴² Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 14.

⁴³ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 16.

⁴⁴ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 16.

⁴⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 14.

⁴⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 17.

⁴⁷ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 16.

⁴⁸ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 18.

⁴⁹ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 15.

⁵⁰ Hemler, *Catholic Stories*, 144.

⁵¹ Reid, *Taking Up the Cross*, 40.

⁵² Hemler, *Catholic Stories*, 145.

⁵³ Reid, *Taking Up the Cross*, 10.

suffering is by enduring it.⁵⁴ In that sense, the way of suffering is the fulfilment of His mission in the world, and thus, consequently saves humanity.⁵⁵

Christ did not want to suffer and die, but He came not to do only what He liked and avoid the will of the Father; instead, He came to do the will of God.⁵⁶ He took upon Himself all sufferings and lifted them up on the cross, not as curses but as blessings. Therefore, the crucified Christ must have been seen as the victorious Christ.⁵⁷ He, who participated fully in our suffering, wants us to participate fully in His resurrection. As Hubert van Zeller (1964) expressed in one of his writings:

*In Christ, who has suffered more than anyone else in the history of the world, we can share in repaying the debt. In Christ, who has loved more than anyone else in the history of the world, we can re-learn the lesson of charity and re-live the life of grace. [...] Greater love He could not have shown for us than by doing what He did. In laying down His life for us, Christ's purpose was not to spare us suffering but to raise our sufferings to the level of His own.*⁵⁸

Self-Offering Out of Love

In His humanity, Jesus Christ embraced all human realities, including the experiences of suffering and death. Jesus Christ consciously welcomed the cross with love: love for His Father's will, love for those who persecuted Him, and love for the people He saved through His suffering.⁵⁹ He became a friend who, out of love, entered the reality of the suffering of His friends and even laid down His life for them.⁶⁰ Jesus Christ, who was willing to suffer with and for those who suffer, is the one who conquered

⁵⁴ Albert Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity* (Maryknoll: Orbis Book, 1976): 138.

⁵⁵ Reid, *Taking Up the Cross*, 165.

⁵⁶ Christopher Mahar, *Finding God in Suffering* (Boston: Pauline Books, 2023): 58.

⁵⁷ Henri Nouwen, *Can You Drink the Cup?* (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1996): 27.

⁵⁸ Hubert van Zeller, *The Mystery of Suffering* (Springfield: Templegate Publisher, 1964): 67.

⁵⁹ Van Zeller, *Approach to Calvary*, 22.

⁶⁰ Reid, *Taking Up the Cross*, 48.

suffering.⁶¹ Therefore, His suffering is the only and necessary way to redemption.⁶²

The crucified Christ reveals to humanity that God is the compassionate God who is able to appreciate what it is like to be in suffering. He died so that we may live. He poured out His blood so that we may live a new life.⁶³ Only in the God who suffers can we find help, healing, liberation, and redemption from suffering. Therefore, because Christ already gave His life for us, it should not be difficult to bear whatever hardships arise for His sake.⁶⁴

Christians Embrace the Cross like Christ Embraces His

Christians who believe that the suffering of Christ brings redemption also find their sufferings as a path to salvation.⁶⁵ Through participation in Christ's suffering, Christians can gradually understand and discover the meaning of suffering.⁶⁶ With this new interpretation, suffering has become not a punishment but instead a privilege for believers to attain salvation.⁶⁷ This indicates that Christians are called to carry their own cross, but not in the sense of intentionally seeking out suffering. Instead, they face it with Christ by recognizing Him in His suffering, and try to imitate Him.⁶⁸

Becoming the disciple of Christ is expected to have a relationship rooted in Jesus Christ who suffered and was crucified.⁶⁹ As members of His Body, Christians must follow the Head and do God's will, even when that means to suffer. Indeed, Jesus Christ did not come to make our lives

⁶¹ Nolan, *Jesus Before Christianity*, 138.

⁶² Nouwen, *Can You Drink*, 28.

⁶³ Nouwen, *Can You Drink*, 38.

⁶⁴ Hemler, *Catholic Stories*, 121.

⁶⁵ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 20.

⁶⁶ Cf. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 26.

⁶⁷ Van Zeller, *Approach to Calvary*, 29.

⁶⁸ Reid, *Taking Up the Cross*, 55.

⁶⁹ Michael Gorman, *Apostle of The Crucified Lord* (Cambridge: Eerdmans Publishing, 2004): 120.

easier, but to make us holier.⁷⁰ However, this notion does not mean that Christians should seek suffering to become holy, but rather to face it together with Christ by seeing Him in His suffering.⁷¹ We are called to welcome the cross just as Christ welcomed His cross with love. As disciples of Christ, we are invited to carry the cross and suffer as fellow victims and co-sufferers with Christ.⁷² Together with Christ, we deny ourselves, accept the cross, carry the cross, fall under the cross, rise to continue the way of the cross, are nailed to the cross, and even encounter death every day, but with Him we also rise again and again.⁷³ Just as Jesus Christ shares in human suffering, we are called to share in His suffering that leads to redemption and eternal life.⁷⁴ Therefore, the life of Christians is a reflection of the cruciform life of Christ, a life based on: 1) faith, which presupposes denying the old self to rise with Christ; 2) hope, that through suffering, Christians will attain salvation; and 3) love, which is expressed in total self-offering to God's will and the service to others.⁷⁵

Jesus Christ gave us an example through His suffering to go beyond ourselves and give our lives for others.⁷⁶ In Christ's suffering, we see an example of patience and resilience.⁷⁷ Therefore, by carrying the cross with Christ, we become disciples who continue His mission and channels of blessings who lead others to experience salvation,⁷⁸ and eventually grow in character and become resilient.⁷⁹ Moreover, suffering helps us to be more compassionate and sympathetic toward others, increasing our awareness of the suffering of others. This experience can also provide an opportunity to develop empathy and help the disciples of Christ embody the good

⁷⁰ Hemler, *Catholic Stories*, 116.

⁷¹ Reid, *Taking Up the Cross*, 55.

⁷² Van Zeller, *Approach to Calvary*, 17.

⁷³ Van Zeller, *Approach to Calvary*, 21 & 62.

⁷⁴ Gorman, *Apostle of The Crucified*, 204.

⁷⁵ Gorman, *Apostle of The Crucified*, 120-124.

⁷⁶ Reid, *Taking Up the Cross*, 35.

⁷⁷ Matthew Drever, "Augustine of Hope in Times of Suffering," *Vox Patrium* 82 (June 2022): 157, <https://doi.org/10.31743/vp.13048>.

⁷⁸ Van Zeller, *Approach to Calvary*, 72.

⁷⁹ Hemler, *Catholic Stories*, 4.

Samaritan in their daily lives. Thus, in their suffering, Christians enliven the verse “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20), and can believe it as “It is no longer I who suffer, but Christ who suffers in me”.⁸⁰

Hope in Times of Suffering

In the Jubilee Year of 2025, which adopted the theme “The Pilgrim of Hope,” Pope Francis gave us messages closely related to the topic of human suffering. Pope Francis reminded us that no reality in life—even in the most desperate circumstances— can prevent us from standing in front of God’s door, knocking, and waiting for the door to be opened.⁸¹ It can even be said that in situations of suffering, God’s mercy and love are more evident in human life. In Christ, who was crucified and risen from the dead, our hope does not disappoint,⁸² because hope lifts us to raise our gaze to Christ, who has taken upon Himself the suffering of the earth and raised it to the heights of heaven.⁸³

Pope Francis also invites all Christians to reflect on their sufferings and remember how close God is to us in them, especially if we understand suffering as a means of encounter, a gift, and an opportunity to give ourselves to others.⁸⁴ First, suffering can be a transformative encounter that teaches us that we are never alone in our suffering, because it can be a path to salvation and an opportunity to experience God’s love.⁸⁵ Second, through suffering, we become aware that hope comes only from God and

⁸⁰ Van Zeller, *Approach to Calvary*, 104.

⁸¹ Francis, “Homily on Jubilee of the Sick and Health Care Workers,” accessed April 28th, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250406-omelia-giubileo-ammalati.html#:~:text=In%20his%20faithful%20love%2C%20the,those%20who%20care%20for%20them>.

⁸² Francis, “Urbi et Orbi Message 2025,” accessed June 29th, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/urbi/documents/20250420-urbi-et-orbi-pasqua.html>.

⁸³ Francis, “Homily on Holy Mass, Blessing and Imposition of Ashes,” accessed June 29th, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250305-omelia-ceneri.html>.

⁸⁴ Francis, “Message on the XXXIII World Day of the Sick,” accessed April 28th, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/sick/documents/20250114-giornata-malato.html>.

⁸⁵ Francis, “World Day of the Sick.”

hope also re-orient us back to God.⁸⁶ Third, we are invited to share hope and be neighbors to those who suffer.⁸⁷ Suffering can only be responded to with openness of heart—symbolized by the opening of the holy doors of the Jubilee—and not with neglect.⁸⁸ Through His cross, Christ taught us not to run away from suffering, because only by encountering and being willing to enter into suffering, we can be freed from all that imprisons us.⁸⁹

Pope Francis beautifully reminded us that “In God, our crosses are not the end of the story; they are doors to glory. In Christ, every cross leads to resurrection, every darkness to light, every loss to communion.”⁹⁰ In this context, Pope Benedict XVI once highlighted that faith in Christ always involves sacrifice and daily suffering. However, in Christ, we also find the hope of salvation.⁹¹ He noted that:

*Christians are not spared suffering; indeed, they must suffer a little more because to live the faith expresses the courage to face in greater depth the problems that life and history present. But only in this way, through the experience of suffering, can we know life in its profundity, in its beauty, in the great hope born from Christ crucified and risen again.*⁹²

Finally, hope acknowledges the profound depth of suffering and gives us the courage to be resilient in suffering.⁹³ Christians must live in hope amidst the suffering of the world as pilgrims of hope, witnesses of

⁸⁶ Francis, “World Day of the Sick.”

⁸⁷ Francis, “World Day of the Sick.”

⁸⁸ Francis, “Homily on the Opening of the Holy Door in the Prison of Rebibbia,” accessed April 28th, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2024/documents/20241226-apertura-portasanta-rebibbia.html>.

⁸⁹ Francis, “Meditations and Prayers for the Via Crucis 2025,” accessed April 28th, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2025/april/documents/20250418-via-crucis.html>.

⁹⁰ Francis, “The Way of The Cross 2024,” accessed May 13th, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/2024/documents/ns_lit_doc_20240329_via-crucis-meditazioni_en.html.

⁹¹ Benedict XVI, “General Audience 5 November 2008,” accessed May 11th, 2025, https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/audiences/2008/documents/hf_ben-xvi_aud_20081105.html.

⁹² Benedict XVI, “General Audience.”

⁹³ Drever, “Augustine on Hope,” 157.

the victory of love, and beloved disciples who walk together toward eternal homeland.

Discussion

The study at Regina Pacis Bogor Senior High School demonstrates a dynamic development in participants' understanding of suffering. There are four points that emerge and can be highlighted from the FGD processes: 1) the deepening understanding of suffering; 2) the transition from avoiding to realizing the meaning, then embracing suffering; 3) the shift from self-centeredness to empathy for others; and 4) the acknowledgement to enliven the example of the suffering of Christ.

Throughout the process, there was a significant moment when the participants transitioned from spontaneous thoughts about suffering to a more reflective dialogue. Initially, participants viewed daily challenges and difficulties as suffering. However, the discussion took a turn when two participants courageously argued that not all daily challenges should be classified as suffering. This prompted the others to recognize the importance of addressing the term thoughtfully rather than treating it lightly. This shift from a limited perspective to a deeper understanding indicates that the participants possess the potential and capacity for profound reflection when provided with guidance and opportunities.

At the beginning of the discussion, several participants admitted that they often have a tendency to avoid situations that make them uncomfortable. Nevertheless, through a thorough and enriching dialogue, the participants began to find meaning in their experiences of suffering. They began to perceive suffering not as a burden, but as an opportunity for learning and developing personal growth. This shift from avoiding suffering to finding meaning in suffering eventually leads to an attitude of embracing suffering. This was shown in one statement of the 11th grade participant, "I believe that suffering is not a waste because we are still able

to reconcile with such situations and trust that God has stored better things for us.”

Additionally, there was also a quite notable transition from self-centeredness to empathy and solidarity toward others. The discussion commenced with participants sharing their personal experiences of suffering, and some expressed frustration about why these situations seemed to happen to them only. At this stage, their focus remained largely on their individual struggles. However, when guided to reflect on the suffering of others, they came to realize that they were not the only ones who suffered. Participants also demonstrated sense of empathy and solidarity with others, as illustrated by their enthusiasm for sharing about their Catholic Religious Education project experiences. This growing sensitivity can be further nurtured alongside efforts to embody the school's values, specifically self-offering, so that it becomes an embodiment that Regina Pacis High School students manifest in their daily lives. The final statement from participants regarding this topic was, “Ultimately, our presence can be something to alleviate others' suffering; through our actions we can bring peace and be the channel of peace for them.” Another added, “I believe that Christ is present in every person who suffers, and that is why we should reach out and help them.”

Finally, the participants ultimately recognized that the suffering of Christ serves as a cornerstone and a model for them to follow in embracing their own suffering. While they understood that Christ's suffering was distinctive and thus different from that of humans, their expression of willingness to take after Christ's example was the statement:

The cross is our constant reminder that Christ had suffered for us. Even though He was in great pain, He still endured all because of His love for us. Therefore, we must not give up. When we have to experience suffering, we must be able to endure it just like how Christ endured it for us.

Through the focus group discussion process, significant transitions became evident in how the participants perceive and accept the concept of suffering. These four dimensions illustrate their development to gain a richer understanding in order to understand the suffering that aligns with the Church's teaching. With additional quality formation and opportunities to apply their insights in practice, participants can eventually enliven the message of Christ's suffering in their own lives and vocations, serving as a manifestation of hope for both the Church and the nation, and thus, become part of a resilient generation that is able to realize the *Visi Indonesia 2045*.

Conclusion

The Church's teachings explain the profound nature and meaning of suffering. According to the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* and several contemporary theological ideas from various sources, the Church views suffering in a broader context than merely daily challenges and difficulties. The Church reflects Christ's suffering as the cornerstone as well as an example to embrace the meaning of suffering, and thus, live according to the will of God and to the service of others. The problem with individuals who consider every problem or daily challenge as suffering is that they risk belittling the significance of suffering. This perspective can lead them to address suffering only as a painful experience without meaning. Hence, rather than trying to endure suffering, they tend to give up easily or even avoid such situations. There is an urgent need to help young Catholics understand and embrace the meaning of suffering that aligns with Christian faith, because the tendency to avoid suffering can become an indication of a less resilient generation that is prone to despair and hopelessness.

The findings from the study at Regina Pacis Bogor High School show that, in fact, young Catholics who participated in this study have the

potential to understand and embrace the meaning of suffering. The insights and answers they provided during the FGDs can serve as proof that they already possess a basic understanding of suffering as valued by the Church. However, there is a call to help them to renew their understanding of suffering and align it more closely with the meaning of suffering in the Christian faith.

This study has demonstrated that simple efforts, such as sharing or discussion (for example, in the FGD setting), can encourage the young Catholics to deepen their understanding of suffering. During the discussion process, participants demonstrated that the discussion flow can lead them to discuss more complex situations. They moved from basic and spontaneous answers to profound realizations. The FGDs also helped them reflect on their experiences related to the topic, and the time allocated for reflection inspired them to move beyond their self-centeredness to consider what happened to people around them. Such an opportunity reminds them to be more grateful and be motivated to endure suffering. At the end of FGDs, we asked participants for their feedback on the process. Most participants mentioned that FGD is a refreshing yet insightful way to discuss serious topics, such as suffering. They articulated that the opportunity challenged them to think out of the box, to connect with others interactively, and to learn from others' experiences. The question then is, if there are more Catholic schools and parishes that make efforts to provide quality opportunities to reflect and discuss together, how many young Catholics can be helped to embrace the meaning of their daily experiences (particularly suffering) and understand the Church's virtues deeply in this era full of distracting and superficial things?

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