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BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF "THE CROSS" IN THE LIGHT OF  
CONTEMPORARY CHRISTIAN SUFFERING: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF  
MATT.16 : 24.

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## ABSTRACT

Most Christians have held as axiomatic that suffering such as calamities, pains, and burdens are cross that they must carry in the course of their Christian pilgrimage. This assumption is widespread in Christian faith and practices of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Christianity. In what context is this contentious theme of cross and suffering placed in the entire Synoptic Gospel corpus and within the Matthean pericope? This thesis attempted the investigation of the theme in the Gospel of Matthew 16:24 by adopting the historical interpretation of the passage exegetically. The doctrines and teachings of the Christian faith fundamentally emanated from the Cross and flows back to it. Deductively, Christian experience of suffering should be measured, confronted and grabbed by this basic foundational element of the faith—the Cross of Christ. In terms of christianity, our mould of theological understanding will inform our response to the necessity of suffering vis-a-vis the demands of the Cross. The Cross is not just a place of suffering but of death. The writer concluded that to carry our cross means being dead to old ways of life. Though Christian suffering, may lend itself to death. Hence Christians should seek for the biblical meaning, purpose and mission for the suffering in our experience in the light of the Cross of Christ. Therefore, no experience of suffering may be completely bad if the right meaning is sought and applied. The Cross for the Christians becomes the recommended place to seek meaning.

## 5.2 CONCLUSION

The cross is an essential foundational and fundamental element of the Christian faith. Any Christian teaching that denies the cross denies faith. It has become a reference point and the mirror through which the Christian faith perceives God and his entire purpose for

man. The cross is not just a place of suffering. The cross is an instrument of death. There can be a paradigm shift in the theological understanding of suffering in the light of the cross only when the exegetical interpretation and theological implications of the cross are placed right in our Christian perspective. Suffering may lend itself or lead to death. The basic prerequisite for death is suffering. Self-denial as Jesus taught it does not involve denying oneself things as much as it does denying one's own authority over his or her life (cf. 4:19; John 12:23-26).

Hence, to take up our cross, is to live as dead to our old way of living. Christian theologians, philosophers and psychologists don't understand all about suffering, even when the path we tread are dark and scary and even painful and unpleasant; to trust in and follow the Shepherd will necessitate the bearing of the cross and we can hope for eschatological blessings.

### 5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS.

From the exegetical study and interpretation of Matt.16:24 and its implications for contemporary Christians, the writer proposed the following recommendations to enlighten their perspectives and theology. First, Christians should understand that the problem of suffering, evil, and pain are part of the make-up of human existence, and wired into our experiences for the ultimate good. Therefore, no experience of suffering may be completely bad if the right meaning is sought and applied. Second, the meaning of suffering generally determines the value humans place on their pain or suffering

experience whether positive or negative. The Cross for the Christians becomes the recommended place to seek meaning. Our response to suffering should be in the light of Christ response, purpose and mission. Therefore, Christians should deliberately adopt Christ's response, purpose and mission. Third, Christians are charge to deny their own authority over their lives; this denial is not the refutation of good things of life. We should enjoy the good things life offers, equally deny self, and continually follow Christ in the way.