

# The meaning of suffering in the secularized world

Quaerebam unde malum et non erat exitus  
(S. Augustine, *Confessions*, VII, 5)

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Suffering is something more than pain in the usual meaning of the word. Pain, as well, sounds a note of warning, announces the "presence" of some malady in man, which threatens his life. But its meaning cannot be reduced to the function of revealing the illness. Having made a diagnosis, we alleviate pain, trying even to eliminate it, if we are able to destroy its causes. But even if we succeed in doing so, the feeling of being in danger, awakened by the experience of pain, will remain in our consciousness as a part of the real condition of our being; it will speak about its truth.

It is in pain that the reality of illness and death, indicated by illness itself, are forced out into the open.

They provoke in man a particular kind of pain which resides in the core of his being and cannot be eliminated while he lives, unless he decides to commit suicide. For man himself is this pain. The memory awakens in him and speaks not only of yesterday's pains or the lost moments of happiness, but even worse, it forecasts further afflictions and ultimately death. It is this pain that I call suffering.

Suffering is a tribulation of man's soul; it is in the suffering man that the memory awakens which does not allow him to reduce his life to the political administration of mundane actions. Suffering calls into question the human calculating reason incapable of calculating either suffering or death; in fact, neither suffering nor death are an object of its operations. Suffering and death call man to quite a different task, the hard task of

confronting himself and of searching for the salvation of his being, threatened with death. When there is no pain man's life is in mortal danger; without suffering man's being is endangered.

To perceive the meaning of suffering it is necessary first to know how to "read" the pain itself. It is not a question of merely locating and eliminating the pain by means of intelligence, but rather the wisdom which consists in "reading" with all one's being its second meaning that of death. It is in accepting this meaning that one retrieves oneself. The man who reads the pain and illness, a text written on every human being, puts a question on the meaning and sense of life itself, that is, a question on the truth of human person. Only he who has the courage to face such a question with all his being so that he becomes this question<sup>1</sup>, day in and day out, truly is able to suffer, and only the person who is able to suffer can approach the truth revealed in the pain and illness.

Every pain is the pain of the whole man. The pain which reveals the illness of an ear or of a finger penetrates the entire person and it is the person, not the ear or the finger, who lives this pain. The ear's pain tortures the person, not the ear. He is anxious for the ear because of himself. It means that this pain of the body introduces him to a dialogue with his body. In this dialogue he is asking about the whole of his being.

In order to receive an adequate response every question must be made by a proper person and directed to one who can make the response. The question about the meaning of the body's pain is directed to the physician and together, physician and patient try to discover the cause of illness and, if it is possible, to heal it. The question about the meaning of suffering, however, can be made only by the suffering man.

It is he alone, isolated by the necessity of death, his death, who asks "why?". No other man has the answer to the question. He is in the face of death. To whom, then, is this question directed, a question which man cannot answer because everything in him is question?

To live such a question does not yet mean to know how to suffer. Only he knows how to suffer, who cares for his being itself, that is to say, who becomes more and more mindful of the truth of his being. This preoccupation makes man think and exist in a more profound way. Having become the great question, he looks for what does not depend on him yet on what relies his salvation. Every other way of thinking is only an intellectual game.

When one was healthy and plunged in moments of the happiness of possession, the doors of this dialogue with self were firmly closed. One was outside oneself, lost in entertainments in the Pascalian sense, where there is no place for questions about the essential and consequently for serious thought. These same entertainments suffocated the memory of the truth of being. He who is healthy imagines this truth (Kierkegaard<sup>2</sup>), i.e. idealizing the transitory moments of possession, in which he closes himself. He

<sup>1</sup> See S. Augustine, *Confessions*, IV, 4 (*Factus sum mihi ipse magna quaestio*)

<sup>2</sup> See Søren Kierkegaard, *Esercizio del Cristianesimo*, Studium, Roma 1971, translated by C. Fabro.

seeks the fulfillment of himself in his own sublimated weakness. His thinking, reduced to questions that are already answering themselves, sometimes could be useful, but it never did touch the *unum necessarium*.

The “legions” of such “idealized” lies shatter a man’s thinking, so that he no longer knows how to ask about truth, because the truth is the one and only. This shattered thought does not ask about the truth but about the functioning of things.

Only the suffering (not the pain), this “dire need” of the parable of the Lost Son, awakens in man the memory of truth. It is the memory of the Other. It is to this Other that man’s being, that the Lost Son discovers his being is orientated. *Fecisti nos ad Te, Domine, et inquietum est cor nostrum...*, St. Augustine says at the beginning of his “Confessions”. Let us not anticipate, however, the course of our reflection.

The loss of what he had, but not of what he is, does not yet cause such pain as to allow man to become fully conscious of his misery and, we will see, paradoxically, of his greatness. Having lost something, or even somebody whom he only possessed, man is not yet ready to ask or care in an ultimate way about the truth of his being. What was possessed can be replaced. The “simple worker”, *homo faber*, present in everyone, is capable of repairing a broken machine or of replacing it with a new one, and even of substituting one man for another; for him the important is not with whom he is producing the objects.

Ironically, *homo faber* does not even see himself as irreplaceable in the application of such a practical “common sense” approach to human reality.

In Job, we find a man who calmly endured the pain caused by the loss of his possessions. Recognizing that God had the right to give as well as to take away what He had given, Job knelt down and blessed Him (see Job 1, 20-22). He did not confuse his being with what he possessed. Yet he did not ask with all his being about himself. His mode of thinking was shaken only when, through the pain of his body, he was confronted directly with death.

One’s consciousness is usually stricken first by the death of somebody close. The departure of the person with whom one has constituted a personal organism of love calls life and being itself into question. “And so one day, while his (Job’s) sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in the house of the eldest brother a messenger came to Job” (Job 1, 13) with the news which since then is called Job’s news. His children were dead. *Factus sum mihi ipse magna quaestio*; it is with these words that S. Augustine called what he experienced following the death of the friend of his youth. “The pain darkened his heart. All they had in common, now, without him, changed into an awful torment”<sup>3</sup>. Plato, after a night talk of his friends with Socrates who was awaiting execution, saw the world in such a changed perspective that he thereafter identified philosophy with meditation about and preparation for death<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> S. Augustine, *Confessions*, IV, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Plato, *Phedo*, 64 a. One could agree to Spinoza’s affirmation, that “homo liber de nulla re minus quam de morte cogitat, et eius sapientia non mortis, sed vitae meditatio est” (cfr. *Etica*, affirmation 67).

The consciousness which already knows that "the last act is bloody, even if the entire play were most beautiful, a clod of earth on the head and here is the end for ever"<sup>5</sup>, is so wounded, that no man can heal it. "Do not cry, it will not help" a friend said to Solon after the death of his son, to which he replied: "It is exactly because it will not help that I cry". Precisely because it is so wounded, man's consciousness becomes his self-consciousness; it is now that he, reminding himself of the truth of his being and seeing himself and the world in due proportion, begins to dialogue with the Other who is God.

Job did not see the loss of possessions as an insuperable injustice for man. In death, however, which threatened him with the loss of his very self, he saw so great a wrong done to his being, that, together with this wrong, he lived his own greatness. Job realized that although he was mortal, he was at the same time spirit; that although he lived in the world of things, he ought not to be treated like one of them. Wondering at his being, the source and goal of which remain a mystery, Job became aware of being a sovereign subject in the world, i.e. that he was orientated not towards the world, which he was leaving, but towards God; it is only He who can make the gift of being and it is only in Him that the truth of this being can have its foundation and fulfillment<sup>6</sup>.

To be sovereign and free and at the same time to be subject to death is both absurd and unjust. No wonder that in the face of his own death Job, a sovereign subject, feels forsaken and deceived by God. Even Jesus dying "cried out in a loud voice: My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mk 15,34).

Death, places Job on the brink of nothingness where his being, menaced with this nothingness, suddenly appears as unique and unrepeatable and his freedom as a cruel joke.

To give a man the entire world, to give him all that he himself is, only to snatch it all away from him, is this not an unjust mockery of man? In this dramatic situation, Job becomes a question which he throws to God as a challenge. Job was right to demand of God: "Who are You? Are you capable of doing such wrong to man? Did I praise You in vain?". Job's concern is apparently for himself. But it is transformed into a question about God Himself which can be addressed to Him alone. The answer can be only a god's gift.

Scraping his wounds with potsherd, wounds that announce his death, and having become a question to which the absolute Other alone can be an answer, Job enters into a dialogue with God. The experience of death's approach changes the way he views

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under one condition, i.e. that this meditation about life is made in the light of death. No doubt that who thinks about death separated from life is led nowhere. In fact, to think in this way about death means to think about nothing; it stops us in the grave which is empty.

<sup>5</sup> Pascal, *Thoughts*, 227.

<sup>6</sup> Both Plato and Aristotle said that cognitive thinking arises in the man when he wonders at what is.

himself and the world; it leads him out of “a distant country” of possession, where he lost himself in a multitude of “ideals”, and introduces him to himself (see Lk 15, 13 and 17). For man, to perceive his own death means to be introduced to a religious experience in which his self-consciousness, regarding the “handy” things, is sobered and yet, at the same time, is enthused with that infinitely distant Reality to which he discovers he is intimately bound.

Job knows that his life will not return. Yet he knows too, from the experience of imminent death, that all he had considered to be in his possession did not in truth belong to him. Now, he cannot say even of his own being “my” being, for it was the Other who had given it to him for a period of time.

In this knowledge, will his being not find salvation in the Other who is God? Is not man’s being a fruit of God’s Love? Is it not true that, according to the logic of love, the gift returns as a gift but in new form to who has it done? If so, then man’s death can be a so great gift of him that he may return to himself in God?

The greatness of the question the Job’s being has now become reflects not only the greatness of his suffering but also the greatness of his hope, or rather the greatness of his person.

The greatness of man’s thought is revealed in the greatness of the hope this thought arouses. Therefore man’s true misery and tragedy result from the rejection of his own mortality or from not having recognized it.

*Magna quaestio* identifies itself not with a particular kind of reasoning but with man’s being the desire for another life. The truth and the meaning of this desire is revealed only to the man who knows how to suffer; to the man whose self-consciousness does not seek “help” within himself but in the Other. To think means precisely to look for “help” in the Other, having recognized oneself as a question. Such thinking, then, in the most profound sense of the word, is identified with this desire for the other life and is achieved in hope which is expressed in prayer. He who asks, prays. The praying question man has become gives meaning to his transient existence. The man who is a question both works and waits for the gift of harvest.

Man can think only in the dialogue with God, because this other life that man desires depends on God. It is for this reason that his thinking-desiring transforms itself into a challenge-question thrown by man to God. He who has become such a question-challenge remains vigilant.

Job’s friends cannot understand this suffering man. They have not become a *magna quaestio* to be answered by God alone. Therefore, they are only able to reason and argue, but not to think. Their reasoning and arguing finds no resonance in Job who has begun to think.

It is his being that needs “help”. Those who have not lived the contingency of their being and who therefore feel well, i.e. self-sufficient, have nothing to offer him. Their “practical, reasonable” questions and answers are vain, for they are telling him how to behave, whereas his is a question of how to be. Living on a different level, they are incapable of telling Job where to go in the hope that salvation will occur.

They are not vigilant because they have no "need" to wait for anyone, not even for God<sup>7</sup>. They are self-sufficient. It is precisely for this reason that they do not think. The life abandoned their reasoning; prayer is the life of thinking.

Hegel writes that man fights as he can with a nature which treats him as an object. For some time he achieves a limited success. In the end, nature defeats him. Death makes man an absolute object. Death, nature's victory, is the worst thing that can happen to man<sup>8</sup>. It deprives him of the possibility of fighting for freedom, i.e., for his subjectivity. Man lives his death as a radical injustice, which violates his being as a person.

Job does not give his consent to the injustice of death. Death clashes against his freedom. Yet through death he gains an insight into the truth of his being the great *quaestio*, *magna quaestio*; Job discovers in it the epiphany of this Otherness which is God. God's Presence for and in Job's freedom does not depend on his dialectical *cogito*. Only this Presence could liberate Job from sterile reasoning regarding death and from death itself.

The union with God's Otherness determines our being the subjects, that is, our existing in this world without belonging to it (cfr. Jn 15, 19; 17, 16). God's Otherness causes that He is always to be found. To think and to exist in freedom means to leave not only the factuality of the world but even that of our being and to search for God. To think means to follow the traces of the Transcendence which are within us, as a result of what I would like call the mystery of our withdrawal from God *in illo tempore*. The power of man's freedom is in his hope, because it is hope that opens for him a Future quite different from time. When hope diminishes, anguish, caused by the threat of annihilation, causes man to seek to forget his contingency and lose himself in the utopian surrogates of the Otherness of God. In fact, man is unable to resign himself to annihilation.

Pascal would have called these surrogates the entertainments, which stupify man for a while. But suffering can not be healed by such technical means. No entertainment or pill will ever answer his being's *magna quaestio*, for no entertainment, no pill can substitute God's Otherness.

If man entrusts himself to entertainments and pills, he submits to their logic which leads him to death as the last pleasant entertainment, euphemistically called euthanasia. Reason not rooted in the *magna quaestio* encloses man in the grave.

<sup>7</sup> So alone in the Garden of Olives Jesus Christ knelt before God. While He was throwing Himself on God, like a challenge to fight, His disciples slept. In this agony with His Father, Jesus did not reason and argue; He thought in the most profound sense of the word. When Pascal says that Jesus will die till the end of the world, and that we cannot sleep during this time, he is saying that we too ought to think, that is, to be the *magna quaestio* and to receive the gift of truth till the end of the world, like Jesus received it in the Garden. It is noteworthy here, that "Adam" found a suitable partner ("help") in "Eve" only when, recognizing in her those thoughts and desires orientated towards the Other, who is God, he ceased to treat her in the way he treated things and "animals".

<sup>8</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Fenomenologia Ducha* (*Phenomenology of Spirit*), Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1963-65, vol. II, p.30

Truth of life comes to man through his death. Through death as through a rift in a world enclosing him, an unusual light enters into his life. This light dissipates the pleasant but dangerous darkness in which idolatry flourishes in relation to ourselves, our bodies and to our products.

Idolatry prevents us from reflecting on ourselves, i.e. to think in a serious way. This light reveals one hypocrisy - we are not what we thought ourselves to be. It is death which strikes our self-consciousness and awakens it. In this light we become aware of our distinction from things; things do not desire to be the other. In the light of this revelation man's awakened self-consciousness is no longer satisfied with any hypothetical interpretations (*doxa*) of his life made by reason separated from the *magna quaestio*. While he cannot say what is the truth which is coming to him in this way, existing in its light, he is able to perceive more clearly, what is evil and false. The light which enters into life through death as through some mysterious stained glass window transforms our stance before the truth so that, rejecting it, we reject ourselves. It is in that truth that our freedom arises. In that truth it is the man who arises.

The tree of a great philosophy grows out of a question put on a man's grave, a question on the meaning of life, a question on the Otherness. A great philosophy, or better, this great question exceeds the limits of reason. A great philosophy thinks not so much of the world, in the sense of what man can find round himself, of what can be the object of his intentional consciousness, but rather of what escapes the confines of such a consciousness. A great philosophy thinks above all about what does not belong to the world but nevertheless is present in it. Then, in the question on the Otherness the fundamental care for man's Future expresses itself. In attempting to avoid the grave, philosophy is inevitably reduced to an intellectual entertainment. Its weakness does not constitute any fulcrum, which would allow man's thought to stand in unconditional opposition to falsehood and his will to evil. The thoughtless reason which does not see that what is renders man powerless. It steals from him the possibility of evaluating and even of judging the world and enslaves him to the predominant opinions of the day. In effect, thoughtless reasoning not only consents to but even participates in a radical injustice towards man.

Philosophy, which is not born in suffering and is thus blind to the world in its orientation towards Transcendence, negates the freedom and responsibility of man. Such a philosophy can never be a friendship of wisdom (*filo-sofia*).

A friend of wisdom responds with all his being to the Promise the Presence of which it feels in his heart. It is in this dialogue between man's hope and God's Promise that philosophy flourishes. To philosophize is to allow the hope and the Promise to put in order one's desires and thoughts, that is, one's existence.

If there is not the Other, God, to whom man is "attuned" (Heidegger), the friendship of wisdom is an illusion; Job is a huge mistake, and the self-righteousness of his friends is vindicated.

If man lived endlessly in time, his life, as it is now, would be a banal and boring series of actions tending nowhere. For lack of that Otherness which alone gives meaning, he would live like the immortal struldburggs whose wretched life appalled Gulliver so very much<sup>9</sup>. The struldburggs are rendered incurable by a consciousness that anticipates that nothing new will happen in their life. Without a fulcrum outside life itself, they are unable rationally even to ask about what is the meaning of their lives, because all that they would consider would give meaning to life would not itself have the meaning. Meaning cannot be homogeneous with what it is the meaning of.

Bored by everlasting free time that one cannot organize with the help of one day's aims, they would even like to commit suicide, but they would not even be able to do this. The lack of truth quenched the spirit in the struldburggs. Fire does not blaze in a vacuum.

In being the "great question" concerning the truth and meaning of life, the realm of man's spiritual existence comes into prominence. Undoubtedly, it is grace that introduces him into this realm, but not without the preparation occasioned by suffering in the face of death. The struldburggs are oblivious to the realm of grace, because they do not suffer. They occupy themselves within the confines of daily concerns and boast of the discovery in themselves of the source of truth and meaning for their lives and being. But non one of such preoccupations can embrace the whole of life. It is death alone that, giving the man a perspective on the truth of his being, allows him to embrace the whole of his life and to comprehend it from the beginning to the confines traced by his heart in the proximity to God's Otherness. In this perspective man's affiliation to Him, as well as the necessity of putting himself in His hands, becomes evident. It is here that man's love reveals and realizes itself, so that he becomes free even from his own life. It is in this that his sovereignty consists.

Avoiding the pain and suffering, man does not enter into dialogue with his own body, with himself and, consequently, with the others, including the Other, God Himself. Man falls into monologizing, garrulous thoughtlessness and laziness. The thoughtless man listens too little and talks too much, trapped within a web of ideas and concepts. Truth reveals itself to the man who knows how to be silent, for truth is expressed more in the word of silence, full of man's listening to truth with rapt attention, than in endless words in which echo only his own conceptions<sup>10</sup>. One works in hope for truth and at the same time one waits for it in silence.

The struldburgg, the modern *homo faber*, is he who separates his life from death. However, as he endeavours to empty his mind of death, so he empties his mind of life.

<sup>9</sup> See Stanislaw Grygiel, "Morire oggi", in: *Assistenza al Morente Aspetti socio-culturali, medico-assistenziali e pastorali*, Atti del Congresso Internazionale, Roma 15-18 marzo 1992, Milano, Vita e Pensiero, 1994, 21-31.

<sup>10</sup> Plato did not directly say a single word about the first evidences (principles) which the eyes of his soul caught a glimpse of the night before Socrates' death. In the famous *Letter VII* he asks for silence regarding them.

Hence the dia-bolical character of his ideas, concepts and acts (from the Greek word *dia-ballein*, “to separate”)<sup>11</sup>; they are not ordered by the presence of the Other, because they do not indicate Him. In opposition to the whole truth that speaks of man as somebody who finds his identify in the Other, semitruths bring chaos. It is only from the entire truths, it is, the truths which comprehend the sense of what they are speaking of, and which I call sym-bolical truths (the Greek word *sym-ballein* means “to unite”), that there is order and peace.

Reason separated from the entire truth of beings destroys the “symbolical” nature of man. Diabolical reason, unable to receive the gift of truth, imitates the creative Thought of God, while the diabolical will, unable to receive the good, which calls man in an unconditional way, degenerates into chance reactions to chance stimuli. It becomes erratic. In the end, such a reason and will identify themselves with the *cogito* in which, for lack of the question put only to God, morals dissolve into ontology. The man of such reason and of such will constructs whatever he thinks of and thinks whatever he pleases. Diabolical ideas and diabolical successes present themselves as if each were the ultimate truth and ultimate good. In consequence, it is not freedom that will determine man’s free choices but so called free choices will determine his freedom. The struldburgg’s principle *cogito ergo non patior*, and *patior ergo non cogito*, has negated man’s freedom, for it has wiped death from his memory.

The thoughtless looking at death and suffering ends with the thoughtless looking at life itself. In the end, pleasure imposes itself on a miscarried reason and will, on thoughtlessness and laziness, as the last goal and criterion of choices made far from the Other whose offsprings we are (see Acts 17,18). The totalitarianism of pleasure imposes its order on all one-day answers given to one-day questions, separated from man’s being as the *magna quaestio*.

Pleasure unites man with his body, but in a completely different manner from that of pain and suffering. Pleasure happens in the body, but focuses man’s attention not on his body but on itself. Therefore pleasure cannot be the epiphany of the truth of the human being. On the other hand, pain and suffering reveal a danger and point man to others who can help and finally to the Other who alone can save him.

Pleasure, instead, only permits man to think about his body for pleasure’s sake and to make it an instrument. It is pain and suffering that open man for *communio personarum*, whereas pleasure destroys it.

In giving himself to pleasure, man does not enter into a dialogue with his body and does not ask about its meaning; one does not dialogue with instruments, only use them. I am not interested in what is the hammer I make use of. It is important for me only whether it functions efficaciously when I try to strike with it. In spite of appearances,

<sup>11</sup> See also “Miłość podpisała byt (Esej o symbolu i micie)” (The Love has signed the being. Essay about symbol and myth), in: Stanisław Grygiel, *W kregu wiary i kultury (Problems of faith and culture)*, Warszawa 1990, Michalineum, 257-278.

when a man loves only pleasures, he neglects his body. He acknowledges it as long as it functions efficiently for pleasure. This lack of care for the body is crowned by the "pleasant death", called euthanasia. It is the body's last efficacious function.

The defeat of modern man, who escapes the grave and at the same time remains entombed in it, begins with the triumphs of Goethe's Faust.

Faust fears time because for him it is only a time of corruption, and he is afraid of pain, suffering and death because he does not know how to confront them in such a time. Not comprehending the message of the Resurrection's bells because of a lack of faith, he is doomed to be a miscarried *magna quaestio*. He does not have Job's courage to exist as a question-challenge thrown to God Himself.

Faust, the beaten Job, tries to hold on and possess the swift beautiful moments of time that pass away, beautiful not by virtue of truth but of pleasure. These efforts end in escapism from time into the dream of eternal youth. Faust, however, is unable to master such beautiful moments. He too seeks help in an Other, but he speaks to one who is quite different from that Other with whom Job dialogues. Faust enters into a fatal dialogue with the Force which "continually negates"; he entrusts himself to Mephistopheles, swearing friendship with him. His anthropology becomes anesthesiology which impedes dialogue with his own body, and consequently with himself. Not knowing how to suffer, he treats himself and others as replaceable instruments. And so he substitutes the technique of uniting elements in vitro, invented by Wagner, the scientist, by the gift of truth and the technique of seducing by the gift of love. Goethe called the product of such thoughtlessness and laziness of Faust, so efficient from a technical view point, *homunculus*.

He who abandons himself to such moments, meticulously records each one in order not to lose any. His insatiable appetite cannot be quenched; he always runs short. Only in the face of death does it become evident that he is running short of reality because he is running short of himself.

I would like to recall here the superb words of Tacit: *id quod corruptit et corruptitur saeculum dicitur*. Time, which becomes mere *saeculum* when the Other is not present in it, takes everything from man, together with himself. *Saeculum* is a time of "diabolical" semi-truths, time which does not indicate anything beyond itself. Secularized man, that is the man who lives in the time of semi-truths, does not behold the Future before himself. He is held in a leash by the conviction that he who does not know how to avoid pain and suffering in the time of corruption is a worthless man; he is nobody because he "did not succeed" (*patior ergo non cogito*). The secularized society, which I would call *turba homunculorum*, is governed by the colorful image of the ever young man, fancifully existing beyond time in advertisements, where he indulges in pleasures.

The "mystics of success and pleasure", however, on which the Faustian prometheism of the secularized society lives, is a "mystics of defeat", which renders society helpless. This "mystics of defeat" sometime takes shape of the empty and therefore purely horizontal philanthropy of Faust.

The society closed *in saeculo* loses the Memory of the Past and the Memory of the Future. Living for the moment and governed by the temporary need possession, such a society falls from the Tradition of man's being the *magna quaestio*, Tradition of hope, of love and of faith, that is, the Tradition of freedom. Such a society, not knowing either its origin or its destiny, cannot create culture, because it does not know how to cultivate the soil, into which the seeds of values are sown and advance in grace to future fulfillment. In Latin, to cultivate means *coleo*; from this verb the word *cultura* is derived which as the future participle indicates the future which man ought to work for, cultivating the soil of his own being. This being, culture is created not by *homo faber* but by *homo patiens*; it requires the patience and the courage of Job.

Secularized society creates an infantile civilization based on the lust for things and for man as one of them<sup>12</sup>. Having made of lust some kind of "pre-understanding" of all things, secularized society wants to have it all now. It imposes its own construction even on God's Word, when in need of Him, rather than bearing witness to Him.

One of the signs of the infantilization of society is the disappearance in men of the capability to govern and to be governed and, at the same time, the increase of the ability to administer and to be administered. One can administer things, never men. What today is called politics has little or nothing to do with the art of governing; it is rather a kind of administering constituted on the one hand by the monologue of masters and on the other by that of slaves. Neither of them knows that every human act fulfills itself in grace. Suffering and death require the grace of a miracle. If secularized society is not free, it is because it does not know the Gift.

Job is free because with all his being he asked God about something more than life itself. Job asked Him about the miracle which was demanded by sovereign man. In the face of death, he saw that the meaning of a human being is either in this Truth, which is a miracle, or it is cruel illusion. Job disposed himself as a subject; asking God about this miracle, in fact he asked Him about the Truth of His Divine Being. In this, he scandalized the slaves, that is, the men who are unable to exist in dialogue with God. Job did not scandalize God. And God's freedom descended to his freedom, a freedom that God challenged. In answering Job's being the *magna quaestio*, God showed to Job the Wisdom of His own creative Love.

God does not descend to Job's friends, who not yet knowing the suffering and death and therefore do not know God. Instead of challenging Him, they try to reason in His defence, as if he was dependent on this. They defend Him while accusing poor Job of being a sinful man. Their tragedy consists in defending only their own ideas about God and Job, without seeking for the truth of both. Thus they offend both God, who is the Love, and put Job, who is a just man, in righteous indignation. Their thought treats both God and Job as if they were objects belonging to their world; such thought is atheistic.

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<sup>12</sup> It seems to me that John Paul II thought of liberating society from such infantilism when he said that the sick contribute to the deepening of the spiritual life in the Church.

God does not descend to Job's friends because they do not yet constitute a community and are not *com-patientes* with Job. There is *com-passio personarum* only where there is *communio personarum*. It is in *com-passio* that the truth of *communio* reveals itself.

One of the signs that we live in a secularized society is the fact that there is no mention to the duties and rights of human persons to exist in the dialogue of *com-passio*, whereas there is much ado about individual claims, separated from one another by monologizing thoughtlessness. In a secularized time one fights no more against death; death's victory has been tacitly accepted. In consequence, the Other and the others have disappeared.

All rights and duties of man emanate from the dialogue between the freedom of man and the freedom of God, between hope and Promise, between faith and Salvation. These rights and duties are rights and duties of love. Their truth reveals itself in the suffering man. It is the oppressed man who constitutes the epiphany of truth and justice. It is the tortured man, and not the torturer, who perceives the nature of man, his rights and obligations. Job, *homo patiens*, is the first champion of human rights, in the deepest sense of the word. He fights for them with God and he does it efficaciously, because God Himself fights for them with Job, at a first glance as if they were against his human being.

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It is not my intention to engage here in some kind of cult of suffering and death. Here, it is the question of some mysterious connection between suffering and man's "second happiness", his *beatitudo*. Job shares this happiness with God, when God Himself, in response to Job, becomes a *magna quaestio* addressed to the suffering man (see Job 42, 10-17, 38-41). It is about this mysterious connection and this mysterious dialogue that Jesus spoke on the Mountain (see Mt 5, 3-12).

*Homo patiens* by his very nature, is *homo com-patiens*. No wonder then that every Job feels guilty for the misery of all in the exact measure in which he realizes to be incapable of suffering in the self-sacrificing way.

His suffering shows which way man ought to go towards salvation. It is his prayer that provoked God to save also his friends who did not know how to entrust themselves to God. The prayer of Margaret tears Faust from Mephistopheles's grasp, Faust who harmed her radically in her being the love for him. Through the suffering and prayer of Sonia in Dostoyewskij's "Crime and Punishment" the light shines on the darkness of Raskolnikov's soul. Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar and Elihu live the God's Otherness in Job, Faust in Margaret, Raskolnikov in Sonia...

Society comes to life in suffering and in prayer. If some Abraham were to fight with God for today's secularized society, he would have to seek such just people as Margaret, Sonia... The salvation of society from totalitarianisms, especially from that of pleasure, will come through the just ones who know how to suffer; only they who

know how to suffer, know grace and so too the Future, without which society is weakened and doomed to self-annihilation.

God's freedom, which is challenged throughout the freedom of the suffering man, answers him in that Person in and for whom He created all that is.

"Where were you when I founded the earth?", God asked Job (Job 38, 4). Job finds in himself no answer to such a question. Therefore, he becomes a new *magna quaestio* and so the dialogue between man and God goes on. The act of creation into which God introduces Job displays itself more and more. In the "Word" that was "in the beginning" and in which "all things came to be" (Jn 1, 1-3), the salutary act of new creation is being accomplished. Through the Person of Jesus Christ, God enters into the dialogue *com-passionis* with the human person. God looks at man, at his pains, suffering and death through the Passion of His Son on the cross. It is not easy to understand the necessity of the cross of Jesus Christ, but without this understanding, never will we understand the truth of man, for we will not see him through the eyes of the Other, that is God.

When Jesus told his disciples that he had to suffer and be killed, Peter, driven by the best of his intentions, rebuked him: "God forbid, Lord. No such thing shall ever happen to you". Jesus replied: "Get behind me, Satan. You are an obstacle to me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do" (Mt 16, 22-23). Whoever does not think of the Divine, will never understand what is human, because man, "not comprehensible on earth" is "more understandable in heaven", writes C.K. Norwid<sup>13</sup>. "Jesus will die until the end of the world: we should not sleep during this time"<sup>14</sup>. If man will understand himself, he ought to be with Him. History is either the story of man's entering into the God's glory (cfr. Lk 24,26) or only a fortuitous set of yarns told by idiots. Therefore Philosophy if it is to be really the friendship of wisdom, *filosofia*, it ought to be above all the friendship of God's glory, of His Love, *filo-agapia*.

In the Cistercian monastery in Hauterive in Switzerland, in the fifteenth century stalls, there is a bas-relief representing the Holy Trinity in the shape of the Pietà: the Father holds up His dead Son. From between Their heads the Dove of the Holy Spirit arises; this Dove, looking somewhere else, is ready to fly far away...

Man is "attuned" to God, but God is even more "attuned" to man. Man's freedom, awaked by his contingency, and God's freedom, touched by human condition, come together in God-Man.

Through God's Word, clothed in human contingency and subject to suffering and death, man enters in the Mystery of Trinitarian Dialogue. Participation in this eternal Conversation in Love between Father and Son saves man's sovereignty. Only here, in the Trinity, death reveals itself not as a radical injustice but an act of radical entrusting to the Father. Therefore, to ask why so many people are suffering and why

<sup>13</sup> C.K. Norwid, "Dumanie (I)" (Meditation), in: *Pisma Wszystkie*, PIW, 1971, vol. I, 18.

<sup>14</sup> B. Pascal, *Thoughts*, 736 (553 Brunschvicg), "The mystery of Jesus".

Jesus Christ's cross does not free man from suffering, but obliges him to co-suffer with God's Son, is the wrong quaestio. *Quaerebam unde malum et non erat exitus.* There was no exitus for such a question even for Jesus Christ; when asked "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?", Jesus answered: "Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him" (Jn 9, 2-3). When He heard that Lazarus was dead, He said: "This illness is not to end in death, but it is for the Glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it" (Jn 11, 4 and 40).

Suffering and death lead man towards the Future and it is only in this perspective that they are comprehensible. The greatest alarm, then, is not that so many people are suffering, but that so many do not know how to suffer. It means that so many do not enter into the God's glory, which is our home. To be homeless means to be unhappy. The house which would be worthy of man one can build only upon his being the *magna quaestio*.

When Raskolnikov had understood this truth he kissed Sonia's feet and said: "I bow in front of the whole human suffering". This truth has been expressed by Peter's brother, Andrew, in praying the words: *ave crux, spes unica*.

In the penal colony Raskolnikov saw through Sonia's suffering the dawn of the "new life". It is in just this moment that Dostojewski interrupted his tale. The "new life" should be told, he wrote, in another way. It should be a song about the "new creation" (Rv 21) that Jesus Christ began to sing on the cross. "Therefore, we are not discouraged; rather, although our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day [...] for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Cor 4, 16-18).

No doubt, it is painful to be contingent, but is it not because of this painful contingency that we are led to our being's truth which is present in live God? We can be ourselves only in Him. It must be for this reason that God, allowing Satan to touch what Job "had", i.e. what is "seen", said to him: "behold, all that he has is in your power; only do not lay a hand upon his person" (Job 1, 12). Indeed, this what we are and then what we should be is in the inaccessible God.

Our life belongs to us and our being belongs to our Creator. Then, life is for being and not being for life. When Job understood this, he said: "I have dealt with great things that I do not understand; things too wonderful for me, which I cannot know. I had heard of you by word of mouth, but now my eye has seen you. Therefore I disown what I have said, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42, 3-6).

The silence full of the Other's Presence is man's word. Such a silence questions and demands. Thought achieved in rationalistic calculation never asks seriously. No wonder, then, that it ends in atheism, into which the friends of Job, in spite of all appearances, have fallen. And no wonder that the happiness, the attribut of divinity, has come only to the suffering man. It is only he who knew how to think.

*Riassunto.* Distinguendo il dolore e la sofferenza, l'Autore cerca di far vedere che il pensare fondamentale dell'uomo, cioè il pensare che si esprime nelle domande sul senso della sua vita, nasce solo in quell'esperienza che egli deve vivere quando viene posto di fronte alla morte. Fuori di questa esperienza, che costituisce lo spazio del filosofare, l'uomo vive in un modo spensierato. Essendo un domandare ed un aspettare la risposta, il pensare filosofico, che si identifica con l'uomo diventato *magna quaestio*, finisce nel pregare. Il Libro di Giobbe serve all'Autore come testo fondamentale in cui questa esperienza, propria dell'uomo, è stata espressa nel modo più adeguato possibile.

*Résumé.* En faisant une distinction entre la douleur et la souffrance, l'Auteur essaie de montrer que la pensée fondamentale de l'homme, c'est-à-dire la pensée exprimée par ses questions sur le sens de sa vie, ne vient que de l'expérience qu'il doit vivre face à la mort. Sans cette expérience qui constitue l'espace philosophique, l'homme vit de façon irréfléchie. En tant que questionnement et attente d'une réponse, la pensée philosophique qui s'identifie à l'homme devenu *magna quaestio*, trouve sa conclusion dans la prière. Le Livre de Job sert à l'Auteur comme texte fondamental dans lequel cette expérience, propre à l'homme, a été exprimée de la manière la plus parfaite.

*Summary.* Making a distinction between pain and suffering, the Author seeks to show how man's questioning of the meaning of life is the basis of philosophical thought. Outside this experience, man lives in an unthinking space. Being a question awaiting an answer, philosophical thought, identified with man and become the *magna quaestio*, ends in prayer. The Author uses the Book of Job as the fundamental text in which this experience, specific to mankind, is expressed in the most appropriate way.

*Inhaltsangabe.* Indem der Verfasser zwischen Schmerz und Leiden unterscheidet, versucht er zu erklären, daß philosophisches Denken sich angesichts des Todes vollzieht. Andernfalls bleibt die Menschheit gedankenlos. Als Frage und Erwartung der Antwort endet das philosophische Denken - sich identifizierend mit der Menschheit, der *magna quaestio* - im Gebet. Als Grundtext, in dem sich diese spezifisch menschliche Erfahrung auf höchst angemessene Weise ausdrückt, benutzt der Verfasser das Buch Hiob.