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Human Suffering and Our Post-Civilized Cultural Mind: A Maritainian Analysis

In *The Twilight of Civilization* Maritain warns us that the defeat of the pagan empires in World War II would not necessarily solve "the problems of freedom to be won, of civilization to be rescued and rebuilt."[1] For it seems that the secular counter humanism[2] (opposed to the humanism of the Incarnation)[3] which produced these empires and its principle of hatred for those who suffer[4] could outlive their military defeat. For the coming into existence of these empires in human history were merely eruptions of forces deeply entrenched in the sophisticated mind of twentieth century man. This was and still is the case since the same erroneous philosophy of man and life[5] at the core of secular humanism has thrived in our times; where the individual is "set up as a selfish god"[6] and man flings himself pathologically "into the abyss of animality."[7] Having banished God from the affairs of men and having rejected the possibility of receiving any wisdom from above; the secular humanist is driven by and consumed within a hatred for truth and wisdom. Therefore the secular

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[1]Jacques Maritain, *The Twilight of Civilization,* trans. Lionel Landry (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1943), ix.

[2]*Ibid.,* 8.

[3]*Ibid.,* 13.

[4]*Ibid.,* 9. "When love and sanctity fail to transfigure the condition of mankind or to change slaves into sons of God, the law claims many victims. Nietzche could not endure the sight of the lame and halt of Christianity: even more than Goethe, he revolted against the Cross."

[5]*Ibid.,* 62.

[6]*Ibid.,* 13.

[7]*Ibid.,* 19.

humanist seeks the impossible: a "communion in human animality"[8] and truth in the myth of anthropocentric self sufficiency.[9] In such a context the compassion of the good Samaritan is judged to be foolishness[10] by those who are ruled by the "dominion of hate."[11] Here the myths of "the homicidal errors of bourgeois individualism"[12] are given full reign over man's consciousness and produce a hideous malformation of man's moral conscience.

As a result of the tenacity of the above, in our present world humankind has been experiencing an evaporation of self-knowledge. This expanding lacuna in our knowledge of our very *being* has necessarily caused an evaporation of our consciousness of justice and the foundation upon which all genuine human relationships are based. This dissolution of our awareness of what we *are* can also be described as a journey to the end of the era of the civilized mind and the coming into existence of the cultured mind that is devoid of civilization. There has been a tremendous accumulation of *data* about man, but this fascination with *data* has clouded rather than enlightened man's understanding of himself.

Nothing manifests the characteristic roots of this post-civilized cultural mind more clearly than the attitude it produces towards pain and human suffering. There is the coincidence of a twofold shunning of reality manifested here: one, of the reality of human suffering; and, two, of the reality of human nature and our relationship to one another. Ultimately this is an occultization of the nature of man as a trans-objective-subject among other trans-objective-subjects. What has resulted from this twofold shunning of reality is a *deconstructed world* where there are no existing human subjects who suffer or who undergo pain--a world devoid of truth, where arbitrary judgments and the dialectical art of rhetorical persuasion reign.

Human suffering or pain does not easily submit itself to a real definition. The etymological origin of the English word "pain" is rooted in Greek and Latin notions of pain as that which is suffered as retribution or punishment for an evil deed that was done--a just recompense. A view that has survived throughout the centuries in certain popular religious

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[8]*Ibid.*, 21.
[9]*Ibid.*, 4 and 34.
[10]*Ibid.*, 39.
[11]*Ibid.*, 41.
[12]*Ibid.*, 58.

beliefs; such views have been applied to the horror of AIDS and other forms of human suffering. The worse perversion of religious sentiment that is found in the above is the conclusion that people who suffer are getting what they deserve from God, and, therefore, they should be shunned and abandoned. If such a view were entertained by an innocent person--for example, if a child were suffering from a painful chronic debilitating disease, this child might conclude that God did not love him/her and thereby devalue his/her own existence. Such a conclusion represents a terrorizing error in reasoning too perverse to comprehend.

It is very difficult to conceptualize principles for a genuine division of pain that would provide us with an adequate means of classifying pain. This is true whether we are looking at it from the point of view of medicine, the social sciences, or philosophy. Those who have tried to develop a taxonomy of pain have found that a natural division of pain which would avoid all artificial elements and overlapping categories is not attainable. This is the case because there are so many (at least nine if not more) different perspectives from which one can attempt to measure and classify pain.[13] For example, one can attempt to distinguish pain in terms of: its cause, its duration, its intensity, whether the cause of the pain is treatable or whether the pain is relievable without massive health trade-offs. There is also the issue of trying to understand the relationship between pain and dysfunction. Pain and human suffering can also be looked at from the point of view of the effects on: the individual, the family, the community, the state, and the world viewed as a global community, and the various moral issues related to all of the above.

The most recent comprehensive definition of pain from the point of view of medicine ("an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage or described in terms of such damage"[14]) is of great value because it preserves the unity of the psychosomatic composite of the person while including psychosomatic illnesses which have the potential to damage tissue and avoiding the pseudo-division between physical pain and emotional pain.[15]

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[13]"*Pain*," The Journal of the International Association for the Study of Pain, " Classification of Chronic Pain," description of chronic pain syndromes and the definitions of pain terms; supplement 3, 1986, S4-S5.

[14]Cf. Robert Feldman, *Understanding Psychology* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1987), 447 ff.

[15]*Pain*, S217.

When one attempts to make pain subject to divisions from the perspective of the cause of the pain, one can only develop somewhat overlapping categories--such as whether the cause of pain is a natural phenomenon (for example, a flood, an earthquake, or volcanic eruption); or whether the cause of the pain is a result of human social institutions, economic or political. In either case, pain comes into existence by reason of physical injury or from the deprivation of basic needs such as food, water, or air. The above categories can be distinguished from the clinical causes of pain--for example, pain due to infectious disease or a neoplasm.

The above-cited definition of pain also avoids the problem of attempting to identify whether the stimulus which is causing the pain is a normal or abnormal[16] stimulus--both of which can be identified as producing a pleasant or unpleasant experience. For example, normal sexual stimulation can be experienced as painful, as a result of injury to the spinal cord; and abnormal stimulation from certain types of electrical stimulation can be identified as pleasant. However, the fact that substance abuse can be viewed as pleasant requires further clarification.

In the case of the snorting of cocaine, the abuser identifies as pleasant a sensation by an abnormal stimulus that produces massive damage to the nasal tissue which will eventually lead to the collapse of the nose among other types of tissue damage to vital organs, including the central nervous system. This is interesting because it represents a masochistic confusion of pleasure and pain which, in many cases, is related to psychological disorders of several kinds--such as, a poor self-image, a lack self-worth, an abnormal desire for punishment and/or self-destruction.

Pain can be distinguished as to cause from the point of view of moral philosophy as to whether it is inflicted on the sufferer by another human agent. Pain created in this way can be divided into pain intentionally inflicted on another person or other persons (such as in the cases of torture or war[17]) or through negligence (such as an auto accident).

When one seeks to distinguish pain from the perspectives of duration, intensity, and from the point of view of a simultaneous experience of bodily dysfunctions, one discovers that the first leads to a distinction

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[16]Thus "paraesthesia" is identified as an abnormal sensation which is not unpleasant; and "dysaesthesia" is identified as an abnormal sensation which is unpleasant.

[17]Cf. Joseph Califano, "Technology and Violence," *Divus Thomas* 8 (Piacenza: Collegio Alberoni, 1975).

between pain and acute pain(pain that lasts no more than three months) and chronic pain (pain that has a duration of more than three months). However, chronic pain should be further distinguished into chronic, permanent pain (a permanent reality for the remainder of one's life) and chronic, relievable or curable pain (or pain in which there is at least some hope of relief). Chronic, permanent pain should be divided into chronic, permanent, progressive pain where pain and dysfunction increase at various rates and chronic, permanent, benign pain where there appears to be no noticeable progression of either the pain or dysfunction. Tissue damage in such cases may be identified as a result of a normal aging process. Attempts to classify various intensities of pain present us with the difficulty of conceptualizing a spectrum from pain as a minimal awareness of discomfort to excruciating agony that takes one's breath away and causes muscle spasms. The latter I call *paralyzing pain,* and it usually causes tissue damage and/or atrophy of the muscles.

Physicians often try to describe pain in terms of pain thresholds, the least experience of pain that a person can recognize, and pain tolerance,[18] the greatest level of pain a person is prepared to tolerate. However, the definition of pain tolerance presents us with many problems. This is the case because a person who is experiencing permanent, chronic, intractable, progressive pain may be in a no-win situation where the pain he is prepared to tolerate is irrelevant in respect to the pain he has to tolerate. In the case of permanent, chronic, intractable, progressive pain, one is often faced with a situation in which the choice to relieve the pain involves a person in serious health trade-offs: for example, 1)the long term use of drugs to anesthetize the sensation of pain can lead to addiction, personality changes, and additional tissue damage to various vital organs; 2) by ignoring or suppressing the pain which signals that damage is being done to human tissue, one may be falling into deeper levels of mental and physical dysfunction. Therefore, the fear of further loss of function or addiction to pain-relieving drugs that may adversely affect the quality of one's life even further might cause a patient to endure agonizing pain rather than accept addiction and the mental oblivion that drug therapy offers and/or paralysis.

In such a circumstance pain presents the sufferer with a manifold reality difficult for many people to grasp: pain as a horrible sign that something is wrong; pain as a constant companion; pain as the signal of

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[18]*Pain,* S220-S221.

progressive levels of dysfunction. One finds oneself in a situation where to endure the pain--to continue to function in spite of the pain--causes damage to tissue and, for example, the atrophy of muscles. The issue here is not a question of "no pain, no gain," but of pain and unavoidable loss no matter what one is willing to suffer. The attack on one's liberty of movement and action is so great that the battle to sustain a genuine sense of self-worth (the value of one's own existence) and hope in such a situation is quite overwhelming. In conjunction with the struggle to maintain an appreciation of the value of interpersonal relationships within the family for all concerned, this battle requires something the present world has found comfortable to ignore. Also, the difficulty of finding the right way to function in the context of the above is the greatest of all barriers to overcome. The greatest danger to the suffering person here is that out of frustration and anger the suffering person loses patience[19] and despairs and, thereby, makes matters worse by indulging in self-destructive behavior. For example, one can focus only on how unfair life is and wallow in self-pity. This preoccupation with what is absent in one's life can lead one to become bitter and disagreeable towards others or to hide in substance abuse. Thus one makes oneself and everyone around one miserable and negates one's own sense of self worth and the value of one's interpersonal relationships. The acquisition of the wisdom to accomplish this in the concrete situation takes it own time in coming for those who seek it. The prevalent cultured mind devoid of civilization discussed below will never provide it. Without a profound understanding of the spirituality of the human reality, the question in our decivilized culture, has become "Suicide and euthanasia--why not?"

Granted, we seem to be able to deal better with acute--that is, short-term--human suffering; for example, right after a hurricane or earthquake there seems to be genuine, intense, short term identification with those who are rendered homeless and are suffering in many ways. However, this identification quickly dissipates along with media coverage, even though the worst of these catastrophes are the chronic, intractable, progressive pain and post-traumatic syndromes that victims must live with for the rest of their lives. It is the shunning or phobia of chronic, intractable, progressive, paralyzing pain that is deserving of more serious consideration. Likewise we have become accustomed to the chronically homeless people all over this nation who live in parks and railroad

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[19]Note that patience is the virtue which fortifies the irascible appetite against despair when confronted with evils other than death itself.

stations, many of whom really are very disturbed people and need some kind of institutionalized help.

Now let us look at pain from the point of the individual and the family; and here we are going to concentrate on chronic, intractable, progressive, paralyzing pain--the kind of pain which when first experienced causes in a person a desire physically to run away from one's own body (sometimes acted out) in order to escape the pain--until one realizes there is no place to run. For wherever one runs one must take one's pain along too. This kind of pain causes one to objectify one's body in a Cartesian manner which almost makes one forget the psychosomatic unity of the human person, in that one's own body can be viewed as something foreign, as an alien causing one harm. When the person has to accept the full realization that the situation is permanent, one feels an isolation that is difficult to verbalize--a foretaste of death fills one with the cold sensation of ashes. This feeling of isolation can cause one to doubt not only the value of one's own existence but also whether one is of value to anyone else--especially one's loved ones. The suffering person asks himself whether he has become a burden to everyone concerned (for our post civilized culture tells one that life is the domain only of the healthy).

All of the above is accompanied simultaneously by the disbelief that what is happening is real and irreversible and also by the absolute certainty that this is one's reality. One's body becomes redefined daily as those parts that work today. The amount of psychic energy that must be expended in the simplest task is inexpressible. The monotony of constant pain and the wearisomeness of the fact that it demands so much of one's life be consumed in dealing with the pain can become most depressing. Constant pain thus is very boring.

One finds that most people consciously shun the reality of the suffering person. This is noticeable by the fact that many avoid looking into the eyes of the person in pain, or they will look at the suffering person until the person who is suffering notices that they are looking, and then they will quickly look away. There is a defensive denial of the reality of pain that can be seen in too many contexts to explicate here. This can take the form of a healthy person cutting off a handicapped person to take a handicap parking space, or an insurance company making it almost impossible to get a prosthetic device or aid to mobility that is absolutely necessary; and those who balk at making a building in which the handicap lives or works handicap accessible (not to mention that doctors who are employed to save insurance companies money, will, for a fee, lie or deny the reality of a victim's sufferings without examining the victim).

There is a kind of victim phobia that has a somewhat universal character in our contemporary world--a kind of view that if I do not let the other person in pain enter into my consciousness, then I do not have to deal with him or her and I cannot be held responsible for not dealing with these realities. This view involves a withdrawal from pain and the reality of death which, in fact, is a withdrawal from the reality of life itself. Thus is born the theory of negative rights, or laissez-faire morality.[20] As long as I do not do anything directly to harm another person, human rights are preserved. Justice is preserved by doing nothing wrong and acts of omission are no longer acts related to justice. Love of another person as a person is excluded from my cognitive comportment, although desire for the other as a source of pleasure or comfort is quite acceptable. This is the foundation of the cultured mind devoid of civilization. This view has a pervasive influence in all levels our contemporary social organization, whether the family, the community, the state, or the world viewed as a global community. In such a context, one might throw money in an impersonal way at a problem in order to protect oneself from having the problem invade one's consciousness, but any involvement beyond this point is too risky for the contemporary cultured mind. This view in reality limits itself to admitting only the secondary and negative understanding of the first principle of moral reasoning--namely, to do no evil. However, the affirmation of the real first principle of morality is that one is to do good and avoid evil, with an emphasis on doing the good. For one could spend one's whole life sleeping and do no evil, but one would fail to live a human life, which requires the doing of the good in more than an egocentric fashion.

A positive understanding of the moral law is necessary not only for the elimination of much human suffering but also for the stability of a family, and we all know of instances in which families that lack the spiritual bond of benevolent love do not survive. For benevolent love is a reality that cannot be recognized as existing or be explained if we see man only as the highest kind of animal. Thus families fall apart when they are forced to face serious problems and they lack benevolent love--the

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[20]Joseph Califano,"Modernization and Human Values,"*Jacques Maritain: The Man and His Metaphyics*, ed. John F.X. Knasas (Notre Dame: American Maritain Association, 1988); "Modernization and the Law of the Prise de Conscience,"*Freedom in the Modern World*, ed. Michael D. Torre (Notre Dame: American Maritain Association, 1989).

necessary means for their survival. There are numerous cases where the contemporary sophisticated, cultured mind is the prime mover in the way a family deals with a chronically ill family member. The ill member becomes an object to be discarded. Thus, just as cars or pet animals, people and human relationships are viewed as discardable objects.

There is also a transference of the evil of the affliction to the existence of the victims and potential victims who become evils to be destroyed. Since we only seek to destroy that which we hate as an evil, it must be recognized that euthanasia and abortion are examples of the above transference in which an actually suffering human being (such as someone chronically ill) and a potentially suffering human being (such as an unwanted child who might become an actual sufferer) are deemed to be evil, hateful objects to be destroyed. There is a negation of the existence of persons as subjects which enables many to identify them as hateful objects. This transference is not merely, as some would have it, to keep the victims at arm's length but a radical negation of the goodness of their existence in order to keep them hateful objects to be destroyed. If this were the right approach, then the way to solve domestic violence--the abuse of women--would be to kill all the wives who are possible victims of such actual violence.[21]

One might say that such a way of behaving depicts an irrational or insane approach to actual or potential suffering. However, contemporary psychotherapy would affirm the sanity of the contemporary decivilized cultured mind since the healthy person is identified as an autonomous, hedonistic, goalless person who is free of guilt and who sees his self realization in and through self gratification.[22] He is one who adapts well and is logical or at least consistent in his behavior, who is free of the

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[21]There is an even more callous view of disinvolvement with others in the case where a woman views a child as an evil to be destroyed simply because she does not consider it a good time to have another person around for whom she might have to be responsible or love in some way. For she might have to give up an activity that she views as essential. Thus you hear statements that "I am not ready at this time to have a child"; or, as I once heard, "I cannot give up my tennis lessons to have a baby now." Thus human sexual acts that would cause a pregnancy are devoid of any human significance since the consequences if undesired are surgically quite correctable.

[22]Cf. B. Ashley and K.O. O'Rourke *Health Care Ethics*, (St. Louis, MO:

conflicts of deliberations about whether the end justifies the means, and who, therefore, acts and follows orders without reflection--a man devoid of any sense of justice.

Thomas Merton notes Adolf Eichmann was judged by psychiatrists to be perfectly sane in light of the criteria in our modern world devoid of all spiritual and, therefore, genuinely human values,[23] and Jean-François Steiner describes how Kurt Franz developed a perfectly rational and scientifically exact method of mass murder.[24] Such evaluations of rationality do not appear different from the contemporary abortionist saying, "I am logically consistent. Since abortion is legal, I do what I am paid for--that is, perform abortions--to solve people's problems. I leave all moral considerations up to the patient and society."

Through genuine knowledge and love persons transcend the confines of their material individuation,[25] discover the roots of their existential spirituality, and enter into communities--for example, the family--and discover an authentic, common good to share. The human soul exercises a spiritual self-possessing and self-giving activity rooted in the identity and difference in genuine acts of knowing and loving that enables persons to be open to other persons and God. Thus persons are wholes in themselves, and they are also a part of another whole--for example, the family. For love is always a singular act between persons as singular subjects which can be shared with the other as an individual. This is only possible because human beings are not completely bound to matter like animals. No man or woman does or should see himself as existing or suffering alone. A wife or husband and children--for example, of someone who is suffering with chronic, intractable, progressive paralyzing pain--suffers intensely also. As the person who suffers attempts to adapt to life and ever changing situations so also do all around him/her have to make such adjustments. However, the preservation of one's self-

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The Catholic Hospital Association, 1978); also editions II andIII.

[23]"A Devout Meditation in Memory of Adolf Eichmann," *Raids on the Unspeakable*, (New York: New Directions, 1966), 45-49.

[24]*Treblinka*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1967).

[25]Joseph Califano, "Maritain's Philosophy of the Person and the Individual," *Notes et Documents* 8 (Rome, August 1977). "Maritain's Democracy of the Human Person or Man as a Moral Agent," *Jacques Maritain: A Philosopher in the World*, ed. Jean-Louis Allard (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1985).

worth is only possible in the recognition by all of the non-material level of the spiritual identity of the human person and the benevolent love that is shared as a common good. Thus shared suffering in the context of shared love brings people closer together rather than tears them apart.

There are two principal ways in which we can view human beings. The first is that man is the highest kind of animal, an object among other objects, shut off from all other objects. The second is that man is a trans-objective-subject and all that this entails. The first is rooted in a pseudo-empirical and pseudo-scientific view of man where the intellect and the will are turned outward in a fixed comportment away from themselves and only towards the other things as objects; the emphasis here is on the other as other--the other as thing and thing as object. Here is a world devoid of dianoetic knowledge and devoid of subsistent subjects; a world devoid of persons. Any reflection upon oneself is viewed as spurious and illegitimate knowledge. All reflective knowledge of the activity of the intellect and the will that would bring one an awareness of the genuine spiritual realities of the human person are shunned because of the moral consequences that their admission would bring into one's consciousness. A recognition of these realities necessarily would result in such a radical transformation of one's perspective that the contemporary cultured will and intellect *a priori* refuse to accept or consider them. In this way, an occultization of the foundation of comprehending the intrinsic worth of a human being becomes a complete and necessary foundation for the cultured mind devoid of civilization. Once one accepts this perspective, all comprehension of human goods and the genuine common goods of human life are viewed as bastard children. The consequence is a people highly cultured in an artificial sense yet devoid of civilization; they have become separated from any genuine understanding of the human reality while they hold fast to the counterfeit notions of human beings and a human world.

All genuine understanding of the human reality begins with an awareness of the fact that man lives in a world of subjects and not a world of objects only. A person is a being who, although not perfectly, through dianoetic and ananoetic intellection, is able to grasp the *esse* and *essentia* of the subjects that coexist within and through judgment. Thus man is understood properly to be a trans-objective-subject among other trans-objective-subjects, a being who, through genuine knowledge of himself and other subjects, is capable of love.

Thus there are two truths that must be comprehended to discover a bona fide moral perspective in regard to human suffering. First, a bona

fide ethics requires the metaphysical knowledge of the spiritual *esse* of the human person; and, second, this metaphysical knowledge must bring with it an intuition of the existence of other existing subjects as real and the metaphysical knowledge that oneness, goodness, truth, and beauty are identical to that *esse* as the act of an *essentia*. Thus the proof for God's existence from the gradation of pure perfection--such as life, intelligence, and the transcendentals cited above--is essential to sustaining our proper moral comportment.

The recent attempts to develop a kind of a rationalist ethics devoid of the certainty of these truths is an exercise in futility. Such efforts will of necessity have the short life proper to fads that fade as quickly as they appear and attract our attention. Ethics without the realization of the above can never identify the human goods to be sought after in an authentic moral life; for all authentic notions of justice which aim at determining what is due another are rooted in the recognition that the existence of the other is a good to be preserved. The right to life and all that the right to life contains is the first right, and all other rights presuppose it. One cannot exercise liberty, and so on, if one does not exist. The cultured minds devoid of civilization often takes refuge in the pseudo-dialectical question of how does one get an *ought* from an *is*? They do this often in the name of a material realism, a material realism which is not a realism at all because it excludes everything that is genuinely human, by reason of a self-inflicted blindness. Dialecticians produce numerous solipsistic, bizarre worlds of thought which terminate in only solipsistic silence. Hume was well aware that his philosophy was a nightmare. Hume's successors in solipsism such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger have fared no better. Whereas for the dialectician no amount of discussion is sufficient to attaining an answer, to the metaphysician who grasps the reality of things in an existential judgment no further discussion is necessary. What the dialecticians fail to see, because they have chosen not to see (and therefore they have chosen not to be in contact with reality) is that the *is* is the *ought*. From this existential fact the myth of egocentric autonomy is overcome and also a whole gamut of positive human rights are understood as flowing from this existential fact. Having separated what is identical, cultured minds devoid of civilization destroy the unity of man's being and the unity of man's moral thinking. They dwell in a world of counterfeit notions of man and reality. Just as the fabled Humpty Dumpty, man is pushed off the wall of reality and his being is fragmented; *and all the deconstructionists cannot get man back together again.*

All of the above makes one realize that acts of omission are also

matters of justice. Thus the premoral experience of freedom of autonomy and its exercise is transformed into the conquest of our freedom. This transformation is the only authentic foundation for living a civilized life. Once man sought to be civilized; now man seeks merely to be free. Man seeks to be free in a *total* -- that is, indeterminate--sense, where freedom has no meaning. Man seeks to be free from the reality of himself and the reality of the other, whether the other is another human person or God.

Unless in the future democracies take seriously the warning of Maritain in the *The Twilight of Civilization* (with which I began this paper), we will be confronted with living in the darkest of ages. If we continue to reinforce the defensive denial on all levels of the realities of human suffering and the demands of justice, then we may never again see the renaissance of civilization. If democracies do not heed the warning of the above and return to the vital principle at the root of their existence "which is justice and love...in the rediscovery of God,"[26] then we will truly be a lost generation. Therefore, only in giving God His proper place in the affairs of men, with all that this requires, can the resurrection of a civilized way of life take place.

A Prayerful Postscript

As we have noted above, a person who loses patience in the context of chronic intractable progressive paralyzing pain risks everything positive in his life by actualizing a self-hatred. The result is that a person makes himself into a self-destructive mechanism mirroring what the secular humanist has judged the suffering person to be. This is a terrible self-deception which proves the worst lies are the ones we tell ourselves.

I am convinced that the only way one can sustain patience in the day in and day out struggle with constant pain and, also, avoid becoming swamped by the tidal waves of negative feelings and the potentially overwhelming states of depression which such feelings produce (which in turn produce self-destructive behavior) is through a daily life of genuine prayer. Secular humanism has nothing to offer the suffering person but nihilistic annihilation--a solipsistic nihilism rooted in the necessary dumbfounded silence of Wittgenstein, vacuous solipsism of Husserl, or the inescapable dread of Heidegger.

One can only pray for the grace to face and get through the present

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[26]Jacques Maritain,*The Twilight of Civilization,* 63.

moment. No more can be asked for, nor can more be granted. In the final analysis, does one have any other constructive choice? When one is confronted concretely with the radical finitude of one's existence, one either finds God concretely or one is lost in abstract solipsistic nothingness.

The confined suffering person is called simultaneously to act at once on two planes,[27] the concrete unavoidably painful situation and the spiritual level. Through such a duality of action one does not escape from the concrete order of suffering nor does one becomes less conscious of the paralyzing enslavement of constant pain (angelism is not an option), but one is able to turn away from the solipsistic dwelling on pain to that which is other than one's self--ultimately, God.

John Howard Griffin confirms my own experience--namely, that the person who is seriously suffering eventually discovers that the self even in pain "is less interesting than other objects of contemplation,"[28] and one sees the beauty of other people even in every day activities. For me it was a day when I could barely move and my eighteen month old granddaughter insisted on playing with me by bringing things to me. Such a simple act of a child who is learning to share does not permit one to remain within oneself. Likewise, a wife who provides one with the physical care normally due a child and who does not permit one to give in or give up on oneself because she will not is a grace from God.

I believe once one is able to realize the above, one is able to see in a way that defies description ("for no fine reasoning could have the same effect"[29]) how God calls one to see the truth. "From this can spring a truth that confuses those who know little of suffering: the core of joy that lies at the heart of even the most intense suffering; the supreme activity of wisdom that does not need movement."[30]

One realizes how God asks the suffering person to look and see what I have created and how good it is. I believe, therefore, the suffering person, if only through a glass darkly, sees that God creates what he loves and loves what he creates and that no suffering is without meaning, if it places one in the presence of God.

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[27]Cf. Raissa Maritain, *Raïssa's Journal* (Albany, NY: Magi Books, 1974), 241; and John Howard Griffin, "The Terrain of Physical Pain," *Creative Suffering*(Kansas City, MO: Pilgrim Press, 1970), 27.

[28]Griffin, Ibid.

[29]Raissa Maritain, *Raïssa's Journal*, 241.

[30]John Howard Griffin, "The Terrain of Physical Pain," 28.