

ADDRESS OF HOMAGE TO THE HOLY FATHER

Most Blessed Father,

As Your Holiness has so often observed, to construct the new society without the deepest values that are at its roots is so mistaken that it leads us without doubt to the culture of death. We observe this when the statistics tell us about what today is described as the greatest murderer of our times – depression.

Your Holiness entrusted our Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care with being concerned with emerging diseases. Unfortunately, this infirmity of depression is really emerging and we have dedicated today's international conference to studying at a deep level what depression is, what the Word of God tells us about depression, and in practical terms what we suggest for the cure of this illness.

We know that Your Holiness is the principle of unity and resoluteness of the Church. All her

salvific actions come together in you and through your Petrine ministry you give them the resoluteness and clarity that they need so that in them can be effectively heard the creative voice of the Lord, through his cross and resurrection. We humbly ask Your Holiness to give utterance to this ecclesial voice, and request that you guide, and make of our reflections, pathways directed towards showing contemporary men the most adequate way by which to defeat this distancing from the Lord, which in the final analysis means depression.

May I be allowed, Holy Father, to introduce to you those who are the speakers at our conference as well as its highly qualified audience, who today have the privilege of greeting you and listening reverently to your words. Thank you, Holy Father, for your paternal welcome!

His Eminence Cardinal JAVIER LOZANO BARRAGÁN
*President of the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care,
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ADDRESS OF THE HOLY FATHER JOHN PAUL II

Depressive Illness can be a Way to Discover Other Aspects of Oneself and New Forms of Encounter with God

Dear Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood,

Dear Friends,

1. I am pleased to meet you on the occasion of the International Conference organized by the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care on the theme of "Depression". I think Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragán for his kind words on behalf of those present.

I greet the distinguished specialists, who came to offer the fruit of their research in order to further knowledge of this pathology, so as to improve treatment and provide the right type of assistance to those concerned and to their families.

Likewise, my appreciation goes to those who are dedicated to the service of persons with depression, helping them to retain their trust in life. My thoughts naturally extend to families who are accompanying their loved one with affection and sensitivity.

Disturbing increase in depression reveals human frailty

2. Your work, dear participants in the Congress, has revealed the different, complex aspects of depression: they range from chronic sickness, more or less permanent, to a fleeting state linked to difficult events – conjugal and family conflicts, serious work problems, states of loneliness... – that involve a crack, or even fracture in social, professional or family relationships. This disease is often accompanied by an existential and spiritual crisis that leads to an inability to perceive the meaning of life.

The spread of depressive states has become disturbing. They reveal human, psychological and spiritual frailties which, at least in part, are induced by society. It is important to become aware of the

effect on people of messages conveyed by the *media* which exalt consumerism, the immediate satisfaction of desire and the race for ever greater material well-being. It is necessary to propose new ways so that each person may build his own personality by cultivating spiritual life, the foundation of a mature existence. The enthusiastic participation in the World Youth Days shows that the young generations are seeking Someone who can illuminate their daily journey, giving them good reasons for living and helping them to face their difficulties.

Help the depressed person to discover God's love

3. You have stressed that *depression is always a spiritual trial*. The role of those who care for depressed persons and who do not have a specifically therapeutic task consists above all in helping them to rediscover their self-esteem, confidence in their own abilities, interest in the future, the desire to live. It is therefore important to stretch out a hand to the sick, to make them perceive the tenderness of God, to integrate them into a community of faith and life in which they can feel accepted, understood, supported, respected; in a word they can love and be loved. For them as for everyone else, contemplating Christ means letting oneself be "looked at" by him, an experience that opens one to hope and convinces one to choose life (cf. Dt 30:19).

In the spiritual process, *reading and meditation on the Psalms*, in which the sacred author expresses his joys and anxieties in prayer, can be of great help. *The reciting of the Rosary* makes it possible to find in Mary a loving Mother who teaches us how to live in Christ. *Participation in the Eucharist* is a source of inner peace, because of the effectiveness of the Word and of the Bread of Life,

and because of the integration into the ecclesial community that it achieves. Aware of the effort it costs a depressed person to do something which to other appears simple and spontaneous, one must endeavour to help him with patience and sensitivity, remembering the observation of St Theresa of the Child Jesus: "Little ones take little steps".

In his infinite love, God is always close to those who are suffering. Depressive illness can be *a way to discover other aspects of oneself* and new forms of encounter with God. Christ listens to the cry of those whose boat is rocked by the storm (cf. Mk 4:35-41). He is present beside them to help them in the crossing and guide them to the harbour of re-discovered peace.

Healthy reference points are necessary, especially for youth

4. The phenomenon of depression reminds the Church and all society how important it is to provide people, and especially youth, with examples and experiences that can help them to grow on the human, psychological, moral and spiritual levels. In fact, the absence of reference points can only contribute to making persons more fragile, induc-

ing them to believe that all forms of behaviour are the same. In this perspective, the role of the family, of school, of youth movements and of parish associations is very important because of the effect that these realities have on the person's formation.

Indeed, the public institutions have a significant role in guaranteeing a dignified standard of living, especially to abandoned, sick and elderly people. Equally necessary are policies for youth aimed at offering the young generations motives for hope to protect them from emptiness or from dangerous fillers.

Disturbing increase in depression reveals human frailty

5. Dear friends, in encouraging you to a renewed commitment in such an important task beside your brothers and sisters who are suffering from depression, I entrust you to the intercession of Mary Most Holy, *Salus Infirmorum* (Health of the Sick). May every individual and every family feel her motherly solicitude in times of difficulty.

To you all, to your collaborators and to your loved ones, I cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing.



Depression



JAVIER LOZANO BARRAGÁN

Inauguration of the Proceedings: Aspects of Post-modern Thought and Depression

In reflecting upon the history of Western thought my attention is directed towards the cycles that present themselves: they begin with the presentation of vital questions that can be summarised as belonging to three major poles – God, man, the world. Various thinkers try to provide relevant answers, these answers grow to the point of reaching brilliant solutions when it seems that mankind has attained his high point, and then one has the impression that specifically at that moment, which is not necessarily the culminating point in terms of time of that epoch (because this can take place at the same time as strong moments), thought decays and becomes weakened in an almost total way.

In ancient Greece, after the great masters of thought such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, there occurred the decadence of the currents of scepticism, epicureanism and stoicism. During the Middle Ages, after the great thinkers who culminated in the Scholastics, Aberlard, St. Anselm, Duns Scotus, St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, and others, there came nominalism, led by Occam. Modern thought and its great thinkers – the rationalism of Descartes, the empiricism of Hobbes, Locke and Hume, the idealism of Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel – was followed by the boredom of the Enlightenment, by deism, pietism, the Aufklärung and the Encyclopaedia, which despite their lack of originality could after a certain fashion be considered essays that provided a universal answer to the fundamental questions of God, man and the world. This decline in thought deteriorated during the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century because of the influence of

thinkers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Lyotard and Vattimo, before falling, like ancient Greece, into scepticism, epicureanism and stoicism.

Such thought, at least in most of the West, is bringing about a cultural change that can be an important frame of reference for us in addressing the subject of our international conference on depression. As a start to our proceedings, and as a small introduction to depression, I would like to mention in a very summarising form what seems to me to be most significant about this thought, which, indeed, sets the contours of the so-called culture of post-modernity.

I will begin with a summarising reference to the basic lines of the positions of the thinkers who seem to me to be at the base of post-modernity. They are Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Lyotard and Vattimo.¹

For *Nietzsche*, God is dead and the only norm of morality is now the superman with his will to power. There are no universal and certain values, and there is no possibility of knowing them.²

For *Heidegger*, a superior Being exists, but he is ineffable. Instead this Being expresses himself through language and not through thought because thought is already an interpretation of language. In addition, because there are so many interpretations of language they are not true. The only possibility is obscure mystical knowledge. Technical knowledge has objectified the world and falsified it.³

For *Wittgenstein*, truth is in language when what it says of facts is scientifically verifiable by the same logicity as language. Values, because they are not facts, are not reliable. Because logicity itself is also a value and thus not a fact, then

it, too, cannot be demonstrated. In addition, attention must be paid to the differences between languages, the ‘game of language’: technical language, game language, political language, poetic language, affective language and so forth. In every game language has a different meaning. There is no common denominator to these language games that one can know. The aim of philosophy is solely to classify the different games that exist. Its function is therapeutic, that is to say to reduce to current and daily language what is expressed in other systems of language. God means that we observe the fact that many things do not depend on us but we depend on them. God is the whole of the world that is independent of our will.⁴

When commenting on previous authors, *Jean-Francois Lyotard* says that the ‘meta-theses’, that is to say the universal summarising examples of the thought of modernity such as the Enlightenment, Marxism, Christianity, Capitalism etc., which provide an all embracing synthesis, are ineffective and incomprehensible. For this thinker, they have no validity at all. Knowledge can only be expressed through the game of language and amounts to research into instability, to which he gives the name of ‘Parology’. Only ‘mini-theses’ are possible, to which assent is given to achieve temporary agreement between interlocutors both in the international field and in the political, affective, sexual, family or cultural fields. There thus exists a plurality that cannot be reduced to unity, which, indeed, does not have universality. This is an anarchic invention of language. Metaphysical universality is a sham. It is not possible to achieve a synthesis from the heterogeneity of the linguistic game. Post-modern

thought dehumanises man in order to go back to humanising him within a context of instability.⁵

Gianni Vattimo is a philosopher from Turin. He interprets Nietzsche and Heidegger taking nihilism as a basis. In the view of Vattimo being has no objectivity and thus is not universal. Only the here and now exists; history does not exist, it has reached its goal, there is nothing new. Knowledge cannot reach being and cannot attain truth. One reaches truth only halfway and thus there is only half-truth. The instrument by which one reaches this is aesthetic, poetic and rhetorical feeling; from *homo sapiens* one moves to *homo sentimentalis*. This is analogous to when someone sees a painting and interprets it according to his own different feelings – the painting thus becomes subject to a myriad of interpretations. Truth is like that: each person sees it according to his own aesthetic and poetic feelings and expresses it with different linguistic systems.

Television, for example, provides us with a set of images, but it is not possible to have a single and universal basis that unites that set. Reality is an intersecting of various images, its self-contamination without a central axis. Society is emancipation from reality, from differences, and is an explosion of multiplicity. Thus the universal being, stable foundations, and metaphysics have reached their end. God exists, but only to the extent that He is perceived as God by books, by Holy Scripture, and by tradition. But He is not a God of immutable dogmas – he is a poetic and aesthetic God, formed by each person. In particular He is not the God of the Catholic Church. Thus Christianity becomes secularised and enters into decline. Man follows the pathway of his centre towards an unknown destination – ‘X’. He does not need the extreme certainty that was given to him by an ancient magical rite – God. The world is an event involving the game of linguistic interpretations within different concrete frameworks. This new thought, which is called ‘weak thought’, is the only one possible and is in opposition to the aspired to ‘strong thought’, which continues to be a myth, a fable left behind by post-modernity.⁶

An attempt to break down post-modern thought by following the ideas of these thinkers could perhaps lead to the following points:

1. Lack of Trust in Man and his Thought

After the fall of the great syntheses of modern thought, thought has become weak thought. Reference is made to the tragedies caused by the ideologies of modernity that brought about millions of deaths and acts of barbarity. Strong thought belongs to the primitive epochs of mankind, to barbaric ages, which have now been left behind us.

2. The Rule of Aesthetic Rationality

Irrationalism: *homo sapiens* has now become *homo sentimentalis*. In modernity, reason was made divine and there was a return to strong thought, which was the cause of all the atrocities that were committed, for example at Auschwitz. Now only the relativism of thoughts in conflict with each other, imprisoned in language, is accepted.

3. Relativism

This takes the place of any claim that there is a rationally ordered world. Scientific rationality is replaced by aesthetic rationality. Scientific rationality was based upon the principles of mathematics and logic, on the principle of identity and contradiction, on the reiteration and verifiability of events. These principles have no validity, and another basis must be looked for, which is aesthetics. Aesthetic rationality is based upon the intensity of feelings, of emotions, of the admiration, the contemplation and the authenticity of experience, on the sensitive and affective dimension of human love, personal decisions and instinctual reactions. For post-modernity, truth is not adaptation to reality but interpretation of reality in a temporality of being. There is nothing else but instrumental reason of a plural nature, which is un-

believing, a matter of play, ironic, destructive, inclined to superficial tendencies of curiosity in a phenomenology of signs and appearances. Truth is replaced by the interplay of images, the ontology of semantics, the determination of indeterminacy, the transcendence of immanence, and the concepts of metaphor. Instead of the principle of causality there is the principle of the relationship between phenomena. That there is only one religion is absurd, and in the place of God there is a divine generality. Thus one reaches theoretical nihilism, a form of ethical relativism, and a lack of a set of moral rules.

4. Nihilism

This is the philosophy of nothing. Beings, things, values and principles are denied and are reduced to nothing. This is a ‘making official’ of the destructive tendencies that exist in society. Nihilism is especially connected with Nietzsche who discerned two types of nihilism – good nihilism and bad nihilism. For this thinker, good nihilism is the destruction of all the values of the past in order to construct new values – those of the superman; bad nihilism is calmly waiting for ancient values to come to an end and not substituting them with those of the superman. One cannot know truth; one can only know changing points of view. The will cannot do anything good. Because God is dead there is no normative point of reference. History cannot have an intrinsic self-completion. Everything is fleeting and provisional, and thus one cannot accept any serious undertaking. ‘Ontophobia’ is proclaimed, and this is a desertification of everything. Objective truth is replaced by ‘points of view’. Life has no value because it is not unrepeatable, it is transmuted through reincarnation, and thus one can trade with it through cloning, surplus embryos, eugenics, euthanasia, and all the rest.

5. Lack of Trust in the Future

Everything is perishable, fragmentation and chaos; there is no

eternal and immutable element. The present is a point of intersection of the past and the future, and it is the only one that matters. There is a crisis of temporality and an all present historicism; the past is a kind of museum photograph, fragments of sacred images and images. History and the past are market objects that are consumed and exchanged. It is not possible to formulate any project in relation to the future.

6. The Return to Mystery and Pseudo-religiosity

There is no God without gods; many saviours and religions have taken the place of the single God the saviour. Religions without God and without a Church are envisaged. Reference is made to mystery but in a purely superficial perspective, involving obscurity and nebulousness.

In particular everything is reflected in the 'New Age' movement, whose 'creed' is summed up by Jean Vernette in what he calls 'the ten commandments of the New Age'. These commandments are: 1. You will impatiently await the age of Aquarius. 2. You will believe in the Great Change. 3. Your consciousness will carefully reawaken. 4. You will look after your body in an active way. 5. You will follow your teachers respectfully. 6. You will believe completely in the irrational. 7. You will faithfully venerate the goddess Gaia (the earth). 8. You will rigorously reject existing religions. 9. You will speak about the spirit with all naturalness. 10. You will laugh at death with serenity.

This religion prefers man to make himself God rather than for God to make Himself man. God is not a person but the highest vibration of the cosmos or the highest expression of transcendental consciousness. Truth is believing: 'it is true because you believe it' or 'it is true so that you feel good'. Every individual has an interior illumination. Guilt or sin do not exist, there is no redemption, no atonement, no grace; evil does not exist, and thus nobody is responsible for evil. One should not fear death because there is reincarnation, not resurrec-

tion. Religion is projecting one's own hopes; it is made to measure religion. This is the 'weak thought' of a secularised and individualistic society. It totally rejects Christianity.

7. The Principle of Diversity

There is no unity; only fragmentation. Society is transformed into groups of symbols, associations, and movements. The solidity of a political party, of the individual, of the nation, come to be replaced.

8. Tolerance

Through rapid communication contemporary society acquires the characteristic of being pluricultural and pluriracial. This is a society without balance.

9. The World

The starting point is a totalising ecologism which means sustainable growth and development, usually known as 'green peace', and which is to be seen as a reaction against the perverse effects of technological rule. The central tenet is that man depends on nature rather than that nature depends on man.

The world has neither meaning nor value; it has no purpose. Its sacred character is taken away. It is no longer the creation of God but is a universe or universes, infinite worlds subject to the sciences that are called upon to discover them and to dominate them, and, in the case of possible prosperity, to exploit them. The world is very uncertain, weak, and has an unpredictable future. It is merely a depository of things and objects; it has no divine order placed in the laws of nature. The sciences do not aim at human construction but at progress as such; they are directed towards their practical goals: for example increasing well-being, eating better, dressing better, etc., without any ethical evaluation or assessment. Technology and scientific knowledge are motivated by their economic interests and by commercial contracts; free giving is totally suppressed. The horizons

of their hope are confined to what is provisional and to what is immediately accessible.

10. Man

Social life is confined to what is economic and political. Man feels lost and without any possibility of integration. He has neither meaning nor purpose; he is a 'tourist', a 'wanderer', a 'moral stranger'. The function of the meaning of everything was at the outset provided by religion. Religion is now relegated to the private world and has neither an economic nor a political role. Man places himself where once God was to be found.

There is nihilism in the philosophical field, relativism in the gnosiological and moral field, and pragmatism in daily life. Man is no longer the centre of nature, who, under the rule of God, governs all things – he is merely a small part of nature like the plants and the animals.

Reference is made to the four ages of man; during the modern age subjectivity was professed as the source of truth and freedom as supreme dominion – this was the age of the 'third man'. Now we have gone on to the culture of the 'fourth man'. The 'first man' was the man of Greek philosophical culture, the 'second man' was the man of Christian medieval culture, the 'third man' was the scientific man of modernity. Today we are faced with the 'fourth man', the man of consumption and the audiovisual. Now neither philosophy nor religion nor science are rejected – they are seen as linguistic games within a pyrotechnical kaleidoscope of knowledge that is no longer monologic but pluralistic and dissipated. 'God is dead. However, one can still believe in God. At base the two things are the same'.⁷ One reaches syncretism or total indifference. Thus post-modern man comes to be alone, poor, and insecure; in losing God he loses his identity; he is 'like a wanderer who crosses a desert and knows only the paths marked by his own tracks, which are removed by the wind as he walks along'.⁸

The first man and the second man were a balanced synthesis of

the history of meta-history. This synthesis was destroyed by the third man who replaced religion and philosophy with the sciences. As regards the history of mankind, it is stated that history no longer exists, and that the past in a valid sense does not exist either. There is no past and no future; one lives only today in pleasure and for pleasure, and for this reason it is good to be strong and unbeatable.

Suffering, especially in its terminal stage, is neither pleasant nor good nor useful to anyone at all, and for this reason it has no meaning and must be eliminated by any means possible: (suicide, euthanasia, etc.). Supermen, whom Engelhardt calls 'cosmopolitans' and who are said to be experts in biogenetics, are invited to carry out this elimination by helping the terminal patient 'to die with dignity'.

The fourth man is a man without quality. He has gone from the technology of needs to the technology of desires. He only feels desires that have to be met and satisfied; he no longer feels needs. He can achieve this in particular through the most appropriate technology – the audio-visual media. Philosophical knowledge was specific to the first man, religious knowledge was specific to the second man, scientific knowledge was specific to the third man, and expressive knowledge is specific to the fourth man. There is a confusion between faces and masks, between history and legend. The media create this confusion and in such a way that in the end even legend no longer exists. This is the new knowledge, the knowledge of art or aesthetic knowledge. Radical man is thus constituted. Radical man professes a total, possessive and anarchical individualism; he expresses himself in a series of negations; he is against the family, he is anti-militarist, anti-clerical, anti-party, and against the state. He attributes an absolute value to his spontaneity, with its socio-political consequences of sexual liberation, homosexuality, feminism, abortion, divorce, the fight against lunatic asylums, against prisons, against concordats, in favour of the abolition of religious teaching, etc. He is the man of radical anti-culture.

For this man, the person and the

individual are not the same thing. The person is only a set of activities or properties, such as mental operations, self-awareness, the sensorial, and the capacity to communicate and to engage in symbolic representation. Where such activities do not exist, there is not a person but an individual. Thus, for example, when a man who is not conscious is killed, there is no guilt because an individual and not a person is being killed. Thus it is explained that the destruction of embryos, therapeutic cloning, eugenesis, euthanasia, etc. are all licit.



The only evil is repression. Nobody must inhibit anyone else. The phrase 'we are all perfect' is used to counter the saying 'we are all sinners'. Each person is his own yardstick of good. Thus each person can use other people and everything that exists as objects to meet his own desires. Thus one is completely free. One has rights but no duties. Public power is legitimised solely through the principle of utility. Happiness is the same as well-being and pleasure, which is not a matter of meeting needs but of satisfying desires, of consuming objects, things, and experiences. Consumerism is the new god; nothing can exist without this god.

The only limit to radical man is the contract. The law does not bind him because this is directed towards the common good which he denies. A contract is accepted only

as reciprocity and only when it is advantageous. Contracts that are not advantageous are not renewed. And when the party that is disadvantaged rebels, power of any kind is used by the strong to suppress the weak. Thus the production, the indiscriminate commercialisation, of any kind of weapon is justified, and the greatest satisfaction is reached. One goes from the defence of the rights of man to the defence of the man of rights.⁹

The environment in which this man lives is the evolved world of high technology, a world in which the rich countries of the world wish to dictate the rules to everyone else. This man dwells within computerised economic globalisation in order to live at the expense of the world of the excluded, the poor countries who no longer matter except as potential for exploitation/investment, both of raw materials or cheap manual labour. Investments are made in anonymous fashion by companies in which the sole motivation is the best economic gain possible in line with the variation of markets, without any attention being paid to the economic disorders produced in poor countries because of the flight of capital abroad.

As a result, we have 'science without a conscience' as the expression of *homo potens*, the lord of life and death, who nonetheless continues to fear death, which he wants to mask by even using corpses at luxurious funerals that are fixed in a smile. Despite all this experience one can see that *homo potens* at a deep level has become, even though this is something that is not acknowledged, *homo pavidus*.

We should not be surprised at the fact that in a world that wants to organise itself in this way depression turns out to be the greatest murderer that exists.

As without doubt we will hear during this international conference, in the culture of post-modernity, there will be those who explain depression as a conflict caused by old sexual taboos examined by psychoanalysis; or by biological problems caused by cerebral serotonin or noradrenalin; or by what are termed cerebral cognitive conflicts, akin to the bugs or

viruses in computers; or by reactions that are termed systemic because they can be treated with reference to the 'system', within family therapy; other people refer to Gestalt theories and argue that depression is due to a kind of psychic pattern caused by endogenous and exogenous factors which in the instinct for self-conservation reject unpleasant events.

There can be no doubt that there are forms of depression caused by physiological disturbances and that they must therefore be treated by the drugs and medicines which cure them. There are also psychological, affective or every other kinds of disturbance. But in essentials, in my opinion, the whole of this post-modern mentality, which in this paper we have tried to summarise and systemise, in varyingly explicit ways penetrates the cultural contents of contemporary society and provides us with a 'parology' of instability. We are referring here to the decline of thought, which is rightly called 'weak thought', and which as such can only generate the horrendous culture of death. This culture provokes an uncontrollable fear and is openly expressed in a whole series of forms of depression.

St. Thomas Aquinas and Depression

I would like to finish this introduction by contrasting the absurd thought of the radical anti-culture with some aspects of 'strong' medieval thought as expressed by one of its most important thinkers – St. Thomas Aquinas. In his own way, with the term 'sloth', he drew near to what we now call 'depression'. As in a painting by Caravaggio, with the light and darkness of St. Thomas and post-modernity, we will provide a framework for the study that we are shortly to engage in.

Turning to the thought of St. Gregory, St. John Damascene, St. Isidore of Seville and St. John Cassian, St. Thomas Aquinas provides us with a concise summary of aspects that were considered of importance in ecclesiastical thought and which in my opinion can in our age be thought about to advantage

when discussing depression and its cure.

St. Thomas says that sloth is a kind of sadness that has a corporeal connotation which increases with the heat of the day and the season. Some people complain that with it the wished for spiritual fruits do not materialise. It must be borne and overcome. It so depresses the spirit that a depressed person pays attention to nothing and his sadness is thus aggravated.¹⁰ It involves tedium in action. It is a torpor of the mind that allows nothing good to be begun. '*Torpor mentis bona negligentis inchoare*'. It is an evil in itself and in its effects. It is an evil in itself because it sees as evil that which is good. It is evil in its effects because it diverts man from doing good. Its wrongdoing is concentrated around his very desires. It is a sadness that is experienced because of something that is good. It increases with deficient corporeal interaction. Sloth despises the goods that God gives us. It can be defeated by thinking about and experiencing spiritual goods.¹¹

According to St. Gregory there are six daughters of sloth: malice, rancour, pusillanimity, desperation, torpor in relation to precepts, and the movement of the mind towards what is illicit.¹² St. Isidore says that sloth is an inclination towards improper rest,¹³ and that from it comes idleness, sleepiness, unsuitable mental processes, disquiet of the body, instability, verbosity and curiosity.

It is a kind of sadness under whose weight people are encouraged to engage in certain actions. It weighs upon the spirit and encourages the person to do what most engenders sadness and to avoid what can generate happiness. In order to avoid sloth a man must flee from what causes him sadness or detach himself from those that cause him sadness. Another way of doing this is to do what he likes doing. A flight from purpose is caused by hopelessness; flight from the goods that lead him to his purpose is caused by pusillanimity; the non-fulfilment of precepts is engendered by rancour; a detestation of spiritual goods is brought about by malice; the abandonment of what is spiritual for material appetites is caused by the movement of the mind to-

wards what is illicit. Thus bitterness is generated as an effect of rancour.¹⁴

Sloth is in opposition to joy. It involves becoming sad about the divine good that is enjoyed through charity. St. John Cassian says that sloth is frequently encountered in those who live alone and is the most contagious and frequent enemy of people who live in the desert.¹⁵

Sloth is sadness of spiritual good understood as a divine good. And it comes to be a mortal sin when it obtains the complete consent of reason as a flight from, aversion towards, and detestation of, divine good. When it does not arrive at full consciousness but remains in the senses then it is only a venial sin. It is not a drawing away from a spiritual good but from divine good itself. Although amongst the saints there are certain aspects of sloth, they did not fully acknowledge this.¹⁶

Conclusion

It appears that we thus come to link St. Thomas Aquinas with post-modernity: in the final analysis sloth is sadness in relation to the divine good that is enjoyed through charity. This divine good is nothing else but the divine life itself. To become sad about it is to understand it as an evil, as something that is inconvenient, to deny it. To deny life is death. The whole of the thought of post-modernity leads to death within the so-called radical anti-culture of the fourth man. Thus sloth meets post-modern *homo pavidus*, depressed man. The only remedy is affirmation of life in the face of the anti-culture of death. The only incontestable affirmation of life is the resurrection. Only the resurrection of Christ and our resurrection in him, beyond any brilliant religious invention but as a fact that took place and takes place, distances depression from any palliative and reaches its ultimate roots and destroys them completely. This is because it destroys death itself.

Thus all these summarising ideas about post-modernity and St. Thomas Aquinas serve as a small introduction to our international conference on depression.

We will begin our reflections with the masterful paper by His Eminence Cardinal José Saraiva Martins who will discuss biblical anthropology and Christian faith in relation to depression. After his reflections we will follow the three stages of the conference indicated in detail in the programme. First of all, we will analyse what depression is, then we will try to understand it in the light of the Word of God, and lastly we will draw some practical conclusions on how to address depression.

At the outset I would like to thank most cordially all the great experts who will favour us by accompanying us during this reflection, placing at our disposal their knowledge, their learning and their skills. There can be no doubt that they provide an irreplaceable support for the carrying out of the mission that the Holy Father entrusted to the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care. Once again many thanks to them and many thanks to all of you for your highly-qualified presence

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Notes

¹ Cf. I. SANNA, *L'antropologia cristiana tra modernità e postmodernità* (Brescia, 2001), pp. 160-161.

² Cf. F. NIETZSCHE, *Ecce homo, Wie man wird was man ist*; Italian edition: *Come si diventa ciò che si è*, (Milan, 1965), pp. 80-117.

³ Cf. M. HEIDEGGER, *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens* (Pfullingen, 1953), p. 76; *Essere e Tempo* (Milan, 1976), pp. 168-178.

⁴ Cf. L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (Turin, 1964), prop. 6,52, 521, 41, 42, 4311; *Ricerche filosofiche* (Turin, 1967) I, 124, 130-132. *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus e Quaderni*, 1914-1916, prop. 8,7,16., prop. 8,7,16.

⁵ J-F LYOTARD, *Il postmoderno spiegato ai bambini* (Milan 1987), p. 28; *La condizione postmoderna* (Milan, 1981), pp. 6, 20-24, 69-76, 98-122; *Postmoderno e filosofia*, p. 410.

⁶ For the works by Vattimo see: G. FORNERO, *Postmoderno e filosofia*, pp. 411-420; 'Il Postmoderno e le sue filosofie', in *Le Filosofie del novecento* (G. Fronero-Tassinari, Milan, 2002), pp. 1204-1214. Cf. G. VATTIMO, *La fine della Modernità, Nichilismo ed ermeneutica nella cultura postmoderna* (Milan, 1985), pp. 9-30, 189; *Crederci di credere. È possibile essere cristiano nonostante la Chiesa?* (Milan, 1996), pp. 25-26; *Dopo la cristianità. Per un Cristianesimo non religioso* (Milan, 2002), pp. 57-58; *Filosofia al presente*, 26; *La società trasparente* (Milan, 1989), pp. 11-17.

⁷ G. MORRA, *Il quarto uomo* (Rome, 1992), pp. 11-23.

⁸ I. SANNA, *L'Antropologia cristiana tra modernità e postmodernità* (Brescia, 2001), p. 337.

⁹ For this summary of post-modernity see: ISAÍAS DÍEZ DEL RÍO, 'Postmodernidad y nueva religiosidad', *RelCult XXXIX* (1993) pp. 59-63. M.P. GALLAGHER, *Parlare di Dio all'uomo postmoderno. Linee di discussione* (Pouppard, Rome, 1994), pp. 5, 7; *Fede e cultura* (Cinisello Balsamo, Milan, 1999), pp. 103-108; 124-125; G. BRUNI, *Dire Dio agli uomini d'oggi* (Pouppard, Rome, 1994), pp. 26-27; G. FORIERO, *Postmoderno e Filosofia* (Turin

1994), p. 411; N. ABAGNANO AND G. FORNERO, *Ecologia* (Turin, 1994), p. 335; I. SANNA, *op. cit.*, 220-236; C. TAYLOR, *Il disagio della modernità* (Rome/Bari, 1994), pp. 12-14; G. MUCCI, *La diffusione dell'Individualismo* (CivCatill, 1997), pp. 468-477; R. CESARANI, *Raccontare il postmoderno* (Turin, 1997), pp. 140-145; D. HARVEY, *La crisi della Modernità* (Milan, 1993), p. 63; GATTO TROCÍ, *Nomadi spirituali* (Milan, 1998), p. 17; CH. SINISCALCHI, *Il dio della California* (Rome, 1998), pp. 33-34; G. FILORAMO, *Il risveglio della gnosi ovvero diventare dio* (Rome/Bari, 1990); J. VERNETTE, *La nuova era* (Rome, 1998), pp. 111-123; F. VOLIPI, 'Nichilismo o nichilismo', *Dfil.*, pp. 756-758; A. SANTUCCI 'Nichilismo', *EncFil*, III, pp. 890-891; V. POSENTI, *Terza Navigazione, Nichilismo e Metafisica* (Rome, 1998), pp. 352-353; G. ARDISONE, *Il postmoderno* (Milan, 1998), pp. 28-32; Z. BAUMAN, *Postmodern Ethics*, (Oxford/Cambridge, 1993), p. 240; DOTOLO, *Secolarismo e Nichilismo nella Fides et ratio* (Cinisello Balsamo 1999), p. 270); S. LATORA, *La ripresa del primato dell'Etica* (Cinisello Balsamo, 1994), pp. 125-126; M. MCKEEVER, 'Postmodern with a difference', *StMore*, 37 (1999) pp. 185-214; R. FRATALLONE, *L'etica teologica e le istanze della postmodernità* (Cinisello Balsamo, 1994), pp. 76-77; G. CHIURASI, *Il postmoderno* (Turin, 1999), pp. 18-22; S. CREMASCHI, *Ecologismo*, ENCFUSU, p. 243.

¹⁰ ST JOHN DAMASCENE, *De Fide orthodoxa* I.II, c.14. MG 94, 932B.

¹¹ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, Secunda Secundae, q.35, a. 1 Marietti, 1952.

¹² ST. GREGORY, XXXI *Moral* C. 45 al 17 in Vet 31 n.88 ML 76, 621 B.

¹³ ST. ISIDORE, *De Summo Bono*, Al. Senten. I.II, c. 37 ML 83, 638 C.

¹⁴ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, Secunda Secundae, q.35, a. 4. Marietti, 1952.

¹⁵ ST. JOHN CASSIAN, *Lib. X de Insititutis Cenobiorum*, ML 49,363 A.

¹⁶ ST. THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, Secunda Secundae, q.35, a. 2-3. Marietti, 1952.



PROLUSION

JOSÉ SARAIVA MARTINS

Depression: the Clinical Phenomenon, Biblical Anthropology, and Christian Faith

Introduction

Depression has become the illness of our century, almost a symbol of modern times. Perhaps it is not very meaningful to refer to statistics, but according to some calculations depression afflicts 12% of the population.

Because it is so widespread, depression has also been defined as being the 'common cold' of psychiatry. It afflicts men and women, young people and the elderly, the inhabitants of industrialised countries and of developing countries (cf. Nuber, 1991, 6).

A group of researchers has gone beyond this by asking whether we are not all depressed (cf. Woodruff, 1975); and have posed a disquieting question: 'how normal is it to be depressed?' (Zung, 1972). The answer is clear: depression has never been a normal state, even though, as is increasingly demonstrated, in this field there is a notable confusion at the level of concepts, with the absence of a clear distinction between, for example, sadness and mourning (reactions that are completely natural to a situation of loss) and depression as an illness. Indeed, the word 'depression' can have different meanings: it can define a feeling, a clinical state, or the style of a person's character (cf. Friedman, 1974, 282).

This paper does not want to engage in a clinical study of the nature and treatment of depression, but seeks, rather, to be a Christian

reflection on a mental phenomenon that also has a religious and spiritual dimension. Specifically from this point of view, after briefly examining the phenomenon of depression, questions will be raised about how depression is seen in biblical anthropology and the possible response of the Christian faith.

1. The Phenomenon of Depression

a. Its definition and classification

By depression is meant a set of symptoms that bring about a sad and 'downcast' mood, a lack of interest and of impulse, motory and psychic inhibitions, with mental contents that are typically depressive, accompanied by specific somatic disturbances (cf. Lindzey, Thompson and Spring, 1991, 685-712.).

In ending his analysis of the different classifications of depression, R. E. Kendall finds that the most frequent criterion is the distinction between depression of an endogenous/psychotic kind and depression of a reactive/neurotic kind. The distinguishing point is to be identified in the ability of the patient to face up to reality (cf. Kendell, 1976, 25; Kendell – Courlay, 1970, 257 etc). Symptoms such as hallucinations, and perhaps also some somatic symptoms (disturbance of sleep, weight loss), can be associated with the psychotic

type. Feelings of guilt, anxiety and agitated forms of behaviour can be associated with the neurotic form.

Another proposal, which is of a psychodynamic orientation, is the one formulated by Arieti and Bemporad. These authors are convinced that in most cases of depression it is possible to identify whether one is dealing with psychotic depression or neurotic depression, but they propose to designate these two forms 'severe' depression or 'mild' depression by employing the subjective criteria of the patient, that is to say whether he or she does or does not accept his or her own depression. If the patient accepts his or her depression as a way of living, and thus lives it out as syntonically, then it is severe depression, i.e. psychotic depression. If, on the other hand, his or her depression is not accepted as a way of living and the person looks for help, the depression is seen as dystonic, that is to say it is mild (i.e. neurotic) depression.

b. Depression, sadness and unhappiness

Depression cannot be reduced to a single factor. It is the result of the coinciding of different factors. Biological, historical, environmental and psychological factors play a certain role in its beginning and its evolution (cf. Fennell, 1998, 169).

Many people never reach a state of clinical depression. Such depression, with the feeling of paralysis

that it involves, is different from normal sadness. People with clinical depression, in general, demonstrate physical and psychic alterations; people who are not depressed manifest certain mental signs of sadness.

In addition, people often confuse depression with unhappiness. Often one can hear the phrase 'I feel depressed', even though the person concerned only wants to say that he or she is not happy. Until one has really experienced depression one cannot realise the enormous difference that exists between being depressed and being unhappy. When we are unhappy, despite the scale of the tragedy that has afflicted us, we remain in contact with reality. When other people offer us consolation and love we can still feel gratitude for their warmth and support. But when we are depressed we feel like people who are excluded from the rest of the world. The comfort and love offered by other people do not penetrate our barrier and we feel neither consoled nor loved. To experience real depression means to feel entrapped in pitch or suffocated by some dense, heavy material or buried alive in a dark tunnel. The depressed person is interested in nothing and nobody, and does not feel any hope (Kenneth, 2002, 28).

2. Biblical Anthropology

a. Forms of depression in the Bible

It would be anachronistic to look for a 'clinical' terminology in the Bible, but, on the other hand, given that we are dealing here with universal human experiences, traces of such experiences also exist in the biblical texts. We ask ourselves, in particular, in what form depression is presented in the Old Testament and what remedies are offered for it in the sacred texts.

In the 1990s a rather lively polemic developed between different psychologists. This polemic was generated by an essay published by C.J. Frost, a lecturer at Midway College in the United States of America, which called into question the clinical concept of depression based upon the model of homeostasis, and instead proposed

the concept of melancholy as an alternative by which to understand and assess the feeling provoked by an experiential incongruence. Frost argued that the concept is widely present in the literature on religion in general, and in the Hassidic works (biblical texts), as analysed by Elie Wiesel (Frost, 1992, 71).

In short, the author argued that many people labelled as depressed do not suffer from depression (in a clinical sense, that is to say from an abnormal, negative state) but from melancholy (a positive state, which is actively chosen). The point of departure of the author is Hassidic literature, where melancholy means a special configuration of the person's perception: the vision of incongruity. There are certain events in life where the only appropriate human response is melancholy. This does not mean to say that the theories about depression are necessarily false, or that the very concept of depression should be eliminated. The author suggests that a sub-group of experiences could exist, experiences hitherto classified as being depressive, but which could be better assessed and addressed as melancholy.

Beginning with the realm of symptoms, we can read anew certain biblical texts, and in particular a number of psalms, as an expression of the depressive state. Amongst the most visible symptoms that we find in these psalms, we may list the following: sadness, a lack of interest, a reduced capacity for work, disturbances of sleep, weight loss, feelings of guilt, suicidal thoughts (including the desire to die or never to have been born), and the desire to cry. Some examples can be taken from the psalms, where, indeed, some of these symptoms can be recognised.

Psalm 55 (vv. 5-6): fear, darkness (and more extensively vv. 2-15; 17-24):

My heart is in anguish within me,
The terrors of death have fallen
upon me.

Fear and trembling come upon
me,
And horror overwhelms me.

Psalm 88 (vv. 1-6): fear, a life transformed into a hell, a man without help:

O Lord, my God, I call for
Help by day;
I cry out in the night before thee.
Let my prayer come before thee.
Incline they ear to my cry!

For my soul is full of troubles,
And my life draws near to Sheol.
I am reckoned amongst those
who go
down to the Pit;
I am a man who has no strength...

Psalm 102 (vv. 1-12): seems to express certain physiological symptoms of depression:

Hear my prayer, O Lord;
Let my cry come to thee!
Do not hide thy face from me
In the day of my distress!
Incline thy ear to me;
Answer me speedily in the day
When I call!

For my days pass away like
smoke,
And my bones burn like a furnace.
My heart is smitten like grass,
and withered.
I forget to eat my bread.
Because of my loud groaning
My bones cleave to my flesh

One of the corporeal symptoms of neurotic depression can be *agitated behaviour*. This phenomenon was already documented in the ancient world, including the biblical world. 1 Kings 21:27-28 describes the reaction of Ahab to the prophecy of Elijah who had pronounced the divine sentence: 'And when Ahab heard those words, he rent his clothes, and put sackcloth on his flesh, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about dejectedly'. Tearing one's clothes, putting on sackcloth, fasting etc., are all forms of behaviour that are associated with mourning. However, the reference to going about dejectedly would indicate a state of depression.

We should also take into consideration *Psalm 35:14*: 'as though I grieved for my friend or my brother; I went about as one who laments his mother, bowed down and in mourning', and *Psalm 38:6*: 'I am utterly bowed down and prostrate; all the day I go about mourning'. These two examples place together

walking (going about) with being bowed and prostrate, which are signs of depression. And there is also *Psalm 42:10b*: 'Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?' (cf. *Psalm 43:2*: 'For thy art the God in whom I take refuge... Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?').

Another example of agitated behaviour as a symptom of depression is to be found in *Job 30:28*: 'I go about blackened, but not by the sun; I stand up in the assembly, and cry for help. I am a brother of jackals, and a companion of ostriches. My skin turns black and falls from me, and my bones burn with heat. My lyre is turned to mourning, and my pipe to the voice of those who weep'. These verses appear in the context of laments, to which is associated, some verses later on, the expression: my lyre is turned to mourning (cf. Barre, 2001, 180-181).



b. The Biblical answers to depression

If biblical anthropology knew about the phenomenon of depression, one can ask what answer the holy texts gave to this disturbance. They found the answer in certain fundamental beliefs that were also remedies: the belief that man is always loved and appreciated by God, who is always near to man;

that the world, in general terms, is not hostile to man, but good because it expresses the greatness of God; that the world has meaning because its Creator is present within it; and that it is normal to express one's emotions.

Such beliefs are emphasised in particular in certain psalms.

a) *The appreciation and unconditional love of God.* Biblical faith offers an indisputable point of reference as to its value, for example in *Psalm 9-10* (vv. 33-35) we find:

Arise, O Lord; O God lift up thy hand;
Forget not the afflicted.
Why does the wicked renounce God,
And say in his heart, 'Thou wilt not call to account'?

Thou dost see; yes, thou dost note
Trouble and vexation,
That thou mayest take in into thy hands;
The hapless commits himself to thee;
Thou hast been the helper of the fatherless.

b) *The belief that the world, in general terms, is not hostile but good, and expresses the greatness of God.* We can refer here to *Psalm 8* where the psalmist contemplates the greatness of the creation:

O Lord, our God
How majestic is thy name in all the earth!
Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted...
When I look at thy heavens, the work
Of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars which thou hast established;
What is man that thou art mindful of him,
And the son of man that thou dost care for him?

c) *The belief that the world has meaning because God himself is present within it.* We can refer here to *Psalm 23* which expresses its strong belief in the presence of God, even in the dark, or to *Psalm 139* (vv. 13-14), which sings of the wonder of the wisdom of God:

For thou didst form my inward parts,
Thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise thee, for thou art fearful and wonderful!
Wonderful are thy works!
Thou knowest me right well.

d) *The belief that it is normal to express one's own inner feelings.* Some psalms strongly express feelings of disappointment, anger and pain. For example, there is *Psalm 6*, which appears to be a description of the most recognisable symptoms of depression, such as laments, insomnia, physical weakness etc. (vv 2-8):

Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing;
O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled.
My soul also is sorely troubled.
But thou, O Lord, how long?...

I am weary with my moaning;
Every night I flood my bed with tears;
I drench my couch with my weeping.
My eye waste away because of grief,
It grows weak because of all my foes!

All these remedies proposed by biblical anthropology are also valid today. The therapeutic value of the above-mentioned beliefs is still intact. Christian faith, however, adds further perspectives regarding the events of life and thus on depression as well.

3. Depression and the Christian Faith

A relevant number of studies demonstrate the positive impact of the spiritual and religious resources of a person on his or her mental health, and thus on depression as well (Larson and Larson, 2003, 44). Amongst the beneficial effects to be encountered, it has been ascertained that the spiritual resources of the depressed patient have accelerated the healing process. This function of spirituality refers, however, only to the mental and cognitive processes, and

does not have any effect on the biological symptoms of depression, such as weight loss, sleeplessness, reduced concentration etc. (cf. Larson and Larson, 2003, 44). In order to orientate ourselves in the field of the relationship between spirituality and mental health, we should bear in mind certain distinctions.

a. Depression and desolation

One of the contributions of Christian spirituality is the distinction made between depression and desolation: this latter can have spiritual causes. An analysis of desolation is one of the treasures of the book 'Spiritual Exercises' by St. Ignatius of Loyola. In n. 317 he offers us this definition of desolation: 'Fourth rule, Regarding spiritual desolation. By desolation I mean... the darkness of the soul, inner disturbance, the stimulus to low and earthly things; dismay at every kind of agitation and temptation, such as they lead to distrust, without hope and without love; as a result of which the soul is completely lazy, lukewarm, saddened and as though it were separated from its Creator and Lord'.

This definition brings out the similarities and the differences between desolation and depression.

a) Both states have in common the fact that the grief refers to a past experience; present-day experiences are presented as being emotionally unsatisfying, boring and unpleasing; the faculties of the will are weakened and those of the intellect function in an inappropriate way; and the whole of the dynamic of life and of interest in the outside world are empty.

b) There are, however, differences that help us to distinguish between the two states of mind.

– In spiritual desolation, the grieving refers more to the *relationships with the person of God*; the principal problem is worry about the disappearance of the effects of consolation; the spiritual faculties work in a distorted way; and the person does not see the fundamental cause of the temptation to which he or she thinks he or she has, to varying degrees, consented.

– In depression, on the other hand, grieving is more centred round the self-image that the per-

son has formed for himself or herself or thinks that others have of him or her; the person does not manage to identify the real problem and no explanation convinces him or her; his or her spiritual faculties are inhibited; and the causes of all this are hidden in the processes of the unconscious (cf. Aufauvre, 2003, 47-56).

In order to discern the transcendental origin of this experience the following criteria are useful:

1) The person continues to tend in a sincere way towards perfection;

2) Despite all the difficulties at the level of meditation, the person makes progress in his or her moral life: he or she is humble, benevolent and attentive towards other people. From a psychological point of view, one could add that it is clear that his or her will is intact, indeed, is inclined towards an increasing co-operation.

3) In his or her memory there predominate memories of previous graces received, i.e., in his or her soul there prevails nostalgia for God.

4) Although meditation and prayer bear no fruit, his or her interior activities, contemplation and self-analysis remain intact; his or her soul lives in the presence of God (cf. Marcozzi, 1963, 132-135).

b) The preventive function of the spiritual life

A regular spiritual life can prevent neurosis, including reactive depression. This is explained by taking into account the dynamics of neuroses.

Neuroses or abnormal existential reactions are the result of an anomalous working out of emotional stimulations; they are, that is to say, 'inadequate forms of reaction that have become chronic'. Neurotic symptoms can be rooted in reactions that may be considered normal in specific circumstances, but which become pathological because of their intensity and fixation. The core of every neurosis is anxiety, and the neurotic symptoms are essentially forms of the manifestation of this anxiety or of the defence against it.

Experimental research on the preventive function of spirituality in depression has demonstrated that

spirituality acts as a moderator between negative and stressful experiences and a depressive reaction (cf. Young *et al.* 2000, 49-58). In other words, an authentic and constant spiritual life also has the collateral effect of corroborating the personal structure, that is to say the interior milieu.

a) A spiritual life provides first and foremost *greater self-awareness*. There are few cultural or artistic activities that direct so much attention towards themselves as religion. Christianity is a constant call to conversion, to purification, and to change. Prayer and confession, for example, are always, by their very nature, activities centred round the person. The first positive effect of a constant spiritual life is thus greater self-awareness. It should be said that psychotherapy also aims, albeit at another level, to achieve growing self-awareness on the part of the person as a path and means of healing. This return to the core of the person in spiritual practice takes place at three points: the first consists in the purification of the mind of everything that St. Ignatius called 'disordered inclinations'; the second is a positive orientation towards higher values (which today is often called self-transcendence); and the third is real interior freedom. Mystic literature calls these three moments the 'three ways': purification, illumination, and union with God.

b) Spiritual life places the believer in a continual situation of divine empathy. In order to organise his pastoral consultancy, S.M. Natale begins from the theological fact that the Incarnation is in fact a 'therapeutic process' of God, that is to say that an ontological acceptance of man by God (cf. Natale, 1977, 21). The point of encounter between theology and psychology is the following: the assumption that man is in basic terms 'acceptable'. Theology calls this state 'justification'. If the person becomes aware of it and accepts it, it is said that he or she is in a 'state of grace'.

c) Faith in God the Creator is the factor that assures meaning to life because it says that each person is created for a personal task in his or her life; that he or she is willed and loved by God. All of this offers the

believers a climate of deep mental security. But religion also performs a specific role at another level. Despite all our attempts, certain irrational phenomena – which are without meaning – remain: wars, destruction, suffering, and death itself. Well, only religion can offer man an acceptable answer to these examples of irrationality.

d) Faith in the risen Christ opens man up to hope, to the paschal joy, and to an optimism that generates a state of mind that is diametrically opposed to the state of mind of depression.

We have examined some psychotherapeutic processes that seek to reinforce the mechanisms of self-defence of the human psyche. The common denominator of all these processes is the fact that they increase the resistance of the interior milieu of man. The same processes, we have seen, are also present in spiritual life, which is not made up of specific practices but of a continuous, stable and personal interior experience.

Conclusion

We have been engaged in a journey within the phenomenon of depression and began with certain data of the professional world of psychology and psychiatry. We then passed through the biblical world, finding therein clues that attest to a knowledge about depression and related responses to it within biblical anthropology. Lastly, we came to the world of Christian spirituality, which in a surprising fashion contains many psychotherapeutic principles that can prevent the imposition of depression and provide relief to it.

This journey has opened up to us new horizons for the study of depression. Suffering man has always occupied a privileged position in biblical anthropology and in the Christian message. God does not forget about the sick person. Indeed, he or she is at the centre of His compassionate love. In the Bible God reveals His identity by saying to Moses: 'I am the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob'. We could translate these words in the following way: 'I am the God of the sick, of the poor, and of the

depressed'. In fact, Jesus specifically announced the beginning of his messianic mission with the words: 'I have come for the sick...', and this included everyone, depressed people as well. Spiritual life transforms this promise into concrete contents that offer the believer spiritual support in facing up to every illness, and thus to depression as well.

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