

# The Problem of God in the Book of Job

Hector Scerri

*Dept. of Fundamental and Dogmatic Theology*

## 1. Introduction

"The gods can either take away evil from the world and will not, or, being willing to do so, cannot; or they neither can nor will, or lastly, they are both able and willing. If they have the will to remove evil and cannot, then they are not omnipotent. If they can, but will not, then they are not benevolent. If they are neither able nor willing, then they are neither omnipotent nor benevolent. Lastly, if they are both willing and able to annihilate evil, how does it exist?" (Epicurus)<sup>1</sup>

I deem this quotation from the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BC) as being most fitting to introduce this research article on the book of Job. The paper seeks to delve into an existential question at the confluence of Scripture studies, metaphysics and systematic theology. According to Samuel Terrien, Job, "the hero of the folk tale is a semi-nomadic sheikh, pious, virtuous, and prosperous, suddenly stricken with the loss of his children, his health and his wealth."<sup>2</sup> James Crenshaw affirms that together with Qoheleth, the book of Job marks "the apex of dissent in the Old Testament."<sup>3</sup> The text of the Book of Job raises many questions, both to the inexperienced reader, as well as to the well-versed scholar. Job endures a number of hair-raising calamities. It is this harrowing situation which stimulates us to reflect upon so many existential dilemmas. Terrien explains that

<sup>1</sup> B. EVANS, ed., *Dictionary of Quotations*, New York: Delacorte Press, 1968, 209.

<sup>2</sup> S. TERRIEN, "Job", in M. Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, VIII, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987, 98.

<sup>3</sup> J. CRENSHAW, "The Human Dilemma and Literature of Dissent", in D. Knight, (ed.), *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, 241.

"to Job, his wife, and his three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar), this uncommon misfortune is inexplicable, but the audience is permitted to learn, through a vista into the heavenly council, that Job is being tested, with the acquiescence of God (whom Job calls Yahweh), by the prosecuting attorney of the celestial court, called 'the *satan*' (not a proper name), one of 'the sons of Elohim'."<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, I shall not be treating the themes of Job's righteousness or the covenant.<sup>5</sup> Nor shall I discuss the problem of evil. I will be attempting to study the *problem of God* which Job experiences. "God is problematic to men in many different senses and ways."<sup>6</sup> When Job asks the "why" of evil and suffering, the only answer which is hinted to him is firmly anchored in the incomprehensibility of God and his ineffability, attributes pronounced in one of the definitions of the Fourth Lateran Council.<sup>7</sup> Reflection and study reveal that the book of Job is concerned with man's quest for God. The contemporary theologian Félix-Alejandro Pastor has affirmed in very clear terms that

<sup>4</sup> TERRIEN, "Job", 98.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. J. DANIELOU, "Job: The Mystery of Man and God", in N. Glatzer, (ed.), *The Dimensions of Job*, New York: Schocken Books, 1969, 101.

<sup>6</sup> G. KAUFMAN, *The Problem of God*, Cambridge/MA: Harvard University Press, 1972, 9.

<sup>7</sup> *Ineffability*, when applied to God, refers to his being "unutterably mysterious and despite the divine names, ultimately unnamable (Ex 3,14; Jn 1,18; 1 Tim 1,17; Rom 11,33-36)," G. O'COLLINS - E.G. FARRUGIA, *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000, 119. In fact, while known through his self-disclosure in revelation, God remains indescribable, or, to be more precise, we can say that he can be described only negatively, as affirmed by the definition of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 against the Cathari and the Albigensians: "Firmiter credimus et simpliciter confitemur, quod unus solus est verus Deus, aeternus, immensus et incommutabilis, incomprehensibilis, omnipotens et ineffabilis, Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus," H. DENZINGER - A. SCHÖNMEYER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, § 800. See F.-A. PASTOR, *La Lógica de lo Inefable*, Roma: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1986; Id., "Io credo in Dio", in R. Fisichella, ed., *Catechismo della Chiesa Cattolica. Testo integrale e commento teologico*, Città del Vaticano - Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1993, 658; R. DEWBY, "Qoheleth and Job: Diverse Responses to the Enigma of Evil", *Spirituality Today* 37 (1985) 323-324.

"the theological question of humanity's search for God, as possibility or as reality, as act of believing or content of belief, has always had an important place in ecclesial thought. Throughout the centuries, various models of understanding have succeeded one another in finding favour with the various theological schools. Apophatism and cataphatism, fideism and rationalism, spiritualism and immanentism have been the most persistent themes in developing the fundamental religious question of the search for and recognition of God, in [the] light of existing conditions, internal logic, and formal linguistic structure... The human desire to affirm the divine reality, to know it and to give it a name [has yielded] to various temptations: idolatrous anthropomorphism or escape into irrationality, intellectualist rationalism or fideist voluntarism, illusory titanism or surrender to superstition."<sup>8</sup>

Thus, it is within this light that we can start to understand that the underlying theme or leitmotif of the book of Job is not a theory on the problem of evil, but the experience of a man who knew the problem in all its difficulties at first hand, and yet without any form of dishonesty or illusion, "staked his life on goodness."<sup>9</sup> Even Terrien is of the same opinion. He affirms that "the Jobian poet did not attempt to solve the problem of the existence of evil. He used the scandal of undeserved suffering as a starting point for an exploration of the nature of faith,"<sup>10</sup> indeed a quest for God.

"Let him [God] kill me if he will;  
I have no other hope than to justify my conduct in his eyes"  
(Job 13,15).

The reader would probably *prima facie* tend to side with Job, also putting oneself in his shoes. Yet, it would be certainly not be inappropriate at this stage, to join Elihu, and with him exclaim: "Yes, the greatness of God exceeds our knowledge" (36,26).

<sup>8</sup> F.-A. PASTOR, "Human Beings and their Search for God: The Doctrine of the Magisterium of the Church between Vatican I and Vatican II", in R. Latourelle, ed., *Vatican II, Assessment and Perspectives. Twenty-five Years After*, II, New York - Mahwah/NJ: Paulist Press, 1989, 367-368.

<sup>9</sup> J.H. EATON, *Job*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1985, 25.

<sup>10</sup> TERRIEN, "Job", 99-100.

## 2. A Bird's Eye-view of the Problem

As affirmed in the introduction above, the book of Job is not a quest to resolve the problem of evil, that is the problem of a loving God who permits suffering to crush the innocent. The book is basically "the thinking of one man and his perception of God".<sup>11</sup> On the same lines, Santiago Sia attests to the fact that "it would be presumptuous to conclude that the book of Job answers the question of suffering."<sup>12</sup> The author of the book of Job debates that "the very existential question that is still being put forward today is: How do human beings stand in relation to their God?"<sup>13</sup> The question of suffering urges us to question our personal relationship with God.

Henry Rowold is of the same opinion. He avers that the problem of the central character of the book does not revolve around Job's suffering: "the basic problem of the book of Job is relational: what is the relationship between God and humanity/Job, or on what basis does humanity/Job stand before God?"<sup>14</sup> This question of man's relationship to God will be reflected upon in greater detail towards the end of the paper.

Regarding the relationship between the Creator and the creature, it is useful, at this point, to refer once again to the magisterial pronouncements of the Fourth Lateran Council. What the latter affirms, in precise terms, is "an attempt at mediation between a theology of identity and a theology of difference. The Council posited between Creator and creature a dialectic of likeness and difference, in which the difference is always greater."<sup>15</sup> This statement was made in response to the errors of Gioacchino di Fiore.

Several commentaries on Job have highlighted the crucial problem, ever-present in the world, concerning the suffering of the just and the prosperity of the wicked. This falls within the ambit of discussions on the problem of evil, and is "the scandal

<sup>11</sup> D. COX, "A Rational Inquiry into God: Chapters 4-27 of the Book of Job", *Gregorianum* 67 (1986) 622.

<sup>12</sup> S. SIA, "Reflections on Job's Question", *Spirituality Today* 37 (1985) 240.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> H. ROWOLD, "Yahweh's Challenge to Rival: The Form and Function of the Yahweh-Speech in Job 38-39," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 (1985) 210.

<sup>15</sup> PASTOR, "Human Beings and their Search for God", 370. See DENZINGER - SCHÖNMETZER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, § 806.

and the anxiety within the heart of the pious Israelites."<sup>16</sup> However, quoting again the contrary opinion postulated by Dermot Cox, the book is not a theodicy.<sup>17</sup> Nor is it a treatise on justice or on the suffering of the innocent: "It is about Yahweh; it asks 'who is God?'"<sup>18</sup>

In his schematic presentation on the God of Revelation, Félix-Alejandro Pastor highlights the basic stages traversed in the Judaic explication of faith in God. In his exposition of the main features of this faith as experienced in the Old Testament, he first treats archaic henotheism and its acknowledgement of a mysterious, universal and benevolent God ('El), sovereign of nature and the world (Gen 33,20), the God of the patriarchs who protects his worshippers (Gen 30,43). Subsequently, the theology of the exodus and the covenant attests a proclamation of monolatry. This is "a monolatry of historical liberation and ethical loyalty."<sup>19</sup> Pastor then reflects upon the emphasis made by the prophets on the ethical norm of the religion of the covenant, and the call to be faithful to it. Pastor explains that "with the prophets, religious language affirms a transcendent and personal theism."<sup>20</sup>

It is appropriate to highlight what Pastor's presentation delineates on Sapiential theology as a whole. This is where the book of Job fits in:

"For the sages of Israel, the principle of wisdom coincides with the fear of God, identified with a practical knowledge of the divine will (Prov 1,7; 2,5). Sapiential reflection does not neglect the contemplative dimension of the religious experience in the form of

<sup>16</sup> A. ROLLA, "Il Libro di Giobbe", in *Il messaggio della salvezza*, Torino-Leumann: Elle Di Ci, 1969, 543: "... lo scandalo ed il turbamento nel cuore dei pii israeliti."

<sup>17</sup> The term *theodicy* was introduced by the German philosopher Gottfried Leibnitz (1641-1716) in his reply to Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), "who had once again raised the question: If God is all good and all powerful, where does evil come from and what does it mean? The question is older than the book of Job and finds its most poignant restatement in Jesus' abandonment on the cross (Mk 15,34). How can believers account for the suffering of the innocent and the faithful? Auschwitz, Dresden, Hiroshima and further scenes of mysterious evil in modern times have more than kept the question alive," G. O'COLLINS-E.G. FARRUGIA, "Theodicy", *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, 262. The tragic events of September 11, 2001 in New York and Washington also point incisively to the same question.

<sup>18</sup> COX, "A Rational Inquiry into God", 625.

<sup>19</sup> PASTOR, "The God of Revelation", in R. Latourelle - R. Fischella, eds, *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, New York: Crossroad, 1994, 356.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

an admiration for God's glory as revealed in the works of creation (Sir 42,15ff) and salvation history (Sir 44,1ff). But the sapiential theology also meditates God's silence, and faces the question of evil and the suffering of the just (Job 42,3,6)<sup>21</sup>.

### 3. *Job versus God?*

"I mean to remonstrate with God" (13,3).

Margarete Susman clearly pinpoints the situation which Job is undergoing: "Job is all alone vis-à-vis God. Neither his people nor humanity support him... He argues only on his own behalf. His dispute is only between God and himself."<sup>22</sup> How correct am I in putting the preposition "versus" in the subtitle of this section? On first thoughts, this section carried the subtitle *Job and God*. However, the over-used conjunction "and" is too poor in expressing the situation prevailing in the book, especially Job's innermost experiences. He shouts out:

"The arrows of Shaddai stick fast in me,  
my spirit absorbs their poison" (6,4).

The trinomial phrase, including the more provocative "versus", expresses the situation much better. Do we encounter a patient Job in the text? And, does Job live up to the often-used simile of his patience? Or is he, in fact, rebellious? Is he really against God? Or is it God who has waged war against him?

Nahum Glatzer, in the introduction to the already mentioned collection of essays, envisages the situation as one of "a hostile deity, and man is its antagonist."<sup>23</sup> The problem is in a way accentuated because in his speeches to Job, God makes no mention of the sufferings which the central character has undergone. "There are

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. See Id., "Io credo in Dio," 660.

<sup>22</sup> M. SUSMAN, "God the Creator", in N. Glatzer, (ed.), *The Dimensions of Job*, 87.

<sup>23</sup> GLATZER, "Introduction: A Study of Job", in Id., (ed.), *The Dimensions of Job*, 5.

neither words of comfort nor accusations."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the author of the biblical text depicts Job as "an exemplar of hubris."<sup>25</sup> Within the classical Greek tradition, this is the excessive pride towards or in defiance of the gods, which attitude often led to nemesis.

### 3.1 *What kind of god is God?*

Job attempts to discover the reason why God has turned against him, and seeks to defend himself in the face of the unjust charges brought forward against him. His expectation of an answer by God is a long one. Human counsel is seen to add to his ordeal. Furthermore, "Job's words about God's dealings with the world are without knowledge and only obscure the purposes of God."<sup>26</sup> Martin Buber entitles one of his articles "A God who hides his face"<sup>27</sup> (see 13,24), a deaf God. Buber also holds that the book of Job is not a philosophical quest on the problem of evil, but rather "a religious concern with the acting of God."<sup>28</sup>

The speculative philosopher Paul Weiss states that "what shocks us and should shock us is not Job's blasphemies, but God's."<sup>29</sup> It is quite surprising that the author of the book of Job presents us with a brutal God, proceeding to carry out anything the worst criminal would be ready to do! He pictures Job "as a pawn between God and Satan."<sup>30</sup> What kind of divinity is God? An aspect which should not be overlooked is that when he intervenes there is a shocking silence on the subject of man's righteousness and his suffering. For Dermot Cox, "what Yahweh does is challenge Job's concept of divinity."<sup>31</sup> God is depicted as being beyond "answerability" to man. The protagonist sees evidence of this in God's capriciousness and in his cruelty: "He can do as he wishes, man has no way of retaliating."<sup>32</sup>

Even Santiago Sia asks: "Is God truly capricious?"<sup>33</sup> Job accuses God of acting

<sup>24</sup> EATON, *Job*, 46.

<sup>25</sup> TERRIEN, "Job", 99.

<sup>26</sup> EATON, *Job*, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. GLATZER, "Introduction: A Study of Job", 56-65.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> P. WEISS, "God, Job and Evil", in N. Glatzer, (ed.), *The Dimensions of Job*, 183.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> COX, "A Rational Inquiry into God", 625.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 646.

as a sinister enemy; he acts as a capricious tyrant (9,18-19), a savage beast (16,7-9), and a treacherous assailant (16,12-14). Sia goes on to ask: "How credible is God?"<sup>34</sup> The problem is that for God there seems to be no essential difference between the good and the evil. God is bent on destroying both the blameless and the wicked (9,22-23). This is a great dilemma for Job, as well as for the reader. He believes in the supreme moral will of the Lord. Job demands an answer:

"I cry to you, and you give me no answer;  
I stand before you, but you take no notice" (30,20).

and

"Will no one give me a hearing?  
I have said my last word; now let Shaddai reply" (31,35).

But God seems to turn a deaf ear.

### 3.2 *Job's Experience of God*

What kind of God is Job in dialogue with? The experience of the afflicted personality of the text under study seems to contradict his belief in a just Deity. This brings us back to the sort of reasoning expressed by Epicurus in the introduction of this paper. Santiago Sia asks a series of similar questions:

"For how could God exist when it is obvious that there is no justice in a world where the wicked prosper and the just suffer and suffer intensely?... If the will of the Lord is for good, and if the divine power is supreme, then why does not the good that God wills come into being and why does God not remove evil?"<sup>35</sup>

In fact, much of Job's suffering comes from the fact that the caring God he has

<sup>33</sup> SIA, "Reflections on Job's Question", 238.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 237-238.



experienced in the past seems to be no longer present. God has deserted him, he argues. Indeed, "Job becomes angry with God and challenges not only divine justice but order in the universe. Job goes deeply into the revolt against the status quo."<sup>36</sup> This is what the reader attests to. But, at the conclusion of the text, a remarkable transformation takes place.

### 3.2.1 A Hidden and Deaf God

For a believer such as Job, "God's hiddenness", according to Gordon D. Kaufman, "may become a serious problem."<sup>37</sup> More than trying to cut the Gordian knots of ordinary day-to-day life, Job's search is "a burning quest for God's presence."<sup>38</sup> His previous experience is one of a bountiful provident God. During and after the calamities that befell him, Job finds it very difficult to "endure a *Deus absconditus*, a hidden God."<sup>39</sup> Job traverses the abyss of despair in his tireless search for God. Because for Job, God was the supreme Good. In the light of his experience, Job avers that God fails to make his presence tangibly felt to men, even though these cry out desperately to him. He seems to conceal himself even from those who are most faithful to him. Job's ever-present and pervading question is: If God is so omnipotent and supremely good, why is my prayer to him so empty and without results, in other words, fruitless?

The author vividly depicts this frame of mind when Job cries out:

"Will no one hear my prayer...?" (6,8), and  
 "He has thrown me into the mud;  
 I am no more than dust and ashes.  
 I cry to you, and you give me no answer;  
 I stand before you, but you take no notice" (30,19-20).

Job struggles against the remoteness of God who is silent and who hides his face. With deep sincerity, Job lashes out at this behaviour:

<sup>36</sup> DEWEY, "Qoheleth and Job", 323.

<sup>37</sup> KAUFMAN, *The Problem of God*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> J. CRENSHAW, *Old Testament Wisdom*, London: SCM Press, 1982, 62.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

"Why do you hide your face, and look on me as your enemy?" (13,24).

When Job implores God to mete justice, he utters:

"Will no one help me to know  
how to travel to his dwelling? ...  
If I go to the east, he is not there;  
or to the west, I still cannot see him" (29,3.8).

He sees God as far too great, far too powerful and far too distant from man to grant this demand. God turns a deaf ear to Job's anguish, expressed in these words:

"That is why I am full of fear before him,  
and the more I think,  
the greater grows my dread of him" (23,15).

Eventually, God *does give an answer* to Job. This is a very important point to highlight in the course of this paper. The answer which is given does not focus on why Job is suffering. A far more central issue is raised. It is an existential argument: "God's nature and [the] human being's relationship to this God. The response is at the same time a rebuke and a challenge to Job."<sup>40</sup>

### 3.2.2 An Unjust and Cruel God

In the sharp psychological struggle between Job and God, the prologue attests to man as being "a pawn between God and Satan."<sup>41</sup> According to Robert Gordis, this wager leads to "Job's misery and degradation as part of a cosmic experiment"<sup>42</sup> wherein God appears as unjust, and furthermore, as cruel. Coming close to blasphemy, Job "accuses the deity of injustice, capriciousness, and even sadism.

<sup>40</sup> SIA, "Reflections on Job's Question", 238.

<sup>41</sup> See GLATZER, "Introduction: A Study of Job", 4 and note 18.

<sup>42</sup> R. GORDIS, "The Temptation of Job - Tradition versus Experience in Religion," in N. Glatzer, ed., *The Dimensions of Job*, 76.

He compares God to some brute who elbows him into the refuse-filled ditch or to a soldier who kills for pleasure.<sup>43</sup> "Laying bitter allegations" (13,26), God, so it seems, deprives the righteous man of his rights, and vexes his soul, approaching him as a tyrant. God persecutes him with a strong hand, "dissolves [him] into the storm" (30,22); he renders him into a "byword" (17,6) for the marginalised, "casts him into the mire" (30,19), making him "a brother to the jackals" (30,29).

Moreover, the righteous man finds himself "watched over" by God during the day, and "terrified" during the night "with dreams and with visions" (33,15). In other words, to a would-be audience watching this spectacular drama, God acts as Job's enemy, "tears [him] in anger" (16,9), and "gnashes upon [him] with his teeth" (16,9). All these strong phrases come from Job's tongue. Furthermore, Job mentions occasions when God seems or, rather in fact, does the reverse, when he lets the wicked do what they will, and lets them unpunished. The wicked "grow old" (21,7), their "thighs padded with fat" (21,24), "see their offspring established" (21,8), and their homes "secure from fear" (21,9).

Eliphaz and his companions declare that for God there are no standards, no responsibility or morality. Yet, such divine attributes bind human beings. But, if they come from God, asks Horace Kallen, how can God be bound by such norms?<sup>44</sup> In other words, for instance, that a man should ask God to enter into judgement with man (see 22,4) would be presumptuous. Conversely, Job "holds that God's responsibility to himself alone is irresponsibility... There can be no common denominator between God and man, and every attempt to establish one proves abortive."<sup>45</sup>

According to the private bias of the human spirit, according to the preferences of man, and considering the need of man alone, God is seen to be unjust and cannot and should not be justified. Indeed, Job cries out:

<sup>43</sup> TERRIEN, "Job", 99.

<sup>44</sup> H. KALLEN, "Job the Humanist", in N. Glatzer, (ed.), *The Dimensions of Job*, 176.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

"If I protest against such violence,  
I am not heard,  
if I appeal against it, judgement is never given" (19,7).

Job experiences a profound feeling of moral injustice. He accuses God of being remote, heartless and unjust with him. For Athalya Brenner, "Job never doubts God's omnipresence or omnipotence — his ability to exercise both good and evil is never questioned. Job's complaint is directed against his choosing to treat man in an arbitrary, inexplicable and often destructive manner."<sup>46</sup> A central facet to Job's problem of God centres on God's showing his dark side in his *rapport* with human beings. Job's strivings to carry out God's will are without tangible results, because he feels that God does not bother about him.

Because of what he interprets as God's cruelty towards him, Job describes himself as having become "a creature on whose face [it is fit] to spit" (17,6), since he has been "struck by the hand of God" (19,21). Job argues vehemently with his comforters and vents his anger at God:

"He has set me up as his target:  
he shoots his arrows at me from all sides...  
Breach after breach he drives through me" (16,12.14).

Furthermore, Job sees God's behaviour towards him as a prolonged persecution: "He keeps inventing excuses against me and regards me as his enemy" (33,10).

### 3.2.3 God as "Destroyer"

I am borrowing this term as applied to God — "the Supreme Destroyer"<sup>47</sup> — from Athalya Brenner. In chapters 38-39, the author of the book of Job illustrates God as master of the cosmos and author of the perfection of creation. Reference to this facet of the Divine is expressed in 9,4-10, and summed up in: "The works he does are great and unfathomable, and his marvels cannot be counted" (9,10). However, Job also sees God as *destroyer*:

<sup>46</sup> A. BRENNER, "God's Answer to Job", *Vetus Testamentum* 31 (1981) 131.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

"He who crushes me for one hair,  
who, for no reason, wounds and wounds again...  
he destroys innocent and guilty alike" (9,17.22).

This is a paradox which constantly presses upon Job. He cannot reconcile the fact that God shows his dark side in his dealings with man,<sup>48</sup> whereas in the natural world these two dimensions of the Divine are both manifested and evidently balanced. For Dermot Cox, God is capricious and cruel to man; moreover, he is seen as "a creator who destroys his creation,"<sup>49</sup> and who is "the implacable enemy of mankind."<sup>50</sup> Job feels himself to be the target of divine enmity, just like the sea serpent (7,12), and at one point, exclaims:

"Proud as a lion, you hunt me down...  
attacking me again and again,  
your fury against me ever increasing" (10,16-17).

### 3.2.4 Other Aspects of Job's Experience of God

Crenshaw affirms that Job's experience is an endless search and striving for God and for knowledge.<sup>51</sup> One also observes that Job passes through several ups and downs. What one encounters on a careful reading of the text is a "fluctuation between doubt and certitude, faith and disbelief, as Job falls into despair and rises to hope."<sup>52</sup> At times, the moments of despair are marked by a *laissez-faire* attitude of 'why worry?' or 'why care?' with respect to God. Job feels so disgusted with God that he utters:

"What is the point of serving Shaddai?  
What should we gain from praying to him?" (21,15)

<sup>48</sup> "The Wrath of God has come to me" is the title of an article by Claude Cox in the review *Studies in Religion* 16 (1987) 195-204.

<sup>49</sup> Cox, "A Rational Inquiry into God," 649.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 638.

<sup>51</sup> See CRENSHAW, *Old Testament Wisdom*, 58.

<sup>52</sup> COX, "A Rational Inquiry into God," 621.

Samuel Terrien reflects on the existential meanderings experienced by Job. He observes that the questions which Yahweh hurls at Job from the whirlwind are often judged as a cruel display of omnipotence. This scholar comments:

"This charge would be legitimate had Job in the poem remained the humble and patient man of the prologue. The man in revolt, however, seeks to condemn God in order to force an acquittal and obtain the recognition of his righteousness (40,8)... He does not 'repent' (*shuv*) of crimes he has not committed (as the traditional translators erroneously put it), but he utterly grieves (*nihamti*; 42,6). Job's guilt is that of titanic arrogance. He erected himself the judge of deity."<sup>53</sup>

#### 4. *The Relationship between God and Man*

One observes a change of heart in Job with regard to the problem under investigation. Behind the might of a God of power, Job finally finds a haven in the God of righteousness who governs the world. This apparent dichotomy does not become a dualism, because the two aspects fuse into one. These two dimensions of the divine merge together when the God of reality not only ignores the defences of the friends in his speeches, but criticises them severely "for not having spoken correctly about me as my servant Job has done" (42,7). The voice from the tempest (see 38,1; 40,6) makes Job conscious of the crux of the tension: Job's affirmation of his own knowledge is an affront to God, the true possessor of knowledge.

The reader can imagine Job giving a deep breath of relief when he states:

"I know that you are all-powerful...  
I was the man who misrepresented your intentions  
with my ignorant words" (42,2-3).

Job renews his assertion of the omnipotence and grandeur of God. Job starts to experience God as an accessible reality who will not turn a deaf ear to his pleas. A dialogue is established between God and "the believer who questioned his ethics, but not his existence or might."<sup>54</sup> What Job was seeking is a God who cares, who is

<sup>53</sup> TERRIEN, "Job," 99.

<sup>54</sup> BRENNER, "God's Answer to Job," 136.

accessible, who listens and is capable of acknowledging the feelings of the individual being. Now aware that he has come closer to God, Job senses the emanation of a new hope in place of despair. Yet, despite this feeling, God remains always ineffable. In fact,

“every affirmation of faith must in some way reconcile in a corrective way cataphatic propositions and apophatic silence. The God of faith is linguistically ineffable, cognitively incomprehensible [and] ontologically transcendent... Linguistic forms, which are finite and limited, do not succeed in expressing fully the absolute, unconditioned, and infinite content of the divine message and of the divine mystery.”<sup>55</sup>

In accordance with what has been said, Dermot Cox asserts that the “problem” underlying the book of Job is *a personal question of the relationship between man and his concept of God*.<sup>56</sup> Daniel J. O’Connor avers that Job’s final words attest that he has come a long way and that he has completed a lonely and winding journey of suffering and searching.<sup>57</sup> He has sought consolation from friends, and a just verdict from God. He finds neither. However, his search has not been fruitless (see chapter 42): he attains a spiritual awareness of God’s presence, and a closeness to God, even in his humiliation (“dust and ashes” – 30,19). In fact,

“instead of a clear-cut reason for his suffering, Job is brought to an existential awareness of how he stands with God... Human wisdom consists in serving God, not in being equal to God in the knowledge of divine providence... The answer which God receives is not in the form of words, but in the form of an experience, that is, a realisation of creaturely existence in the presence of the Creator. It is not the time for questions but for faith and humility.”<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> PASTOR, “Human Beings and their Search for God,” 377. Several of the phrases used by Pastor in this quotation are taken from the documents of the Second Vatican Council, a fact to which he attests in the respective footnote: “ineffabile mysterium” (*Nostra Aetate* 1); “ex ineffabili misericordia” (*Nostra Aetate* 4); “ineffabilem Dei benignitatem” (*Dei Verbum* 13). See PASTOR, *ibid.*, 384 note 49.

<sup>56</sup> See COX, “A Rational Inquiry into God”, 651.

<sup>57</sup> See D.J. O’CONNOR, “Job’s Final Word – ‘I am consoled’ (42,6b)”, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 50 (1983-84) 181-197.

<sup>58</sup> SIA, “Reflections on Job’s Question,” 238-239.

In fact, knowing simply *that God is*, Job is led into a deeper wisdom. The problem of God, deeply embedded in his heart, takes a new direction because he has now taken new bearings.

### 5. Conclusion

Santiago Sia affirms that God "*does answer [Job's unquenched questions]. The answer given is not to the question why the innocent Job is suffering, but to the more profound point which Job has raised: God's nature and the human being's relationship to this God.*"<sup>59</sup> This appears as being both a rebuke and a challenge to Job. He is brought to an existential awareness of how he stands with God. As pointed above, the answer Job receives is not in the form of words. Instead, what he is given is a tangible experience — a realisation of oneself as creature in the presence of the Creator.

The author of Job is more interested in a more basic question out of which the problem of suffering emerges — What is one's relationship to God? A response to the sufferings undergone by Job depends to a large extent on an answer to this question. Hence, it is above all, an awareness of God and the commitment of the individual to him. This research, lying at the confluence of Scripture studies, metaphysics and systematic theology, therefore offers a conspicuous pointer to

"the absolute divine sovereignty over nature and history, over mysticism and morality. God manifests himself therefore as being at the same time both absolute and personal. On the one hand, God appears as [a] numinous reality, unconditioned and infinite; on the other, he reveals himself as also the basis for invincible trust and uncontainable religious awe."<sup>60</sup>

This is a far cry from what Job's "friends" tell him. He is dissatisfied with the answers or solutions they try to give him because all they do is an attempt to justify his suffering.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>60</sup> PASTOR, "Human Beings and their Search for God," 380.



At the end of the text, one observes that Job is transformed.<sup>61</sup> In fact, he withdraws his former objections and protests "because he has grasped that he is a creature and his destiny is well protected by this mysterious God who demands complete surrender on Job's part."<sup>62</sup> In a nutshell, this implies that Job "must allow God to be God, not made in the image of human rationality or human limitation."<sup>63</sup>

This is the Gordian knot of the human experience of the problem of God. What now matters more for Job is to find out *who God is*.

<sup>61</sup> See V. LOSSKY, *La teologia mistica della Chiesa d'Oriente*, Bologna: Edizione Dehoniane, 1985, 44.

<sup>62</sup> SIA, "Reflections on Job's Question", 239.

<sup>63</sup> DEWEY, "Qoheleth and Job," 324.