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**Book Review**

**The night of Gethsemane  
By Massimo Recalcati, Einaudi, 2019**

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The book by psychoanalyst Massimo Recalcati, *The night of Gethsemane*, p. 78, Einaudi publisher, year of publication 2019, aims at highlighting the radically human aspect that Jesus shows when, in the interminable night of Gethsemane, His life experience proves that typical emptiness of the one who experiences solitude, betrayal and abandonment.

The author, through nine chapters, guides the reader along a path aimed at capturing the actual human turmoil that characterizes the existential journey of Jesus, who seems to be able to surrender himself to his story only after having faced with difficulty the controversies of his own existence.

Recalcati (2019), using also the reflections present in the thought of Lacan (2007), presents a Jesus aware of the inevitability of testimony, the only way capable of embodying the truth of the Word: «Jesus is called to give a testimony to the truth of his word. If he had not passed the night of Gethsemane, the fall and abandonment of God, his friends and his disciples, if he had not done, Lacan would say, experience of the non-existence of the Other of the Other, the truth of his word would he have the same strength?» (pp. 15-16).

Here, then, is the meaning offered by the experience of suffering.

It is not the glory that distinguishes the experience of Jesus; it is rather the inner travail, the traumatic events experienced that give the possibility of grasping the meaning of one's own life.

«His decision in Gethsemane is not to sacrifice his life on the gloomy altar of the Law, but to offer, to give his life, to remain faithful to his own desire. It is an absolute gesture of freedom that finds its foundation only in itself. Every act of love, if it really is such, is always absolute because it finds its satisfaction only in the fulfillment of itself and not in an advantage that the act could add, in a deferred time, to the act itself» (p. 22).

Through his life, Jesus repeatedly experiences the trauma of being betrayed. And like any radical experience of betrayal, the latter is perpetrated precisely by those who are closest, those, that is, to whom maximum trust was placed. «True betrayal, unlike deception, always breaks up a symbolic pact based on the law of the word. For this reason, betrayal always has the nature of trauma» (p. 28).

Unlike Socrates who, as Recalcati points out, decides in the name of the truth to face death due to the accusation of men who fear his influence (Savino, 2012), the experience of Jesus shows heterogeneous traits precisely because of the fact that, in this case, the accusers concern figures close to him. «The passion of Jesus does not end but *begins* with the gesture of Judas. While the final act of Socrates elevates the figure of the Master to the glorious dignity of an icon in an act that wants to honor the divine dimension of truth, Judas, selling off his master's life for only thirty coins - the sum with which he was then possible to buy a slave -, declare the name of Jesus to that of a common criminal. In the first case we have an elevation of the Master, in the second case its degradation» (p. 36). Through the relationship between Jesus and Judas, the author highlights how the path that leads Judas to deny that master whose real life will not find actual correspondence with the image the disciple had for him. «Judas expected something from Jesus that did not belong to Jesus' being [...]. The idealizing falling in love excludes the otherness of the Other, he would like this otherness to fully coincide with the narcissistic representation of the beloved» (p.38). Thus Judas, whose *modus operandi* is reflected in the one who in the name of social justice does not compromise any exception, does not really manage to accept certain behaviors of his master, as when he was in Bethany: «Why didn't this fragrance be sold for three hundred coins and not given to the poor?» (*Gv* 12,5). Judas' political reasoning guides the transference towards his master until he considers himself the traitor to their cause; and only after having convinced himself that Jesus was the first to betray, Judas legitimizes his betrayal in the name of justice.

A different level is taken on by the betrayal of Peter, who, besides betraying his master, ends up betraying himself too. And once again Recalcati chooses to illustrate the path that this experience has in common with the typically human one: «Jesus through Peter's betrayal is removing all heroic idealization of fidelity.

It wants to show that even the most solid love - being human - can fall, slip and betray one's cause. Doesn't Peter reflect the dramatic ambivalence that runs through every bond of love? He tells the truth when he affirms his love without hesitation, yet he is unable to stand the test of this love. His betrayal reveals a contradiction that belongs to the human: we are not always up to our love, we are not always consistent with our desire» (p. 51). And yet, it is thanks to our being humans that failing we can establish a love that is not ideal but real (Freud, 1962).

The chapters of the book continue to offer innumerable reflections about the actual experience lived by Jesus in this tragic night. The implications concerning the sleep of the disciples, his brothers (Baggio, 2012), the anguish and loneliness that Jesus, being *in* the world, lives in the deafening silence of God's non-answer to his prayers are highlighted. Jesus «wants to change the way we understand the Law; he does not feel submissive to a Law that does not respond and does not forgive, but finds, in the last instance, only in himself his own Law, the Law of his own desire. In this way Jesus, as Paul writes, does not suffer death but *gives himself* (Gal 2, 20) to the Law. In this subtle but profound difference, the gesture of Jesus is not at all a sacrificial gesture, but a gesture that, since the night of Gethsemane, well before the torture of arrest, trial, Calvary and crucifixion, frees the Law from deadly shadow of sacrifice» (p. 74).

The book gives us the opportunity to grasp the actual commonalities linked to the personal experience of each one with the life path that Jesus undertook up to its fulfillment. It seems, in fact, to be able to see between the lines of Recalcati the desire to highlight the pedagogical and psychological implications that the Christian message intends to give. The possibility of accepting what we live *in* the world, whether they are events of a positive or negative nature, tries to reject the typical escape strategies that come into play when we try to mask our suffering (Frisone, 2019; Settineri et al., 2018). Taking responsibility for living what we are called to live, preventing the fear of events from turning into a phobia (Merlo, 2019), means having the opportunity to welcome all those events that, once lived, will have offered the opportunity to approach to our history.

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