

INTRODUCTION

“The unexamined life is not worth living!” Socrates is said to have uttered these words at his trial.¹ Awareness enfolds a substantial part of human life and, therefore, the constant search for the real nature of a person has always been a part of human history from unknown antiquity. *Gnothi seauton* – Know Thyself – was a well-accepted dictum among the learned Greeks in the ancient times, on which many of the mystical thoughts had their foundation.² Any endeavour to live completely cannot overlook the way of awareness which delivers one from the clutches of bondage and ignorance and leads beyond all the realms of human knowledge. In the ancient Indian sub-continent, the seers and the seekers confronted the question of “who are you?” almost concurrently to the Greeks and emerged with an outcry: *Tatuam Asi* – I am that – referring to God. The deeply imprinted elements of awareness come to light in the given life of an individual at critical situations such as bereavement. The entire drama of life with its miseries and happiness, attachments and separations either help to trace the prints of awareness in oneself or take one away from it.

The finality which engulfs every living entity without exception instigates in an intellectual being the renewed question of one’s own real nature. A human person lives on earth as a being capable of self-knowledge, instrumentalizing and utilizing the world and its objects for the self and others almost sharing a destiny with it but unquenchably longing for more which the world and its riches cannot offer. With awareness, one goes beyond the clutches and perils of nature but with consciousness, one becomes genuinely part of it in a liberating way.³ In the process of awareness, a person purifies his own intentions and willingly relates to the universe, not being overwhelmed by the pleasures alone but acknowledging the role of pain and death together with the joys of everyday life. The necessity to be separated from all what one loves and happily possesses makes the inner truth explicit that the self cannot be inextricably attached to the materiality of this world. At the best of one’s own will, one can gratefully relate to all other realities in a value-oriented way without becoming slaves to anything or anyone while maintaining the dignity of the person.⁴

¹ Cf. Plato, Apology, 38a. For full titles see Bibliography, 283ff.

² Cf. Alois M. Haas, *Nim din selbes war*, 1-2.

³ Cf. Chapter One, 22-26.

⁴ Cf. Chapter One, 33-34.

Bereavement is the most stressful and lasting experience of life to which one will have rather learn to adapt than to avoid it. Such an ordeal makes one aware of the uniqueness of the person in a painful way as an irreplaceable part of his/her life in human society. When a cherished person departs from the world all who have loved him/her agonizingly realize the fact that the price of real love is life itself. Our human dignity and finality as two irreducible parts of existence make us mindful of the need to live our lives in a worthy manner with consciousness, identifying with every reality with the hope of an eternal destination and inner purity. Through the pains of separation, loss, and the ensuing grief one is led to the light of awareness without losing the nobility of being human. The experience of bereavement is part of life and there are only two alternatives in confronting it, either through the value-oriented relationships or by the negation of values. The consequences of the former enhance further growth in virtues and the latter creates uncompromisingly further choices and a sheer accumulation of unheeded issues. Therefore, this research endeavours to analyse the structure of awareness and its influence on a human person during bereavement. Initially, an attempt is made to unravel the constitution and the functioning of awareness in its multifaceted levels. Furthermore, the common elements and theories in the field of bereavement, grief and mourning are examined⁵ in order to identify their fundamental relationships with awareness and values.

This work was undertaken with the scope of investigating systematically the faculty of awareness and its possible impact on the process of bereavement from an interdisciplinary milieu. There have been numerous earnest efforts and studies to comprehend the phenomenon of bereavement down through the ages. Various scientific fields have explored different areas of bereavement which has influenced human life although a large part of it remains obscure. However, a genuine attempt is made to illuminate the available facts about bereavement while exploring the interconnectedness of various factors through the structural analysis of awareness from an interdisciplinary perspective.⁶ In the process, the illustrative empirical realizations are critically analysed and interpreted using normative theological concepts to investigate the possibility of responding holistically to the crucial life situations.⁷ In this research, it was imperative to take into account the terminological differences in the field and to categorize the large volume of materials available on bereavement, grief and mourning. Throughout

⁵ Cf. Chapter Three, 129-154.

⁶ Cf. Chapter One, 20-54.

⁷ Cf. Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4.

this work the term “bereavement” is used for a vivid description of the entire process of going through the initial turmoil, grieving, and the further progression of the situation for a longer period of time caused by the death of a dear person in the closest social circle, especially in the family. The process of bereavement may also include the consequences one confronts as a result of making a choice to cope with the grief situations that have emerged through the death of a beloved person.

Furthermore, the term “awareness” is used from a wider perspective primarily as the existential internal knowledge of the person derived from the interrelatedness to other realities.⁸ In the same way, the faculty of consciousness is carefully examined to assess the inner dynamism of a person which enables him/her to relate to all other entities based on values, perfecting and enhancing the dignity of one’s person. The impact of bereavement in the entire network of relationships has been a curious element of inquiry down through the ages. One of the primary concerns of this thesis is to investigate whether the value-oriented relationship in awareness could help a person to face bereavement situations effectively. Those who painfully live through the separation of a person are not destined to sink into the hopelessness of melancholy and grief. On the contrary, the bereaved have to be empowered to realise the mystery of life as an unsurpassed gift of the creator and the death as the culmination of human liberty to return to Him forever.⁹ Can the witnesses of such a pilgrimage of a dear person experience the healing power of relationship by being grateful to the creator of life for the gift of the deceased? Will the expression of profound gratitude to the departed for the shared life be a liberating tribute? Deep-rooted values in all relationships seem to have a liberating energy which is available to every person. Despite the limitations that can occur in an inquiry a genuine effort is made to clarify whether interrelatedness is a call to liberation itself. With this background, this work is introduced to the readers with good wishes.

The *first chapter* of this work examines the faculty of awareness with its attributes elaborated in theology and various scientific fields and assesses their collaboration with values. An attempt is made to distinguish the nature of awareness and consciousness and how the latter monitors and regulates all relationships through values. If awareness is a faculty which makes the human life worth living it must have an association with every event which touches, affects, and moulds our life. This section includes an evaluation of bereavement with the help of the factors of awareness. In this chapter the discussion on values which a

⁸ Cf. Chapter One, 58-67.

⁹ Cf. Paul M. Zulehner, *Jedem seinen eigenen Tod*, 11.

person accomplishes in relating to God, oneself, others and to the world is considered as a category of bereavement analysis to detect the working of awareness.

The *second chapter* is an inquiry into the factor of time and a discussion on how the human person is endowed with the freedom to associate with the experiential dimensions of time in various ways. This chapter investigates a brief history of time-measurement to examine how the lived life and temporality differ in the human experience of duration and interpolate with each other. It explores further the theological interconnectedness of human experience of time and eternity. This section, furthermore, assesses the values which enhance the human association with the elements of time and their significance in managing the process of bereavement. The value-oriented relationships with the factors of time are also considered as categories for the case analyses in the forthcoming chapters.

The *third chapter* incorporates the issue of bereavement from different perspectives, from the common opinion to the lived traditions of religions and to the modern scientific inquiries. It touches upon the prominent theories and the conflicting opinions in the field. The aim of this discussion is to create a panoramic view of the field in the scientific spectrum and to form the categories for further research with an in-depth understanding of bereavement. Therefore, an elaborate treatment and assessment of the theories and their effect on therapeutic methods are intentionally avoided to keep the theme strictly within the framework of this inquiry.

The *fourth chapter* analyses the lived experiences of the bereavement of people from the published narrations which remain over an extended period of time. This attempt is undertaken through the method of qualitative narrative analysis. The categories of research were identified through the evaluation of factors presented in the theories, and the rudiments which were highlighted in the bereavement narratives in general. As part of the analysis, a long discussion of the elements detected in each case is added. The associations that were discovered are emphasised with the help of the materials available in the theoretical field. The realizations and notifications illustrated in the work are accompanied by a qualitative narrative analysis of bereavement cases.¹⁰

The *fifth chapter* comprises the elaborate explanations of observed factors as the outcome of the case analyses undertaken in the previous

¹⁰ In this edition only a short description and discussion on the narratives is included. For the detailed qualitative analysis, cf. Joy P. Abraham, *The Structure of Awareness and Its Influence in the Process of Bereavement* (Diss.), University of Vienna 2018.

chapter and compares them with the proposed categories and the theoretical assumptions. There are altogether eight observations which illustrate the ongoing process of bereavement which are directly or indirectly connected with the value-oriented relationships to the realities and directed towards the associated factors of awareness. The final section draws a general conclusion of the work and describes certain areas for further inquiries in awareness, bereavements, human person and values.

Finally, the psychological, as well as the practical dimensions of bereavement and the detailed assessment of awareness are integrated exploring the four tasks of practical theology, such as the empirical descriptive, interpretative, normative and pragmatic tasks.¹¹ Considering the departed souls in the light of the scripture and the consistent effort of the church to function as a source of consolation for those who are affected by the intensity of bereavement through practices which are centuries old¹² this work is undertaken in the faculty of practical theology. Although it is not the scope of this thesis to explore the development, nature and the present status of this discipline as a domain in the regional or global level, attempting to promote international exchange and collaboration through constructive dialogue, integrating and promoting a variety of methodologies of know-how from different branches of knowledge for the salvific work of the whole humanity,¹³ a brief section is incorporated to illustrate the general state of the field in the German-speaking area. The rationale of this specific segment is to provide a general idea of the developments in this field to those who may be interested in the subject from elsewhere, where the practical theological advancement is limited or not attuned to the progress in the once Christianity dominated countries of Europe.

¹¹ Cf. Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 4-5, 11-19.

¹² Cf. Johann Pock, *Sterben, Tod und Trauer*, 6-7.

¹³ See Norbert Mette, *Einführung in die katholische praktische Theologie*, 11-15, 21-26, 28-32; Johann Pock, *Dem Leben auf der Spur*, 9-11; Friedrich Schweitzer *et al.*, *Practical Theology*, 7-10.