

# Religion and suffering – cries and whispers

[Entertainment](#), [Movie](#)



Cries and Whispers showed a theological understanding of human suffering in its portrayal of its ugliness, its universality and how its spiritual value or lack thereof is a consequence of our response. One may choose to read in the film the absence of God and the hopeless wretchedness of life on earth. I, however, choose to draw from the film its subtle supply of good -- subtle, yet as genuine as the unconditional love of the family's servant, Anna. The film was about pain, agony, and depression.

The color palette that was used in the film combined with the different scenes of affliction evokes an intense horror that was as suffocating as the pain eating away at Agnes' body. The film was also about the human response in the face of suffering. It was about patience, kindness, and love in the presence of a fellow human being who was a victim of suffering. No one is exempt from human suffering. Agnes was the one suffering from cancer in the film, but her sisters have their share of moral and spiritual affliction as well.

Maria suffered from ennui and her response to it was the seeking of extra-marital pleasures and flaunting it in front of her husband who attempted suicide because of it. Karin has an unexplainable aversion to human intimacy that even caused her to wound herself rather than perform her marital duty. Was it her marriage that she called a tissue of lies? Or was it life itself? The sufferings of Maria and Karin are probably symptoms of bigger issues. They had lost the capacity for love.

When the dead Agnes asked them to stay with her and hold her hand, they refused. Karin has nothing left but hatred, not only for those around her, but

even for herself. Maria tried to show that she cared at first, reminiscing about their childhood, but she pulled away in horror when Agnes tried to kiss her. There can be no question on the ugliness of human suffering. The film didn't try to diminish the horror of Agnes' agony. It can be seen on her face as she struggled against the pain that was tormenting her.

It can be felt from her violent gasps for breath as she tried to fight for the last few minutes of her life. There is no experience as miserable as watching a human being die, the violent gasps diminishing into a terrible silence that is punctuated only by the sobbing of the bereaved. There can be no mistake that suffering and death are evil. For most part of the film, one can feel that God was indifferent. God did not make Agnes' affliction easier. Her illness was painful and dreadful towards the end.

He did, however, allowed Agnes to enjoy small, simple pleasures – a sip of water, the genuine concern and unconditional love of Anna, and the company of her sisters. Her illness brought them back together, albeit temporarily. This “togetherness” was a gift that she was most grateful for. At the end of the film, we saw from the pages of her diary how she enjoyed the company of her sisters. When they visited her, she felt much better because the people that she was most fond of were with her. For a brief moment in her life she was genuinely happy.

The spiritual value of suffering or lack thereof is a consequence of our response. We can bear it patiently as martyrs like Agnes, or we can try to escape it by carnal pleasures like Maria, or we can succumb to it in hatred, indifference, and despair like Karin. There was no scene in the film

suggesting that Agnes has a deep relationship with God. Nevertheless, when her suffering was punctuated by a few moments of reprieve, her smile seemed to suggest an inner peace that can radiate only from a martyr's resignation to the will of unseen God.

The most prominent color used in the film was red, with a few interspersed black and white. Black is most often the symbol of mourning and bereavement. It is the color that represents suffering in the film. White, the garment of Agnes, represents purity. Red is most often a symbol of passion, and in the film we can feel the emotions of love, fear, hatred, and despair. Red is also the color of martyrdom. Agnes suffered bravely without uttering a curse, without denouncing God. She had been thankful for the presence of her sisters and smiled for the simple pleasures that God had allowed her.

The part of the film that contains an explicit theological statement on suffering was during the last rites after Agnes' death. In the Chaplain's prayers we hear of Agnes being found worthy by God to bear her long and tortuous agony. We also hear the Chaplain asking for Agnes' intercession for those she left behind. Because Agnes had borne her anguish and suffering bravely and for so long, she was most surely worthy of advocating their cause. This puts a redemptive value on her suffering. Suffering is inevitable and universal.

It is present in different forms – in physical affliction, in emotional desolation, in spiritual corruption. In the film's portrayal of its ugliness, we can never say that suffering is good. Suffering and death are evil. However, even the murder of Christ which was the greatest evil of all was the greatest triumph

in the history of salvation. God has a mysterious way in creating existence out of nothing, and in turning good out of evil. The spiritual value of our suffering depends on our response. In suffering bravely, and accepting daily martyrdom, God can draw a redemptive value from our suffering.