

# GOD IS GREAT, GOD IS GOOD QUESTIONS ABOUT EVIL

By Daniel B. Clendenin\*

I will never forget one of my first pastoral visits when I called on a widow who, in a tragic, single accident, lost her father, husband, two sons, nephew and brother-in-law. My mind also goes to a colleague who before age 40 was ravaged with a rare and aggressive form of Parkinson's disease so that now he has virtually no motor coordination. He, his wife and four children face a future filled with untold pain and stress that is certain to get much worse before it gets any better. As I wrote this article, one of our parishioners lost a second child to another automobile accident. More disturbing still is the realization that instances like these are not uncommon or isolated, and my reader certainly has similar stories to tell. How does one justify the ways of God in light of experiences like these, that being the definition of theodicy (from the two Greek words *theos* — God, and *dike* — justice)? Can one in good conscience still recite the childhood table-prayer? Although people have amended the definition, and although we correctly speak of many problems of evil in differing contexts,<sup>1</sup> and different types of theisms, for our purposes we can say the "problem of evil" concerns the apparent contradiction between the reality of evil and the affirmation, attested in the Christian Scriptures, that God is all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-good. In a passage preserved by the church father Lactantius (AD 260-340), which Boethius, Voltaire, Bayle, Leibniz, Hume and others on down to contemporary scholars like Mackie and Plantinga cite, Epicurus (341-270 BC) gave classic expression to the matter when he suggested that God

either wishes to take away evils, and is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does He not remove them?<sup>2</sup>

The present essay explores five questions fundamental to theodicy and some of the responses given to these questions.

## I. *What is Evil?*

In his ponderous *Theodicy* (1710), which gave classic expression to eighteenth-century optimism,<sup>3</sup> Leibniz offered that "evil may be taken

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metaphysically, physically, and morally.”<sup>4</sup> Metaphysical evil, he suggested, refers to “mere imperfection” or the necessary limitations of a finite order. Paley, likewise, wrote that some evils result “by a kind of necessity, not only from the constitution of our nature, but from a part of that constitution which no one would wish to see altered.”<sup>5</sup> As the most fundamental evil, both natural and moral evil result from metaphysical evil according to Leibniz.

Moral evil refers to the wrong actions of free moral agents, deception, cruelty, hatred and the like. Dostoyevsky paints a portrait of humanity’s inhumanity with hideous detail:

People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that’s a great injustice and insult to beasts; a beast can never be so cruel as man, so artistically cruel. The tiger only tears and gnaws, that’s all he can do. He would never think of nailing people by the ears, even if he were able to do it. These Turks took pleasure in torturing children, too; cutting the unborn child from the mother’s womb, and tossing babies up in the air and catching them on the points of their bayonets before their mother’s eyes. Doing it before the mother’s eyes was what gave zest to the amusement. Here is another scene that I thought very interesting. Imagine a trembling mother with her baby in her arms, a circle of invading Turks around her. They’ve planned a diversion; they pet the baby, laugh to make it laugh. They succeed, the baby laughs. At that moment a Turk points a pistol four inches from the baby’s face. The baby laughs with glee, holds out its little hands to the pistol, and he pulls the trigger in the baby’s face and blows out its brains. Artistic, wasn’t it?<sup>6</sup>

As Kant and others have observed, we deem moral evil like this as absolutely contrary to divine purposefulness either as a means or an end, even though we might allow that some evil, though hard to understand, serves as a means to good.<sup>7</sup> Aquinas, for example, suggested that God “in no way” wills moral evil, although he sometimes indirectly wills natural evil because of the greater goods which attach to it.<sup>8</sup>

Natural or physical evil, on the other hand, originates apart from the free decisions of moral agents and involves the design of the world (deserts, dangerous animals, pests), natural calamities (flood, famines, earthquakes), disease (AIDS, cancer, leprosy), and congenital defects (mental retardation, blindness, deafness).<sup>9</sup> Also included here is animal pain, for it occurred long before humans existed. The Lisbon earthquake on All Saints’ Day, November 1, 1755, killed perhaps 30,000 people, and the irony was not lost on Voltaire that the death toll swelled because overcrowded churches crumbled on top of their worshippers. In a heated rage he penned his *Poem on the Lisbon Earthquake* which, because of the horror of such natural evil, disdained all theodicies.

Few have given more trenchant expression to the vagaries of nature than JS Mill. In *Nature* he repudiates the idea that nature is a model of divine excellence and a manifestation of God’s will which humans should imitate (cf.

Paley's *Natural Theology*). In fact, writes Mill, Nature exhibits frightening cruelty:

For how stands the fact? That next to the greatness of these cosmic forces, the quality which most forcibly strikes everyone who does not divert his eyes from it, is their perfect and absolute recklessness. They go straight to their end, without regarding what or whom they crush on the road . . .

In sober truth, nearly all the things which men are hanged or imprisoned for doing to one another, are nature's everyday performances. Killing, the most criminal act, Nature does once to every being that lives; and in a large proportion of cases, after protracted tortures such as only the greatest monsters whom we read of ever purposely inflicted on their living fellow creatures . . . Nature impales men, breaks them as if on the wheel, casts them to be devoured by wild beasts, burns them to death, crushes them with stones like the first christian martyr, starves them with hunger, freezes them with cold, poisons them by the quick or slow venom of her exhalations, and has hundreds of other hideous deaths in reserve, such as the ingenious cruelty of a Nabis or Domitian never surpassed. All this, Nature does with a most supercilious disregard both of mercy and of justice, emptying her shafts upon the best and noblest indifferently with the meanest and the worst . . .

Thus, Mill concludes:

Not even on the most distorted and contracted theory of good which ever was framed by religious or philosophical fanaticism, can the government of Nature be made to resemble the work of a being at once good and omnipotent.<sup>10</sup>

While some people like Paley might argue that the number of goods in the world outnumbers natural evils,<sup>11</sup> many are convinced that the problem here is the overwhelming amount of natural evil in the world. For thinkers like John Roth and Frederick Sontag, the existence of a benevolent God is not necessarily logically incompatible with the reality of evil; it is only the preponderance of evil overshadowing good that tilts the scale towards agnosticism or atheism. It is no surprise, then, that some theodiscists find natural evil more perplexing than moral evil, for while moral evils are assignable to human agents (why blame God for the evil we do?<sup>12</sup>), who but God alone can be responsible for non-moral evil?

In defining evil another tack sometimes taken is to shift the emphasis away from evil's objective reality to the subjective knower and to define evil as an illusion of our own making. Mary Baker Eddy (1821 — 1910), founder of the Christian Science Movement, espoused a popular but highly influential version of this definition. In her *Science and Health* (1875) Eddy contended that suffering was not only an illusion but a sinful delusion. A quote by Shakespeare in the book's frontispiece marks her direction: "There is nothing

either good or bad, but thinking makes it so." Death, sickness and the like are all unreal contrivances of false belief, dreams, things which "do not exist."<sup>13</sup> Evil, too, is non-existent: "Evil is but an illusion, and it has no real basis. Evil is a false belief."<sup>14</sup>

Eastern ways of thinking likewise define evil as human illusion, as in the Hindu concept of *maya*. Alan Watts argues that western perception, language and logic dissect and dichotomize reality into diametrically opposed elements, resulting in a dualistic epistemology that distorts the true nature of reality. "To be specific, the individual's basic sense of separation from his universe may be a perceptual illusion based upon inadequate concepts of sensing and knowing."<sup>15</sup> Mythical or poetical ways of thinking, on the other hand, are integrative and express "a point of view in which the dark side of things has its place, or rather, in which the light and the dark are transcended through being seen in terms of a dramatic unity."<sup>16</sup> Both Eddy and Watts, then, prescribe an epistemological catharsis to a monistic way of thinking that cleanses the mind of faulty ways of perceiving reality.

Spinoza (1632-1677) had already proposed a more scholarly version of this definition of evil in his *Ethics*. In his scheme of pantheistic determinism God alone is the only infinite substance and determining cause. All other entities exist as modes or attributes of this one substance (minds as the attribute of thought, bodies as the attribute of extension). Although Spinoza describes God as "free," he insists that all creation flows from him by strict and logical necessity, and since he alone is perfectly good, all of created nature is good. What appears to us as evil is only the result of our own ignorance. In a sense, for Spinoza, evil is undefinable, for it is the figment of misguided perception. People wrongly imagine that creation exists for their own utility and, based on that misperception, make comparisons such as "good, evil, order, confusion, heat, cold, beauty, and deformity."<sup>17</sup> This, says Spinoza, reveals more about the observer than the ultimate nature of reality, for such comparisons are only the product of an errant imagination:

We see, therefore, that all those methods by which the common people are in the habit of explaining nature are only different sorts of imagination, and do not reveal the nature of anything in itself, but only the constitution of the imagination; and because they have names as if they were entities existing apart from the imagination, I call them entities not of the reason but of imagination.<sup>18</sup>

As with Eddy, and to a lesser extent Watts, this "definition" of evil consists in denying its ultimate reality.

Perhaps the most important definition of evil in terms of historical influence is the idea that it is a *privatio boni*, a lack, limitation, or distortion of something in itself good. Echoing the *Enneads* of Plotinus (205 — 270)<sup>19</sup> and the *Hexaemeron* of Basil the Great of Caesarea (329 — 379),<sup>20</sup> Augustine asked, "What, after all, is anything we call evil except the privation of good? . . . Where there is no privation of the good, there is no evil . . . From this it follows that

there is nothing to be called evil if there is nothing good.’’<sup>21</sup> Sickness for example, is but the corruption of health, blindness the lack of sight. Evil, in other words, has no independent existence, but is parasitic, accidental, and privative. Repeated by Boethius (480 — 524)<sup>22</sup>, Hugh of St. Victor (1096 — 1141)<sup>23</sup>, Aquinas (1226-74)<sup>24</sup>, Descartes<sup>25</sup>, Leibniz<sup>26</sup>, Barth’s idea of *das Nichtige*, and on down to Pope John Paul<sup>27</sup>, the idea of evil as a privation of good becomes central in any discussion about the definition of evil. This definition rightly protects the goodness of the created order from any final dualism, but it creates the dilemma of evil springing up *ex nihilo*. In the context of Adam having been created good, and placed in the moral paradise of Eden, his defection and the appearance of evil appear paradoxical and even absurd, but if he was not created finitely perfect, as some angels apparently were, then responsibility for evil’s intrusion rests even more directly with his creator. Because of this dilemma, some have reasoned that Adam was created either morally neutral<sup>28</sup> or at an “epistemic distance” from God.<sup>29</sup>

## II. Whence Evil?

Beyond saying that evil is an inexplicable riddle or mystery and that we can know only its beginning and not its origin,<sup>30</sup> or that evil originates from a God neither infinite<sup>31</sup> nor wholly good,<sup>32</sup> what can we say about its source or cause? Three responses deserve attention. The so-called “free-will defense” located the origin of evil in human volition. According to Augustine, “an evil will, therefore, is the cause of all evils.”<sup>33</sup> Adam’s corrupted will constituted the “original sin” that all people subsequently inherited. Appeals to free will find expression in the works of Aquinas, Jacques Maritain, Austin Farrer, Nels Ferre, Charles Journet, John Hick, Stephen Davis, G. Stanley Kane, Keith Yandell, and others,<sup>34</sup> but by most accounts, the pre-eminent free-will defense is given by Alvin Plantinga.<sup>35</sup> Yet the free will defense has a limited function, for it addresses only the matter of moral evil and says little if anything about the origin of non-moral evils.

Plato, and some contemporary process thinkers, locate the origin of evil in the recalcitrance of matter, although Plato does not make it clear whether matter itself is evil or only a medium of evil. Physical matter has existed eternally and its primal chaotic condition forms the source from which “all the wrongs and evils arise.”<sup>36</sup> The “bodily element” in the world’s constitution was responsible for its failure. Beside this cosmology, Plato’s account of human psychology also locates the origin of evil in the material order. In his famous analogy of the charioteer and horses, Plato describes how the soul must battle its unwieldy material body in which it is lodged, the rational element mastering the spiritive and appetitive “parts” like a charioteer driving a pair of horses pulling in opposite directions.<sup>37</sup> By itself, the soul would be free never to stray, but “when the soul uses the instrumentality of the body for any inquiry . . . it is drawn away by the body into the realm of the variable, and loses its way and becomes confused and dizzy, as though it were fuddled.”<sup>38</sup> David Griffin

is only one modern process thinker who follows Plato's lead and suggests that, as with the demiurge in the *Timaeus*, God is limited by matter which is not entirely under his control.<sup>39</sup>

Although not a widely accepted notion, a final suggestion regarding the origin of evil, especially natural evil, is the idea that much evil results from the machinations of Satan and his cohorts. Modern westerners might find such a thesis untenable, but that attitude reveals our own intellectual and cultural provincialisms, as anyone who has taught in a third world setting can affirm. Augustine, CS Lewis, Stephen Davis, and Alvin Plantinga provide examples of this strategy. According to Plantinga,

Satan, so the traditional doctrine goes, is a mighty nonhuman spirit who, along with many other angels, was created long before God created man. Unlike most of his colleagues, Satan rebelled against God and has since been wreaking whatever havoc he can. The result is natural evil. So the natural evil we find is due to the free actions of non-human spirits.<sup>40</sup>

Discounting the possibility of demonic influence in our world cannot claim any scientific support, and it often has its basis in what Lewis called the contemporary "climate of opinion," which opinion, he suggested, thinking people rightly ignore. Further, the reality of the demonic is firmly and deeply rooted in biblical religion and not something only tangential to it.

Those wishing to retain traditional notions about the goodness and power of God have no alternative but to locate the origin of evil in divine responsibility, a strategy which comes in milder or stronger versions. In a mild form, distinctions are made between what God indirectly or permissively wills, and what He directly and positively causes, the idea being that God allows but does not cause evil for the greater good that will occur: "God neither wills evils to be nor wills evils not to be; he wills to allow them to happen. And this is good."<sup>41</sup> For Aquinas, the Christ event itself is the ultimate good which arises from the greatest evil, and it evokes his famous "O felix culpa!"<sup>42</sup> This milder version, which the story of Job corroborates, protects the goodness of God by disallowing any hint that evil resides in God (cf. James 1:13-14; 1 Jn. 1:5), while the stronger version does not blush to posit what Hick rightly describes as the "monstrous moral paradox" that God deliberately wills evil. Hugh of St. Victor writes that God "wills evil to be, and in this He wills nothing except good, because it is good that there be evil. . . . If we do evil He wills that we do not do good, and He approves this because it is good."<sup>43</sup> Indeed, the doctrine of unconditional predestination, especially the supralapsarian type as propounded by Calvin's successor at Geneva, Theodore Beza, holds that God actively consigns some people to eternal torment. Calvin called this a "dreadful decree (*decretum horribile*) and Augustine admitted that it was hard to understand, but both are unrelenting in underscoring the sovereign will of God (cf. Psalm 115:3).<sup>44</sup> Both the milder and stronger versions wrestle with the relationship between human freedom and divine sovereignty. Suggesting that God preordains history (either personal or cosmic) denies human freedom

and tends to compromise His goodness by locating the origin of evil in divine responsibility, while stressing human freedom tends to undercut traditional notions of His power.

### III. Does Evil Make Theism Irrational?

Epicurus, as we have seen, locates the problem of evil on the plane of logic, so that a person can affirm only two but not three of the following propositions before lapsing into a logical fallacy: (1) God is perfectly good; (2) God is all-knowing and omnipotent; and (3) Evil exists. Intellectual integrity demands that a person avoid affirming logically incompatible propositions and the question arises whether the theist does just that — hold a faith that requires him or her to jettison the normal canons of logic. As Pike observes, the matter has the logical status of the statement, “If Jones is a bachelor, how does it happen that he has a wife?”<sup>45</sup> Part X of Hume’s *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* is usually interpreted to make this point, that theism is not just unlikely given the amount of evil in the world but that it is downright illogical. But the critic’s challenge at this point is probably one of the easiest positions for the theist to refute, for in order to refute what the critic holds is a *necessary* truth of logic, the theist need only provide a *possible* reason God had for allowing evil.

John Mackie begins his highly influential article by insisting that theodicy is not a practical or scientific problem but a problem of logic, that because of the presence of evil in the world “it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack support, but that they are positively irrational,” and that theism can be held only by an “extreme rejection of reason.”<sup>46</sup> The theist believes “not merely what cannot be proved, but what can be disproved.”<sup>47</sup> Adequate solutions exist, he observes, for the theist who is willing to relinquish one of Epicurus’s three propositions, and, in fact, this is what many theists do, but only in a half-hearted way. That is, in order to solve the logical problem of evil, some explicitly reject one of the three propositions only to reintroduce them covertly somewhere else in their system.

The real focus of Mackie’s attack, however, is not on these half-hearted solutions that implicitly reassert what was ostensibly rejected, but those fallacious solutions that

explicitly maintain all the constituent propositions, but implicitly reject at least one of them in the course of the argument. . . [I]n order to solve the problem one (or perhaps more) of its constituent propositions is given up, but in such a way that it appears to have been retained, and can therefore be reasserted without qualification in other contexts.<sup>48</sup>

In the course of his article Mackie examines four theistic solutions, all of which suffer from this basic defect. First, to say that evil is a necessary counterpart to good compromises divine omnipotence by maintaining that God could not create one without the other, and denies the reality of evil by implying that,

ultimately, it is not really opposed to good. To argue that evil is necessary as a means to good ends likewise undermines omnipotence by subjecting God to causal laws over which He has no power and by implying that good ends cannot result from other means. Third, the vale-of-soul making and aesthetic themes contend that our world is better with some evil than with no evil, but this denies the real opposition between good and evil and suggests that God is not fully good because He chooses not to minimize the world's suffering. Last, in response to free will defenders, Mackie argues that it is logically possible that God could have created people so that they always choose God freely, and, more fundamentally, to the extent that people are truly free, it means that God cannot control them. He thus triumphantly concludes:

Of the proposed solutions to the problem of evil which we have examined, none has stood up to criticism. . . [T]his study strongly suggests that there is no valid solution of the problem which does not modify at least one of the constituent propositions in such a way which would seriously affect the essential core of the theistic position.<sup>49</sup>

Is the theist guilty of Orwellian "doublethink," as Flew charges, of simultaneously accepting contradictory beliefs and "playing tricks with reality?"<sup>50</sup> I think not, primarily because Flew, Mackie and their kin simply try to prove too much. By positing merely logically *possible* reasons for the presence of evil, the theist evades the charge of *necessary* irrationality, although, of course the theist has done nothing to bolster the probability of his position (which he or she does in other ways). Pike, for example, suggests some "morally sufficient reasons" why God allowed evil, making the analogy that in ordinary life we sometimes absolve people of moral culpability (but not responsibility) when we finally learn of the reasons for their apparently harmful actions. Further, the critic of theism can never claim to have examined all the possible morally sufficient reasons God might have for allowing evil. Indeed, it is not necessarily inconceivable that the best of all possible worlds *might* contain evil. That point cannot be proven, Pike admits, but neither can it be disproven, and so the mere possibility that evil might be a component in a good world indicates that God could have had a morally sufficient reason for allowing it, and thus the charge of logical incompatibility is not necessary but only possible or probable.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to free will, a common morally sufficient reason to which some appeal is an eschatological scenario in which God will right the wrongs we have experienced. Hick, Stephen Davis, and others consider eschatology essential to any Christian theodicy. The redemptive work of Christ, Scripture attests, ushered in the firstfruits of the age to come and engenders an irrepressible hope that present sufferings do not compare with the glory to come (Rom.8:18 — 22). Appeals to eschatology, however, must not denigrate the doctrine of creation or mitigate attempts to ameliorate evil in the present age (lifeboat ethics). Ironically, some who insist that God could (should) have made a different world (one with no evil) are the first to reject appeals to just such a

world beyond history. Dostoyevsky's Ivan, for example, demands justice "here on earth" and insists that justice delayed is not justice. Others argue that no future reversal could ever redeem evil or restore what has been lost.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, while Christians differ in details (for Hick the eschaton is a continuation of circumstances like those in history, while Davis envisions a radical reversal), eschatology insists that despite current appearances, future blessings will vindicate God's reasons as morally sufficient for making the world as He did.

What about the contention that God could have made people so that they always (or mostly) and freely choose good? Ninian Smart has met this objection, I think, by insisting that "moral discourse is embedded in the cosmic status quo."<sup>53</sup> It is possible, he agrees, that God could have created people like this, but such a scenario would have no "clearly assignable content" and we would have to remain agnostic about it. If such a proposed world was basically like our own, changing the set of moral circumstances or the makeup of human nature would also require us to change the meaning of our moral discourse about the world (what it means to be a "good" person, for example), otherwise we would be guilty of equivocating with the use of our terms. If, on the other hand, such a fictional world was basically unlike our own, then it becomes difficult to judge such a radically different world by standards which do not apply to it. Simply put, a world where people always and freely choose good might be logically possible, and people there would clearly be different, but it is not clear what it would mean to call them or their world "good." We must remain agnostic about such worlds, which is to say that the proposed fiction is not clearly better than reality.

#### **IV. Does Evil Make Theism Improbable?**

It is one thing to respond to charges that your position is logically irrational by showing that it is theoretically possible, but quite another to show that the given evidence makes it likely or probable. Thus theodiscists sometimes distinguish between the logical and evidential problems of evil. Hume raises this point at the end of Part X of his *Dialogues*. Even allowing "what can never be proved," Philo urges that the preponderance of evil is not what we would expect of a wholly good and powerful God. But he retreats from this line of attack and allows for the sake of the argument that evil is logically compatible with theism. He then asks Cleanthes, "what are you advanced by all these concessions? A mere possible compatibility is not sufficient. You must *prove* these pure, unmixed, and uncontrollable attributes from the present mixed and confused phenomena, and from these alone. A hopeful undertaking!"<sup>54</sup> Contemporary scholars addressing theodicy from the evidentialist perspective include JW Cornman, K Lehrer, George Schlesinger, Wesley Salmon, Nancy Cartwright, Michael Martin, David Basinger, Lawrence Resnick, Harold Moore, Edward Wierenga and R Pargetter.<sup>55</sup> The theist might respond to this evidentialist argument in two ways.

Some follow an inductive and *a posteriori* method and try to show empirically that the amount of evil in the world does not make belief improbable. The question partly hinges on whether one considers all the evidence in general or gives special emphasis to a particular piece of evidence either pro (the Christ event) or con (the Holocaust, Dostoyevsky's innocent children who suffer) that is said to have overriding influence. Some have simply concluded that, taken in the balance, goods outnumber evils.<sup>56</sup> I doubt that arithmetical calculation will convince many, but two observations seem to me helpful. First, given the chance, would we choose to live our lives over? Kant raises the question and replies in the negative,<sup>57</sup> but with a slightly different twist a positive affirmation seems more reasonable. Despite the evils we all experience, I think most people would choose to live rather than die, and to live rather than never to have been born. We rightly consider the will to death as abnormal, and if this were not so, as Roth observes, nobody would bother with theodicy in the first place. Along with Roth, John Cobb and David Griffin make similar points, that despite the ravages of evil, healthy-minded people choose life over death or non-existence.<sup>58</sup>

Second, we must remember that theodicy arises because of the *ambiguity* of human experience, not the unilateral influence of evil, and forgetting this point might cause us to overlook the goodness and teleological ordering that constantly challenges evil. In *The Color Purple*, Alice Walker's character Celia incarnates this idea with poignant grace. Despite the radical evil she experienced, Celia observed that it was still wrong not to celebrate the goodness of God in the flowers that dressed the meadowside she walked. HE Fosdick observed that "the mystery of evil is very difficult when we believe in a good God, but the problem of goodness seems to us impossible when we do not."<sup>59</sup> Indeed, some of the most vociferous critics of theism, many of whom appeal to the problem of evil to make their points, back off when faced with the alternative of embracing atheism. Long considered an atheist by many, JS Mill, for example, shocked his admirers with what they judged were his considerable concessions to theism in his *Three Essays on Religion* (1874). Despite the chilling detail with which he describes the machinations of nature, and what he felt was the moral sophistry of many theodicians,<sup>60</sup> Mill still concluded that "the adaptations in nature afford a large balance of probability in favor of creation by intelligence. It is equally certain that this is no more than a probability."<sup>61</sup> Likewise Voltaire, who mercilessly satirized the optimism of the Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* and Leibniz's *Theodicy* in his *Candide* and *Poem on the Lisbon Earthquake*. Despite the charges of atheism that are understandable but unjustified, he maintained an unswerving belief in a Supreme being, based primarily on his fascination with the teleological ordering of nature. It is likely he subscribed to at least three of Aquinas's proofs for the existence of God. His torrent of invective against establishment Christianity came primarily during the last decade of his life when he was almost obsessed by it, but even then what outraged him was religion's intolerance, barbarity, despotism

and cruelty, not so much cosmological chaos. Even Hume, who scandalized readers with his advice to “commit to the flames” all religious books of “sophistry and illusion” (*Enquiries*), concluded his *Dialogues* by surmising that the whole of natural theology “resolves itself into one simple, though somewhat ambiguous, at least undefined, proposition, ‘That the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence.’”<sup>62</sup> an admission which hardly typifies full-fledged atheism. Finally, Dostoyevsky, whose own life was so full of pain and suffering, and who so graphically portrays the atheist apostate in the character of Ivan (*The Brothers Karamazov*), gives the last word to the novice monk Alyosha, whom he calls the real “hero” in the novel’s preface, and who on the final page of the novel exudes a vibrant faith in the resurrection.

Another response to the evidentialist problem of evil is *a priori* and deductive, where a person begins in faith and with certain beliefs and subsequently tries to reconcile the observable facts of the world with that belief. While this route will be of little help to the person not convinced of theism on other grounds, it enjoys a long heritage in the Christian tradition. Perhaps Anselm best illustrates this position in his *Proslogion*, where he proclaims, “I do not seek to understand in order to believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this too I believe, that ‘unless I believe, I shall not understand.’”<sup>63</sup> Far from denigrating reason or surtailing its proper use, the believing theodicist is convinced that good, hard thinking is most needed in order to combat some of the common reactions people have when they encounter evil: despair, false guilt at seemingly unanswered prayer, naive expectations of magical deliverance and so on. Rather, the argument intends to avoid the hubris sometimes attached to natural reason, as when it assumes the prerogative to put God on trial and make Him a defendant. Kierkegaard, contemplating the theme of suffering, rightly responds:

God’s love is never found in this way; accursed of God will the endeavor of doubt be to God, because it begins with audacity. On the contrary, it is the eternal happiness of faith, that God is love. It does not thereby follow that faith understands how God’s plan for man is love. This exactly constitutes the conflict of faith — to believe without being able to understand it.<sup>64</sup>

Anticipating the criticism that a theism of this stripe is non-falsifiable by any empirical data, the theist responds that the criticism is substantial only if empirical evidence alone is one’s sole criterion of truth, but at that point radical empiricism must respond to charges that it courts a reductionistic positivism.

Christian faith demands an especially important affirmation here. It insists that Christology constitutes what Surin rightly calls the “theologically normative” element in theodicy.<sup>65</sup> Pope John Paul reminds us that the answer to evil “has been given by God to man in the cross of Jesus Christ. . . [and] that in the mystery of redemption suffering finds its supreme and surest point of reference.”<sup>66</sup> The Christian tradition insists that Christ conquered both the

temporal and eternal dimensions of evil and suffering. Physical death, according to Scripture, epitomizes physical suffering and evil (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 3:23, 5:12 — 21), while sin embodies its moral dimensions. In a sense, then, a truly Christian theodicy is soteriological and rests in the self-justification of God, and especially humans, in the work of Christ. It recognizes the truth that in the person of His Son God not only suffers for us but with us (Heb. 4:15, 5:8). Few have expressed this point of view more eloquently than the great Scottish theologian PT Forsythe (1848 — 1921), who wrestled with evil in the context of World War I:

[T]here is no theodicy in the world except in a theology of the Cross. The only final theodicy is that self-justification of God which was fundamental to his justification of man. No reason of man can justify God in a world like this. He must justify Himself, and He did so in the Cross of His Son.<sup>67</sup>

Coupled with the Pauline truth of redemptive suffering (Colossians 1:24), and the observation that constructive deeds of Christlike acts are themselves responses to the problem of evil even more powerful than words, Christian faith makes a meaningful response indeed to the problem of evil.

#### V. *How Do Divine and Human Discourse Relate?*

Perhaps no other aspect of theodicy is as difficult to fathom as that of language about God. To what extent is the divine logic like our own, or to what extent do the normal meanings of moral attributes, when applied to God, correspond to their meaning when applied to people? Hume's Philo forces this question, asking, "In what respect, then, do God's benevolence and mercy resemble the benevolence and mercy of men?"<sup>68</sup> He concludes that Cleanthes must assert "that our common measures of truth and falsehood are not applicable" to the question.<sup>69</sup> Are theodicies which retain traditional notions of God's moral character guilty of a type of "reasoning [that] is of the other world and incomprehensible for the heart of man on earth?"<sup>70</sup> The implication, of course, is that the theodicyist equivocates at this point, ascribing a sense of goodness and power to God that has little if any relationship to the normal way we use those words. Consequently, the critic accuses the theist of living in a linguistic Wonderland not unlike that of Alice:

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "Whether you *can* make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master — that's all."<sup>71</sup>

The stakes are high at this point, for if we sever the congruity between divine and human discourse, what God calls heaven we might call hell,<sup>72</sup> and one

person's god becomes another person's devil.<sup>73</sup>

Following the views of his father,<sup>74</sup> JS Mill pressed this argument against Henry L. Mansel, a follower of William Hamilton, an Oxford Professor who in his Bampton lectures, published as *The Limits of Religious Thought*, addressed the problem of evil and concluded that the conundrum of Epicurus in Lactantius was an antinomy that had to be accepted in faith. What appears to us evil might well be, from the divine perspective, good. The book, which Mill blasted as "a detestable to me absolutely loathsome book [sic],"<sup>75</sup> evoked his rage, and in a chapter of his *An Examination of Sir William Hamilton's Philosophy* he leveled a scathing attack on Mansel's doctrine. This line of thinking has often been taken, Mill observes, as a rationale for asserting "moral monstrosities" about God and mislabeling them divine perfections.<sup>76</sup>

Mill makes three criticisms. First, Mansel violates the law of non-contradiction by saying, in effect, that A is non-A. If we use the same word to describe something that is fundamentally different in kind, then language no longer has meaning. Second, Mill charges Mansel with moral casuistry, for "to assert in words what we do not think in meaning is as suitable a definition as can be given of a moral falsehood."<sup>77</sup> Last, Mill contends that the logical outcome of Mansel's position is agnosticism; we would not "ascribe any moral attributes to God at all, inasmuch as no moral attributes known or conceivable by us are true of him, and we are condemned to absolute ignorance of him as a moral being."<sup>78</sup>

In a sense this charge against theism is a straw man argument, for few theists argue that God's attributes are different in kind from our own. With Scripture we acknowledge that our discourse about God is limited in a number of ways and is not univocal; our finitude (Is. 55:8, 1 Cor. 1:18-31), sinfulness (Rom. 1:18), earthbound condition (1 Cor. 13:12; 1 Jn. 3:2), and cultural conditioning all limit our knowledge about God. But based on the *imago Dei*, and the reality of God's self-disclosure in Christ, the Christian tradition maintains that God created people with a capacity to know him, and though compromised, our knowledge of him is still a valid knowledge and not equivocal. Thus, older theologians distinguished between a *theologica archetypa*, that perfect knowledge of God known only to Himself, and a *theologica etypa*, the knowledge of God available to finite beings. Distinctions in the later category are likewise helpful: there is a *theologia beatorum*, the knowledge of God of the blessed in heaven, and a *theologia viatorum*, the pilgrim knowledge of wayfarers on earth. CS Lewis, writing about the goodness of God, put it this way:

[God's] idea of "goodness" differs from ours; but you need have no fear that, as you approach it, you will be asked simply to reverse your moral standards. When the relevant difference between the Divine ethics and your own appears to you, you will not, in fact, be in any doubt that the change demanded of you is in the direction you already call "better." The Divine "goodness" differs from ours, but it is not sheerly different: it differs from ours not as white from black, but as a perfect circle from a child's first attempt to draw a wheel.<sup>79</sup>

In short, the theist claims a knowledge of God that is similar to but not identical with God's knowledge of Himself, a knowledge which is analogical and neither univocal nor equivocal.

## VI. *Conclusion*

Descartes once observed that he was not "astonished at not being able to understand why God does what he does. . . I no longer have any difficulty in recognizing that there are an infinity of things within his power the causes of which lie beyond the powers of my mind." Indeed, certain of God's purposes remain "impenetrable,"<sup>80</sup> and in their better moments most theodiscists admit that a large degree of mystery attaches itself to the problem of evil.<sup>81</sup> That posture does not make ignorance an ally; it only recognizes that theodicy consists of fallible options. While the theist admits that he or she cannot answer every question about evil, that in itself reveals little about the rationality of theistic belief.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, while critics assail theism with the problem of evil, the fact remains that the problem of evil assaults any world view, not just theism. The responses to the five questions above remain subject to fallability, but they have proven themselves helpful to some of the best minds of the Christian church. Augustine maintained that our felicity on earth does not depend upon knowing completely the mind of God. Alice Walker's Celia and others like her have proven that point. Still, Augustine advised, we should seek out answers to these questions "at least as far as men may do so in this life," and, having done that, rest patiently in unknowing.<sup>83</sup> Childhood table prayers, I suggest, are still in order.

## End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Surin makes this point in his *Theology and the Problem of Evil* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), although as reviewers have noted, he overstates his case. For reviews see *Scottish Journal of Theology*, Vol. 41

No. 4 (1988): 539 — 541, and *Theology Today* Vol. 44.3 (October 1987): 405 — 408.

<sup>2</sup> Lactantius, *A Treatise on the Anger of God*, in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. William Fletcher, vol. III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951): Chapter XIII, p. 271.

<sup>3</sup> Next to Leibniz's *Theodicy*, Archbishop William King's *De origine mali* (1702, with editions of Edmund Law's English translation in 1731, 1732, 1739, 1758, and 1781) and Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733 — 34) gave fullest expression to the optimistic thesis, as did, to a lesser extent, Shaftesbury's *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Societies* (1711), John Clarke's *Enquiry Into the Cause and Origin of Evil* (1720), Soame Jenyn's *Free Inquiry Into the Nature and Origin of Evil* (1757), and William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802). What angered most people was not that this optimism denied the reality of evil but that it insisted on it as a necessary component of the overall perfection of the world. Cf. Arthur Lovejoy, "The Principle of Plenitude and Eighteenth-Century Optimism," in *The Great Chain of Being* (New York: Harper, 1960).

<sup>4</sup> G.W. Leibniz, *Theodicy*, trans. E.M. Huggard (LaSalle: Open Court, 1988): para. 21. Cf. the similar threefold division by Maimonides (1135 — 1204), the leading Jewish philosopher of the Middle Ages, in *The Guide For the Perplexed* (III.xii). Archbishop William King likewise uses a threefold classification of evil as imperfection, natural, and moral evil. Cf. his *An Essay on the Origin of Evil*, trans. Edmund Law (Cambridge, 1758): 92.

<sup>5</sup> William Paley, *Natural Theology*, 2 vols., ed. Elisha Bartlett (New York: Harper, 1857): 2.155.

<sup>6</sup> Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Random House, n.d.): II.IV.4.

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *On the Failure of All Attempted Philosophical Theodicies (1791)*, in Michel Despland, ed. and trans., *Kant on History and Religion* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1973): 294.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. and ed. Thomas Gilby (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1967): Ia. Q19.art.9.

<sup>9</sup> Here I am following HJ McCloskey's categories. Cf. his "God and Evil," in Nelson Pike, ed., *Good and Evil* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1964): 63.

<sup>10</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Nature*, in *Three Essays on Religion* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969): 28-30. But cf. note 61 below.

<sup>11</sup> Paley, *Natural Theology*, 2:131ff.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Basil, *Hexameron*, III.5: "Do not then go beyond yourself to seek for evil. . . Each of us, let us acknowledge it, is the first author of his own vice." Maimonides makes a similar point when he refers to self-inflicted evils as the largest class of ills. Cf. his *Guide*, III.xii.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: The Mary Baker Trustees, 1934): 188. Cf. pp. 348, 393.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 480. Cf. p. 470: "If God, or good, is real, then evil, the unlikeness of God, is unreal. And evil can only seem to be real by giving reality to the unreal."

<sup>15</sup> Alan Watts, *The Two Hands of God* (NY: Macmillan, 1963): xix.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>17</sup> Benedict Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. Robert Hutching, vol. 31 of *Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952): "Appendix."

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*, 3rd edition, trans. Stephen Mackenna (London: Faber and Faber, 1962): I.8.3.

<sup>20</sup> Basil, *Hexameron*, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VIII, trans. Blomfield Jackson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951): II.4-5.

<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, III.11-13.

<sup>22</sup> Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. Richard Green (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1981): Book 3, Prose 10 and 12; Book 4, Prose 2, *passim*.

<sup>23</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, trans. Roy Deferrari (Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1951): I.v. 29.

<sup>24</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.Q48.arts.1 and 3.

<sup>25</sup> Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, trans. Laurence J. Lafleur (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979): 55.

<sup>26</sup> Leibniz, *Theodicy*, para. 32. Cf. paras. 20, 29-33.

<sup>27</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Salvifici Doloris: The Christian Meaning of Human Suffering," *Origins* 13 (February 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Stephen Davis, "Free Will and Evil," in *Encountering Evil*, ed. Stephen Davis (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981): 73.

<sup>29</sup> John Hick proffers this idea in the various presentations of his Irenaean theodicy.

<sup>30</sup> GC Berkouwer, *Sin*, trans. Philip Holtrop (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977): Chapter 1, "The Question of Origin."

<sup>31</sup> Cf. JS Mill's finite theism as propounded in his *Three Essays*.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. those who place the origin of evil "in" God as in the theodicies of John Roth, Frederick Sontag, Edgar S Brightman and some process theologians.

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *On Free Will*, III.xvii.48. Cf. *Enchiridion*, VIII.23.

<sup>34</sup> For bibliographical references see Michael Peterson, "Recent Work on the Problem of Evil," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (October 1983): 335-339.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. his *God and Other Minds: A Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1967) and *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974). A simpler version is found in his *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

<sup>36</sup> Plato, *Statesman*, 273.b.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, *Phaedrus*, 246a-b. Cr. *Phaedo*, 80a-b.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 79c.

<sup>39</sup> See David Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (Philadelphia: John Knox, 1976).

<sup>40</sup> Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom, and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974): 58. On the relationship of demonic powers to evil see the works

by Marguerite Shuster, *Power, Pathology, Paradox: The Dynamics of Evil and Good* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), Walter Wink, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) and *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Shape Human Existence* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), and GB Caird, *Principalities and Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956).

<sup>41</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, Ia.Q19.art.9. Cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XXIV. 95-96, and Leibniz, *Theodicy*, para. 22-26.

<sup>42</sup> Aquinas, *ST*, III.Q1.art. 3: "O fortunate crime which merited such and so great a redeemer!"

<sup>43</sup> Hugh of St. Victor, *On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith*, I.iv.23. Cited by Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Harper, 1978): 91.

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxiii.7; Augustine, *Enchiridion*, XXV.99.

<sup>45</sup> Nelson Pike, *Good and Evil*, p. 2. Critics advancing this argument include FH Bradley, JS Mill, JE McTaggart, Anthony Flew, HD Aiken, JL Mackie, CJ Ducasse, HJ McCloskey, WT Stace, and Richard LaCrois. Cf. Pike, pp. 86-87.

<sup>46</sup> J. Mackie, "Evil and Omnipotence," *Mind*, LXIV, 254 (1955), as reprinted in Pike, p. 46.

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

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.

<sup>50</sup> Anthony Flew, "Theology and Falsification," in *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1964): 108.

<sup>51</sup> Pike, "Hume on Evil," in Pike, *God and Evil*, pp. 85-102.

<sup>52</sup> For two examples, see Jean Paule Sarte, *What is Literature?*, trans. B. Frechtman (London: Methuen, 1950): 160-162; and Dorothe Soelle, *Suffering* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1975): 149. Both examples are taken from Surin, pp. 51, 95. Soelle writes, "the God who causes suffering is not to be justified even by lifting the suffering later. No heaven can rectify Auschwitz" (p. 149). Cf. Roth, p. 10.

tion is always incarnational.

In short, the quest for the historical Israel is incomplete unless it comes to grips with Israel's views of the past and her expression of history as a means of faith. Those approaches are inadequate which emphasize the religious value of the text while at the same time denouncing the basic historicity of the story. We must recognize that biblical religion itself insists on the historicity of certain events as the foundation for faith, indeed, as the compulsion for faith. This is true no less for the exodus, conquest, etc. of Old Testament faith, than for the cross and resurrection in the New Testament.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> George W. Ramsey, *The Quest for the Historical Israel: Reconstructing Israel's Early History* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> So that, for example in New Testament studies, the resurrection of Jesus may be said to be true as *Geschichte* (history-as-significance, and is therefore "historic"), but not true as *Historie* (history-as-fact, and therefore "historical"). Likewise, in Old Testament studies, the historical nature of many redemptive events is called into question.

<sup>3</sup> Ramsey concluded his volume (*Quest*, 124) by asserting that it matters little whether biblical tradition tells of events which never occurred, or of persons who never existed: "This does not alter the fact that the tradition has spoken to believers for generation after generation with power and expressed things which they believed to be true. The tradition 'rang true' in their own experience and enabled them to develop a self-understanding and a lifestyle." Such a position has tremendous implications for one's view of revelation and inspiration.

<sup>4</sup> Shanks' volume brings together contributions of leading Old Testament scholars who each contribute one chapter on Israel's history. Dever's book is the publication of a lectureship which he delivered at the University of Washington.

<sup>5</sup> As with the classical statement of Martin Noth (*The History of Israel* [2d ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1960] 5-7 and 179.) But more recently, even the United Monarchy has been treated with a certain amount of historical "agnosticism." See J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986) 159-60, and G. Garbini, *History and Ideology in Ancient Israel* (New York: Crossroads, 1988) 31-32. For a review of Miller-Hayes and Garbini, see Mark W. Chavalas, "New Perspectives in the Study of Ancient Israel's Past," *Ashland Theological Journal* 23 (1991) 62-66.

<sup>6</sup> Lemaire, p. 85. Siegfried Horn's comments are more generous. He asserts in a most unbiased fashion, that the biblical authors were "more concerned

monolatrous instead of monotheistic. He asserts that priestly parties of Jerusalem produced the biblical texts quite late and expunged the accounts of syncretistic tendencies. Since the biblical evidence is late, the archaeological evidence is primary, and those who depend too heavily on biblical evidence are "bibliophiles."

Once again, Dever has assumed a starting premise which many will find objectionable. He nowhere explains what is intended by the chapter title "the Lost Background of the Israelite Cult." What exactly does Professor Dever assume is lost? In his conclusion to this chapter, he summarizes the primary features of the pre-Monarchic Israelite cult based on the archaeological record (p. 165). But in reality, the summary is consonant with the evidence presented in the Book of Judges. The biblical witness indicates that Israel indeed struggled with syncretistic tendencies. Even throughout the monarchy, the official religion of Jerusalem was constantly challenged by vestiges of Canaanite religious practices, as the biblical sources admit. In this sense, Professor Dever's presentation fails to recover the "lost background" of ancient Israel's cult, simply because it was never really lost.

Dever has done those of us who are non-specialists in archaeology a great service in collecting these data in one place. But many readers will object to his basic premises. He has overemphasized the continuity between Canaanite and Israelite religion and culture. Without doubt, there are many points of continuity. But the picture of religion in Palestine during the late Bronze and early Iron Ages is far from monolithic, as Dever would have us believe.<sup>20</sup>

Many will further object to Dever's assertion that Israelite religion was syncretistic throughout the monarchic period. The Bible clearly portrays an ideological struggle between Israelite Yahwism and Canaanite religion during this period. The archaeological evidence reveals the pervasiveness of Canaanite practices in Israel and fills out details of the struggle. But the evidence is insufficient to claim, as Dever does, that the struggle was actually a theological retrojection from the exile into the pre-exilic period, a sort of historical revisionism.

In the conclusion to his book, Dever avers that limitations are placed on the biblical message when one supposes "that the truth of the story lies in its historicity" (p. 170). Having repeatedly decried the historical reliability of biblical evidence several times in this volume, he expresses the consensus of many Old Testament scholars today when he states "religious consciousness leaps beyond event to meaning" (p. 172).

This brings us back to the central question in our quest for the historical Israel: How does the Bible itself view past events? How do the authors of the biblical texts, collectively and individually, perceive history and its role in their message? In point of fact, the Bible consistently presents theological truth as intrinsically bound to historical events. Throughout the scriptures, there are numerous passages which make clear the historical nature of Israelite faith, especially as faith relates to covenant between God and humanity.<sup>21</sup> From the biblical perspective, spiritual reality is always fleshed out in historical reality. So human faith always involves works, and from the divine perspective, revela-

of the Davidic-Solomonic period.<sup>17</sup> This chapter is a convenient compendium of archaeological material from the tenth century B.C. which produced the earliest and most impressive evidence of Israelite material culture and monumental architecture. Dever's systematic presentation of individual sites, fortifications (i.e. city walls and gates), and royal buildings, including an interesting discussion of Solomon's temple complex is a useful update on the most recent archaeological parallels to the biblical witness in Samuel and Kings.

The final chapter of Professor Dever's volume is entitled "Archaeology Reconstructs the Lost Background of the Israelite Cult" (pp. 119-66). After complaining that previous studies are arbitrary and fail to present a genuine history of ancient Israelite religion, Dever outlines a "phenomenological" or "functionalist" methodology for this chapter. He defines these terms as a characteristic of the *Religionsgeschichte* ("history of religions") approach. Dever asserts that this approach is superior to earlier methods such as literary criticism and Biblical Theology. It is phenomenological because it "concentrates on ancient religion itself, rather than on its modern relevance," and functional in that it "emphasizes not just theoretical belief but the overall role religion plays in actually shaping society" (pp. 126-27).

But this raises a question addressed over sixty years ago by Walther Eichrodt. Is it possible to write a genuinely "objective" history of Israelite religion? All of us, whether attempting a history of religion, or a distinctively Christian Old Testament theology, must confess to what Eichrodt calls "the subjective moment."<sup>18</sup> It becomes the responsibility of the scholar to make clear his or her guiding assumptions and values, and not to "set to work in the cheery optimism of absolute objectivity." It appears that Dever is guilty of historicism's greatest mistake, as defined by Eichrodt: "the suggestion that one can, by historical-empirical means, advance to norms or to universally valid propositions."

The heart of this chapter on archaeology and Israelite religion is a well-illustrated presentation of the material remains of the Israelite cult (pp. 128-62). Here the reader will discover a convenient, brief survey of archaeological artifacts bearing on the religious customs and practices of ancient Israel, though many will disagree with Dever's interpretations. He discusses Israelite shrines, both large, open-air cult places and smaller domestic installations. In addition, he presents religious paraphernalia used at these shrines and Hebrew seals and seal impressions, with their impressive art and iconography. Of particular interest in this chapter is Dever's rather controversial interpretation of the recent Kuntillet 'Ajrud discoveries, which he believes identify for the first time the old Canaanite fertility goddess Asherah (the consort of El at Ugarit) as the consort of Yahweh.<sup>19</sup>

The working hypothesis running as an undercurrent throughout this chapter is the assumption that "Israelite religion scarcely differed from the fertility religions of greater Canaan" (p. 128). The author believes that philosophical monotheism was a late, exilic development, and that Israelite religion was syncretistic, combining aspects of Yahweh worship with Canaanite religion throughout the monarchic period. The early Israelite cult was officially

of the Bible itself, as both a theological and historical document, but also to the nature of the human condition. On the basis of both history and theology, it lays claim to the reader's life. Instead of an artifact with a coded message to be deciphered, the Bible's message is transparent and inescapable.

Professor Dever's second chapter is entitled "The Israelite Settlement in Canaan: New Archaeological Models" (pp. 37-84). Like the chapter by Callaway discussed above, Dever also begins his discussion of the conquest by assuming the ideological and historical dichotomy between the books of Joshua and Judges. He states boldly, "The book of Judges, with its account of gradual Israelite infiltration and assimilation in Canaan, is diametrically opposed to the story of Joshua, which is one of overwhelming military victories" (p. 42).

This is crucial to his argument, since it sets up a bogus choice one is forced to make: either Joshua or Judges is true, but not both. Later in the chapter he asserts that Judges is more "realistic and thus more historically reliable" (p. 79). But the dichotomy he assumes between these two biblical sources is misleading. It is inaccurate, in the first place, to picture the Book of Judges as an "account of gradual Israelite infiltration and assimilation in Canaan." This approach also fails to take into account the literary and canonical purposes of Joshua and Judges (see our discussion of Callaway above).

One of the values of Dever's book is the survey he presents of archaeological evidence and theories regarding the conquest. His evaluation of the American position established by Albright and his students is uncomplimentary and Dever views their emphasis on a military invasion and conquest as passé. He is less critical, though still not convinced, by the older German "peaceful infiltration" model. What this reviewer found surprising was Dever's total acceptance of the "peasants' revolt" model first articulated by G. E. Mendenhall in 1962, and given full definition by Norman Gottwald in his burdensome 1979 volume *The Tribes of Yahweh* (over 900 difficult pages),<sup>15</sup> which Dever praises as "probably the most important book to appear in Biblical (OT) studies in the past twenty years" (p. 55). In light of Professor Dever's subtitle to this chapter ("New Archaeological Models"), we might have expected a new alternative to the evidence of Israel's occupation of the Promised Land. But instead, he simply adds his voice to the limited number of scholars supporting the Gottwald hypothesis.

As always, even archaeological material requires careful scrutiny and interpretation. Dever's basic premises are periodically marred by logical inconsistencies. Page 61 reveals one of his most startling assertions: "it may be stated confidently that the archaeological evidence today is overwhelmingly against the classic conquest model of Israelite origins." But this is a logical *non sequitur* since it constitutes the conclusion for a section in which he has listed at least eight cities (perhaps as many as ten) which yield archaeological findings consonant with the biblical witness of just such a conquest model (pp. 56-61).<sup>16</sup>

Dever's third chapter ("Monumental Art and Architecture in Ancient Israel in the Period of the United Monarchy") is a survey of the building remains

more nor less. While agreeing with Celsus that evils did not proceed from God, he also rejected the notion that matter is the source of evils. Undergirding Origen's response is the concept of human free will. "It is the mind of each individual which is the cause of the evil which arises in him."<sup>7</sup> From this vantage point, Origen dismisses both the deterministic and materialistic nature of Celsus's view.

Methodius (d. 311) reveals the logic that undergirded the Gnostic view. He observed that the Valentinian Gnostics, in order to avoid making God the author of sin, posited "the existence of substance as coeval with Him."<sup>8</sup> Evil things have their source in this substance or matter. The Gnostics, as did Marcion, wanted to protect God from the charge of originating evil. Even though they resolved the problem in a different way, they ended up with a dualistic system.

Methodius resolves the dilemma by arguing that evil has no existence in the essence of things; rather it is in the doing of something evil that evil has its origin.

Because there is nothing evil by nature, but it is by use that evil things become such. . . . man was made with a free-will, not as if there were already evil in existence, which he had the power of choosing if he wished, but on account of his capacity of obeying or disobeying God.

For this was the meaning of the gift of Free Will. And man after his creation receives a commandment from God; and from this at once rises evil, for he does not obey the divine command; and this alone is evil, namely, disobedience, which had a beginning.<sup>9</sup>

A writer who would have noticeable impact on discussions of evil in later centuries was Origen. Unfortunately, his consideration of the issue of evil is often intertwined with some of his most speculative theories, which bear a clear Greek philosophical stamp. Though Origen does wish to remain faithful to the teaching of the apostles, he points out that this teaching does not provide comprehensive knowledge, for example, in regard to "what existed before this world, or what will exist after it."<sup>10</sup> Origen felt that he could offer "intelligent inference" on subjects that did not have "strict dogmatic definition . . . i.e., in agreement with the creed of the Church."<sup>11</sup> Significantly, Origen's importation of Greek philosophical concepts is most apparent when he is utilizing "intelligent inference" to fill in the gaps in apostolic teaching. Origen's speculation in the two areas noted above — what existed before and what will exist after the world — introduced some most dubious tangents to the issue of evil.

Origen posited an eternal creation, not of corporeal beings or of the visible world, but of rational creatures or pure intellects.<sup>12</sup> God's purpose for these intellects was that they should contemplate and, thereby, imitate Him. However, God created them with free will, which some of them abused by turning their gaze from Him to the multiplicity that characterizes evil. Origen indicates that no created being is good or evil in its essence, but becomes so by the use it makes of its own free will.<sup>13</sup>

Origen upheld the doctrine of a double creation with a prehistorical fall. Genesis 1 recounts God's creation of the pure intellects who were made without sexual distinctions (they were made "male and female"). The Genesis 2 account describes how, following a heavenly fall when some intellects turned away from God, these intellects became "souls" with material bodies. God first made the body of a man and then that of woman, thereby establishing sexual distinctions. Origen held that God created the visible world as a field for the trial of these fallen intellects.<sup>14</sup>

Not only were these intellects the focus of God's original creative activity, they also are the focus of God's ultimate saving activity, according to Origen. It is from this perspective that he introduces his concept of the restoration of all things, for, as he argues, "the end is always like the beginning."<sup>15</sup> God's ultimate purpose is therefore to restore the unity found in the beginning by bringing all rational beings into subjection to Christ. This subjection, which Origen equates with salvation, includes even the demons and the devil, who holds the world in his dominion.<sup>16</sup>

Origen's speculative theology includes two points that are important for this study. Origen underscores the idea that God created all rational creatures with free will and that it is the misuse of free choice that is the occasion of sin.<sup>17</sup> Origen does observe that there are natural disasters and hardships that come our way. God does permit these; in fact "holy Scripture teaches us to receive all that happens as sent by God, knowing that without Him no event occurs."<sup>18</sup> But, for the most part, Origen places the burden of responsibility for evil on the misuse of free will, whether Satan's or humanity's. A second point related to Origen's speculation is the idea that the final restoration of all is an outworking of God's goodness: he believed that "the goodness of God, through His Christ, may recall all His creatures to one end, even His enemies being conquered and subdued."<sup>19</sup> Thus, Origen places special emphasis on God's love and goodness in the outworking of eschatology. Though the church, during the sixth century, did reject Origen's speculations about the preexistence of the intellects and their eventual salvation, these ideas continued to persist as, for example, in the medieval church through the mystical speculations of the pseudonymous Dionysius the Areopagite and in the Protestant tradition through the theosophical system of Jacob Boehme.

There are several other noteworthy points about the theme of evil that surface in the writings of church fathers through the mid fourth century. Theophilus of Antioch (late second century) underscored a point that later Christian writers frequently emphasized when facing the concept, which was thoroughly embedded in much Greek thought, that matter is inherently evil. He observed: "nothing was made evil by God, but all things good, yea, very good — but the sin in which humanity was concerned brought evil upon them."<sup>20</sup> A number of writers indicated that the devil was the author of sin, even though he also was part of God's good creation. Often they make the point that the devil became evil by his own free act.<sup>21</sup>

Several writers also wrestle with the question of why God delays in condemning evil. Tertullian, for example, argues that God's wisdom is shown

in allowing time for humanity to crush his enemy through the use of the same freedom of will that had caused humanity to succumb in the first place.<sup>22</sup> Lactantius (ca. 240-ca. 320) maintains that God “did not exclude evil, that the nature of virtue might be evident.”<sup>23</sup>

Athanasius (ca. 296-373) reflects a conception of evil that becomes increasingly common from his time onward. He defines good as that which has its pattern in God Who is (that is, Who is self-existent). Whereas good *is*, because of its connection with God, “evil is not,” for evil consists in turning from the contemplation of what is good and wandering away towards its contraries. Because all that exists is good, made so by the Creator, evil cannot be said to exist. Evil did not exist in the beginning, nor did it belong to humanity’s nature, which was created good. Likewise evil cannot come from the good; it derives from the soul’s movement towards that which is not: lust expressed through various bodily senses. Evil, therefore, has no substantive or independent existence.<sup>24</sup>

The final church father that we need to consider from this period is one of the Cappadocian Fathers, Gregory of Nyssa (330-ca. 395). Gregory is significant both because he continues features of Origen’s thought and because he anticipates a number of points regarding evil that find their classic statement in Augustine.

Gregory’s conception of God possesses a definite Neoplatonic cast. God is depicted as ineffable and incomprehensible, unchangeable, unimpassioned, and simple, that is, uncompounded.<sup>25</sup> He is good and the Creator of a time and space universe (Gregory avoided the Greek notion of an eternal creation).<sup>26</sup>

Gregory’s view of God helps to understand his view of evil. Evil stands in contrast to God. While He is simple and without parts, evil is compound, multiform, many-colored (thus the bias against sexuality which derives from forming humanity male and female). While God is without change and passionless, His creatures are subject to change and passion, a door which God’s creatures can open to evil if they choose. While God is good, evil is the deprivation or privation of the good (Origen had also seen evil as a privation of the good<sup>27</sup>). Gregory further argues that because evil is a privation of the good, it has no self-subsistence, “for no evil of any kind lies outside and independent of the will.”<sup>28</sup>

What is the origin of evil? Gregory lays the blame on the devil. The devil willingly turned away from the good and came to understand the opposite of goodness, that is, envy. This beginning is the cause of all that follows. For in this act, the devil received a bias toward evil. The devil, however, envied the special status of humanity, who still maintained communion with God. The devil therefore mixed the same wickedness into humanity’s will as he had in his own. By this means humanity is in its present evil condition. Gregory insists that this entire sad history is a result of the misuse of free will. It is “by a motion of our self-will” that “we contracted a fellowship with evil, and, owing to some sensual gratification, mixed up this evil with our nature . . .”<sup>29</sup> Gregory indicates that God foreknew that all this would happen, yet He permitted it in order that “He might not destroy our freedom, the inalienable

heritage of reason and therefore a portion of His image in us.”<sup>30</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa reveals the influence of Origen in a number of areas: his openness to Greek philosophy, the concept of a prehistorical fall of man, an acceptance of the restoration of all things. Though Gregory does part company with Origen in several areas, including the eternity of created beings, he does follow him, nonetheless, in his understanding of God’s grand design for the world.

Both regard the history of the world as a movement between a beginning and an end in which are united every single spiritual or truly human nature in the world, and the Divine nature. This interval of movement is caused by the falling away of [that is, through] the free will of the creature from the divine: but it will come to an end, in order that the former union may be restored . . . Both, too, . . . would regard “man” as the final cause, and the explanation, and the centre of God’s plan in creation.<sup>31</sup>

For this study, one of the significant points of agreement between Gregory and Origen is the conviction that evil has its source not in matter, but in the misuse of the free will of humanity. Though they lived over a century apart, they were reacting to a common threat: the fatalism and determinism of a prominent religious movement. In Origen’s case, it was Gnosticism; in Gregory’s case it was Manichaeism. Both movements viewed evil as an inevitable result of divine processes; it resided in matter and, therefore, human responsibility was nullified. In response, Origen and Gregory asserted that evil was due to an act of human will. Evil had no independent existence: “it was relative, being a ‘default,’ or ‘failure,’ or ‘turning away from the true good’ of the will, which, however, was always free to rectify this failure. It was a . . . loss of the good; but it did not stand over against the good as an independent power.”<sup>32</sup>

### Summary

Throughout the period of the early church, leading up to Augustine, there is a quite uniform approach to the problem of evil. Invariably, evil is seen as a product of the misuse of free will. It is important, though, to set this observation in a larger context. Pelikan notes that classical Greek, and later, Roman thought had wrestled with the opposing themes of responsibility and inevitability. By the time of the first century, determinism and inevitability had become predominate in the philosophical and religious mix of the Greco-Roman world. Gnosticism served only to heighten the sense that humanity was a “victim and slave of forces over which he had no control.”<sup>33</sup>

The early church fathers, as they sought to respond to the determinism that pervaded their cultural context, were sensitized in their study of Scripture to the concepts of choice, freedom, and option. Forster and Marston comment on this development:

The early church noted the Scriptures (such as Matthew 23:37) which indicated that man sometimes defied and disobeyed God's will . . . They therefore coined the term "free-will" to describe the will of man. This was to emphasize the Bible's teaching that Man's will was free to choose not to do the will of God.<sup>34</sup>

They further stress the unanimity of the early church's appeal to free will:

The doctrine of "free-will" seems to have been universally accepted in the early church. Not a single church figure in the first 300 years rejected it and most of them stated it clearly in works still extant . . . The only ones to reject it were heretics like the Gnostics, Marcion, Valentinus, Manes (and the Manichees), etc. . . . Three recurrent ideas seem to be in their teaching:

1. The rejection of free-will is the view of heretics.
2. Free-will is a gift given to man by God — for nothing can ultimately be independent of God.
3. Man possesses free-will because he is made in God's image, and God has free-will.<sup>35</sup>

The responsibility inherent in human free will becomes the dominant apologetic tool in the church's response to heretical notions about the source of evil. The prominent heretical groups invariably traced the source of evil back to God either directly by positing two gods, one of whom created evil, (Marcion and the Manichees) or indirectly through divine processes which brought into existence a world and matter in which evil inheres (Gnosticism). The church responded by insisting that both God and His creation were good and that the devil and humanity are responsible for evil through the misuse of God's good gift of free will. Evil is seen as having no self-existence but as being derivative in nature. Indeed, because only that which is good is existent, evil is not.

There are only limited discussions of incidental or natural evil in the writings of the early church fathers. The emphasis is clearly on those forms of evil for which humanity is responsible. When such evils as disease or natural disasters are discussed, they are viewed as God's just judgment against sin (Tertullian's "penal sin"), or as "ambassadors" which direct us toward God (as such, Basil the Great prefers not to call them evils), or as the result of the fallen world order.<sup>36</sup> The minimal consideration given to these evils certainly is an outgrowth of the church's stress on human responsibility for evil, but there are also other factors. Suffering was an expected part of the life of the Christian throughout this period. In fact, the church probably experienced worse suffering directly from human hands than from natural sources of pain and hardship. Likewise, Christians of this period were other-worldly oriented; they believed that heaven was their true home, not this world. This outlook was strengthened by the Platonic world view which held that the true reality was heavenly, while the present life was but a mere shadow of the greater

heavenly existence. Pain and suffering are therefore temporary aberrations found in an unstable world. God's original endowment to humanity was passionlessness, existence beyond the touch of such temporal sensations.<sup>37</sup>

## Augustine

### Background to Augustine's Thought

Perhaps no one has dominated the theological world, both in his own age as well as succeeding ones, as has Augustine. His impact has been due to the way that he marshalled his rare intellectual abilities to respond to a world that was undergoing unparalleled change. Not only did the Western church face numerous religious challenges from inside (Pelagianism, Donatism) and out (Manichaeism), but the very social and political order was in a state of disarray due to the conquest of Rome and the Western empire by a host of foreign invaders. In the course of responding to these and other issues, Augustine constructed a most impressive theological structure that would come to dominate the theological horizon of the Western church for over a millennium.

Knowing Augustine's historical context allows us to gain a better grasp of his discussions about the problem of evil. Much of what Augustine writes about evil derives from his confrontation with two major challenges to orthodox thought: Manichaeism and Pelagianism. In addition, much of what Augustine has to say about evil has its roots in the thought of earlier theologians, but he does develop a new framework and provide new direction to the problem of evil. We will pursue Augustine's thought on the topic of evil as he develops it in response to the movements of Manichaeism and Pelagianism. Some background on both movements and Augustine's relation to them will help to set the stage.

Ever the seeker of truth, Augustine, in his younger years, had been drawn to Manichaeism because of its promise to offer a rational explanation for the universe. Augustine had had difficulties with the problem of how the goodness and love of God could be reconciled with the existence of evil. Manichaeism resolved this problem by positing two eternal principles, one good, the other evil, which are in perpetual conflict. Humanity's plight derives from its present situation: the human spirit, which is part of the divine substance, is now in anguish because of its union, here on earth, with the principle of evil. Like Gnosticism, Manichaeism taught that through a revelation humanity can know its divine origin and escape the bonds of matter. In time, Augustine came to doubt this explanation for evil and eventually reject Manichaeism.<sup>38</sup>

As we noted in the previous section, the early church uniformly emphasized free will and human responsibility in response to a cultural milieu which stressed inevitability. The church in the Eastern, Greek-speaking portion of the Roman Empire especially upheld the doctrine of free will, a characteristic that continues to the present. In the West, however, there was a gradual movement toward a position of original sin, anticipating the doctrine of total depravity. J. N. D. Kelly notes, however, that even though fourth-century Christians had a firm grasp of "man's fallen condition and consequent need of divine

help," they also maintained "dogged belief in free will and responsibility." He continues, "These two sets of ideas were not necessarily irreconcilable, but a conflict was unavoidable unless their relations were set down very subtly."<sup>39</sup>

A conflict indeed was touched off when a well-educated Briton, Pelagius, appeared in Rome at the end of the fourth century. He brought with him a message that emphasized humanity's innate goodness, free will, and perfectibility. In addition, he challenged the growing tendencies in Western Christianity toward the inevitability of sin, original sin, and moral pessimism. All this put Pelagius on a collision course with a number of church leaders, including Augustine.<sup>40</sup>

### Augustine and the Problem of Evil

Augustine shares the Neoplatonist view of God which was becoming the norm among theologians: God is incomprehensible, incorruptible, unchangeable, infinite, eternal. He is the sole source of light; only in Him is true enlightenment. He is the one sovereign Good; only in Him do we have wellbeing.<sup>41</sup>

Augustine affirms that God is the creator of all that exists. All the things which God created are individually "good, and altogether very good, because God made all things very good."<sup>42</sup> It is from this standpoint that Augustine attacks Manichaeism. Creation is the work of the one absolute God. To posit two eternally antagonistic principles present in the universe is not only contrary to Christian monotheism but also leads to logical absurdity.<sup>43</sup>

Augustine's discussion of evil reveals his indebtedness to the writings of earlier Christian theologians but especially to concepts derived from Neoplatonism.<sup>44</sup> Augustine rejected any notion that evil has its source in God. Therefore, he felt that the proper place to begin talking about evil was not "Whence is evil?," as in the case of the Manichees, but "What is evil?" He rules out the Manichaen argument that evil was a nature or substance. Since God's creation was very good, evil cannot be a substance, for if it were, it would be good. Evil, indeed, is what is against nature.<sup>45</sup>

Augustine's classic definition of evil is that it is a privation (or depriving, or absence, or corruption) of the good. He is careful to observe that even though some things can be termed "better" than others in creation, it is not because they lack goodness. Rather, it is because they have differing degrees of measure, form, and order. Evil, on the other hand,

is nothing else than corruption, either of the measure, or the form, or the order, that belong to nature. Nature therefore which has been corrupted, is called evil, for assuredly when incorrupt it is good; but even when corrupt, so far as it is nature it is good, so far as it is corrupted it is evil.<sup>46</sup>

Augustine will make use of a related argument against the Manichaen con-

cept of the existence of two principles, one good, one evil. Here, as in his above argument, he begins with one of the attributes which was essential to God's nature, as he understood it. He observes that God is the supreme existence. A nature which moves away from Him and thereby becomes more corrupt moves toward non-existence, and "what is non-existent is nothing."<sup>47</sup> True existence is to be found, therefore, only in the One who truly is. To be fully corrupt is to cease to exist.

Even though evil is not a nature, it is an undeniable reality. Though not existing as a substance, it does exist as a lack of goodness. Evil is thus an "ontological parasite" in Augustine's thought.<sup>48</sup> "At this point, Augustine followed the lead of Neoplatonism, for which evil consisted not in another reality besides the One, but simply in withdrawing from the One."<sup>49</sup>

What is the source of evil, according to Augustine? He observes that even though God is incorruptible, this is not true of those natures created by Him. Insofar as they are natures, they are good; but because they were made out of nothing, it is possible for them to be corrupted. Yet God cannot be held responsible for the corruption of natures that He created good, "for corruption cannot come from Him who alone is incorruptible."<sup>50</sup> The only source of evil "is the falling away from the unchangeable good of a being made good but changeable, first in the case of an angel, and afterwards in the case of man."<sup>51</sup> This falling away arises from the "perversion of the will, bent aside from . . . God, the Supreme Substance, toward . . . lower things."<sup>52</sup> The abuse of free will by God's creatures allows Augustine to claim that God is the creator of all things, but is not the author of evil.

Augustine maintained that free will is good, for its source is God. In the case of Adam, free will was capable of good, but only as it was aided by God's grace. But it likewise was capable of evil.

God . . . did not will even him [Adam] to be without His grace, which He left in his free will; because free will is sufficient for evil, but is too little for good, unless it is aided by Omnipotent Good. And if that man had not forsaken that assistance of his free will, he would always have been good; but he forsook it, and he was forsaken.<sup>53</sup>

Augustine insists that the will itself is the source of the move away from the good.

But what cause of willing can there be which is prior to willing? Either it is a will, in which case we have not got beyond the root of evil will. Or it is not a will, and in that case there is no sin in it. Either, then, will is itself the first cause of sin, or the first cause is without sin. Now sin is rightly imputed only to that which sins, nor is it rightly imputed unless it sins voluntarily.<sup>54</sup>

Augustine's teaching about evil up to this point is consistent with what we have seen in the writings of earlier church fathers. Likewise, most of the above

discussion derives from Augustine's interaction with Manichaeism and generally with a deterministic philosophic outlook which the church had resolutely opposed from the second century on. It is in his response to Pelagianism, however, that Augustine introduces some significant new perspectives on the subject of evil.<sup>55</sup>

The preceding thought of Augustine on free will is true only of humanity before the fall. Augustine followed the Western tradition, beginning with Tertullian, that Adam's sin radically affected all his descendants through their inheritance of original sin from the progenitor of the race. Though, as we have seen, Adam, prior to the fall, was able to sin, he also possessed the gift of being able to persevere in the good, i.e. the power not to sin. As a consequence of his sin, however, Adam lost the power not to sin. He was still free, but without the gift of grace that enabled him not to sin, he was free only to sin. All humanity since Adam is in this same condition because of the inheritance of original sin from Adam.<sup>56</sup>

Because our will is incapable of doing true good, we are dependent upon divine grace to act upon our will if we are to be led out of the "mass of perdition" to salvation. Augustine held that grace works irresistibly in the will, leading it to will the good. Though God initiates this working in the human will, once His grace is present, He cooperates with our initially weak will, strengthening it for good works. "He operates, therefore, without us, in order that we may will; but when we will, and so will that we may act, He co-operates with us."<sup>57</sup> Faithfulness is expected of the Christian. But even this faithfulness derives from the gift of perseverance which is also a result of grace and not merit. Interestingly, Augustine holds that some who have received initial grace and the resultant truly free will may fall away because they do not receive the gift of perseverance.<sup>58</sup> In the future life, the saved will not have the power to will evil; they will not be able to sin. This state does not remove free will, however; rather, the elect will be much freer when it becomes impossible for them to be the slaves of sin.<sup>59</sup>

Augustine's understanding of grace leads him to the issue of predestination. As Gonzalez observes:

If salvation is only possible through grace, and if that grace does not depend on any merit on the part of him who receives it, it follows that it is God himself, through his sovereign freedom and action, that decides who is to receive that unmerited gift.<sup>60</sup>

Augustine holds that the number of those predestinated is fixed. But he is insistent that God does not predestine humanity to sin or to damnation. Rather God saves the elect from the mass of perdition through His own sovereign and inscrutable will, while He leaves the rest in this mass to face the future condemnation which their sins deserve.<sup>61</sup> Augustine further observes that no one can be certain in this life whether "he is in the number of the predestinated."<sup>62</sup> This serves to caution believers against any presumption or pride in their lives.

There is in Augustine's writings a certain unresolved tension between his desire to deny that God is the source of evil, as he responds to Manichaeism, and his desire to uphold the absolute primacy of God in salvation through the doctrine of predestination, as he responds to Pelagianism. John Hick observes that this double emphasis on the "self-creation of evil *ex nihilo*" through the abuse of free will and on the doctrine of absolute divine predestination "in effect brings the origin of evil within the all-encompassing purpose of God, and lays upon Him who is alone able to bear it the ultimate responsibility for the existence of evil."<sup>63</sup> Augustine, no doubt, would hold that such a charge is improper, both because we have no right to charge God with unrighteousness and because we are delving into issues which are part of God's unsearchable and inscrutable will.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, this tension does exist as Augustine deals with the issues raised by Manichaeism and Pelagianism.

There are several other noteworthy points about evil in Augustine's writings which relate to the purpose and place of evil. They fit evil within a larger philosophical world view which tends to minimize the notion that evil is an existential problem. A salient principle in Augustine's thought is what Hick has referred to as Augustine's "aesthetic theme." This is his "affirmation of faith that, seen in its totality from the ultimate standpoint of the Creator, the universe is wholly good; for even the evil within it is made to contribute to the complex perfection of the whole."<sup>65</sup> Following is one expression of this theme from Augustine's *Confessions*:

And to Thee is there nothing at all evil, and not only to Thee, but to Thy whole creation; because there is nothing without which can break in, and mar that order which Thou has appointed it. But in the parts thereof, some things, because they harmonize not with others, are considered evil; whereas those very things harmonize with others, and are good, and in themselves are good.<sup>66</sup>

By fitting evil within the larger scope of God's ultimate plans, Augustine sees evil fulfilling several purposes. It serves as a kind of counterpoint to good, enhancing our admiration for the good.<sup>67</sup> Further, God can bring good even out of that which is evil. An exceptional case of this truth is that when God

foresaw that man would make a bad use of his free-will, that is, would sin, God arranged His own designs rather with a view to do good to man even in his sinfulness, that thus the good will of the Omnipotent might not be made void by the evil will of man, but might be fulfilled in spite of it.<sup>68</sup>

Augustine argues that even when God's will inflicts evil, it is always just, "and what is just is certainly not evil."<sup>69</sup> As we have seen in earlier writers, Augustine also distinguishes between two forms of evil in order to remove any suggestion that God creates sin.

He did not make sin, and our voluntary sin is the only thing that is called evil. There is another kind of evil, which is the penalty of sin. Since therefore there are two kinds of evil, sin and the penalty of sin, sin does not pertain to God; the penalty of sin pertains to the avenger. For as God is good who constituted all things, so He is just in taking vengeance on sin.<sup>70</sup>

Augustine follows up this discussion by tying it in with the aesthetic theme that we noted above: "therefore all things are ordered in the best way possible . . ." <sup>71</sup> Even those acts of God which are adjudged evil by humanity are part of the larger working of God's justice.<sup>72</sup>

### Observations Concerning Augustine's Approach to Evil

The theme of evil serves as a microcosm of Augustine's thought, for it cuts across some of his most distinctive beliefs: the doctrines of God, creation, humanity, sin, salvation, even consummation. His approach to evil reveals both his indebtedness to earlier theologians, but also the new directions which he pioneered.

Of special importance is that, in his discussion of evil, Augustine shifted the balance which had existed in the church from the second century to his time away from an emphasis on free will and in the direction of determinism. It is true that Augustine sought to retain the traditional argument that misuse of free will is the source of sin and evil. But his doctrine of predestination, that God has from all eternity determined which shall receive saving grace and which shall not, introduces an irreconcilable tension into the mix. As John Sanders has observed concerning Augustine and Calvin,

both attempted to argue for a form of soft-determinism or compatibilism (human freedom and divine determinism are not contradictory), by making a distinction between remote and proximate causes. They thought that if God was only the remote cause, then humans are still free and responsible as the proximate causes. The problem is that the proximate cause only does what the remote cause determines it should do. Soft-determinism is actually a determinism in freewill clothing.<sup>73</sup>

There is no doubt that Augustine's doctrine of predestination derives in part from his reaction to Pelagianism and his desire to guard against the introduction of human works into God's work of salvation. But even more determinative was his conception of God. Sanders observes that Augustine logically applied his Platonic concept of God as perfect, static, and unchangeable to the issue of the divine-human relationship.

Because God is totally unconditioned, he cannot "respond" to a person's faith . . . God has always known who would be saved and who would be damned. Furthermore, God does not decide who will be saved

based on foreknowledge of future human decisions because God is immutable. Basing election on any sort of human activity would imply conditionality and mutability in God. God is therefore the sole cause of salvation and damnation. God is, in fact, the sole cause of everything . . .<sup>74</sup>

Clark Pinnock has noted that Augustine's view of God bears directly upon the issue of evil. His commitment to this "type of theism threatened his defense of the divine justice" in attributing evil to the misuse of freedom. "However, if history is infallibly known and certain from all eternity, then freedom is an illusion."<sup>75</sup> And if freedom is an illusion, in what sense can humanity be held responsible for evil and sin? Likewise, does not the ultimate responsibility for evil come to rest at heaven's gate? Though these questions tended to be muted during the medieval period due to the dominance of a semi-Pelagian (or semi-Augustinian) approach to grace and free will, they would again surface during the Reformation when a purer form of Augustinian doctrine was recovered.

(This article will be continued in the next issue of the journal.)

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Note these points in the following passages: "The Letter of the Romans to the Corinthians" 4:2, 22:6, 28:1, 45:1-8 in *The Apostolic Fathers* (hereafter *AF*), trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), pp. 30, 41, 44, 53-54; "An Ancient Christian Sermon (2 Clement)" 8:2, 10:1 in *AF*, pp. 71-73; "The Letters of Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch: To the Ephesians" 13:1, 19:3 in *AF*, pp. 90, 92; "The Martyrdom of Polycarp" 2:1-4 in *AF*, pp. 135-136 (interestingly, the letter affirms that the martyrdoms of God's people "have taken place in accordance with the will of God" since He has "the power over all things"); "The Epistle of Barnabas" 4:12, 20:1-2 in *AF*, pp. 166, 186-187; "The Shepherd of Hermas" 53:4 in *AF*, p. 240; "The Fragments of Papias" 24 in *AF*, p. 326.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter *ANF*), Vol. III: *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian. The Five Books against Marcion*, by Tertullian (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint ed, 1980), 1, 2, p. 272.

<sup>3</sup> Justo L. Gonzalez, *A History of Christian Thought*, Vol. I: *From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1970), p. 141.

<sup>4</sup> *ANF*, Vol. I: *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus. Against Heresies*, by Irenaeus, 29, 1-2, p. 502.

<sup>5</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 2, 9, p. 305.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 2, 14, p. 308. See a similar approach to Isaiah 45:7 in Origen's response to Celsus. *ANF*, Vol. IV: *Fathers of the Third Century. Against Celsus*, by Origen, 6, 60, pp. 598-599.

<sup>7</sup> Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4, 62-66, pp. 525-527.

<sup>8</sup> *ANF*, Vol. VI: *Fathers of the Third Century*. "Concerning Free-Will," by Methodius, p. 358.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>10</sup> *ANF*, Vol. IV, *De Principiis*, by Origen, Preface 7, pp. 240-241.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 1, 7, 1, p. 262. Such speculative inference is consistent with Origen's view that there is, beyond the literal sense of Scripture, a spiritual, or secret, or hidden sense which the Holy Spirit reveals to some. Ibid., 2, 3, 2, pp. 270-271.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 2, 2, 1, p. 270; 3, 5, 4, p. 342. Gonzalez, *Christian Thought*, Vol. I, p. 226, refers to these creatures as "pure intellects." When writers refer to Origen's belief in the pre-existence of souls, they have this concept in mind.

<sup>13</sup> Gonzalez, *Christian Thought*, Vol. I, pp. 226-227.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>15</sup> Origen, *De Principiis*, 1, 6, 2, p. 260.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 1, 6, 1, p. 260. Origen's equation of subjection to Christ with salvation comes from joining the concept of subjection found in I Corinthians 15:25 with the parallelism between "subject unto God" and "salvation" found in Psalm 62:1 — "Shall not my soul be subject unto God? From Him cometh my salvation."

Origen's idea that God's enemies will be brought to salvation through their subjection is intriguing. He is such a proponent of free will in dealing with the issue of evil (vs. the determinism and fatalism of the Gnostics) that it seems quite out of character to suggest that some beings will be subjected to Christ.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2, 10, 6, p. 292.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 3, 2, 7, p. 334.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 1, 6, 1, p. 260.

<sup>20</sup> *ANF*, Vol. II: *Fathers of the Second Century*. "To Autolycus," by Theophilus, 2, 17, p. 101.

<sup>21</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 2, 10, p. 306; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 4, 65, pp. 526-527. Note also *ANF*, Vol. VII: *Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries. The Divine Institutes*, by Lactantius, 2, 9, p. 52.

<sup>22</sup> Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, 2, 10, p. 306.

<sup>23</sup> Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 5, 7, p. 142.

<sup>24</sup> *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter *NPNF*) Second Series, Vol. IV: *Anthanasius*. "Against the Heathens" by Athanasius (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint ed., 1978), 2-6, pp. 4-7.

<sup>25</sup> *NPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, *Against Eunomius* by Gregory of Nyssa, I, 26, p. 69 and "The Great Catechism," 20, p. 491.

<sup>27</sup> Origen, *De Principiis*, 2, 9, 2, p. 290.

<sup>28</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "The Great Catechism," 7, p. 482. For other discussions of the nature of evil, see "On the Making of Man," 20, 3, p. 410; "On the Soul and the Resurrection," p. 433; and "The Great Catechism," 6, p. 481.

<sup>29</sup> Idem, "The Great Catechism," 8, p. 482; see also 6, p. 481.

<sup>30</sup> *NPNF*, Second Series, Vol. V, "Prolegomena" by William Moore, p. 10.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>33</sup> Jeroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 283. I am indebted to the article by Owen H. Alderfer, "An Inquiry into Divine Sovereignty and Human Will," *Ashland Theological Bulletin* 11 (Spring 1978): 14-39 for pulling together much material pertinent to this discussion.

<sup>34</sup> Roger T. Forster and V. Paul Marston, *God's Strategy in Human History* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1973), p. 244.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, *NPNF*, Second Series, Vol. VIII: *St. Basil. The Hexaemeron* by Basil the Great, 2, 5, p. 62 and Gregory of Nyssa, "The Great Catechism," 8, p. 484.

<sup>37</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "The Great Confession," 8, p. 484.

<sup>38</sup> Gonzalez, *Christian History*, Vol. II, pp. 15-18.

<sup>39</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, revised ed., 1960), p. 357.

<sup>40</sup> Alderfer, "Inquiry," p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> *NPNF*, First Series, Vol. I: *St. Augustine. The Confessions of St. Augustine* by Augustine, 7, 1, 1-3, pp. 102-103; 7, 10, 16, p. 109; 8, 1, 1-4, pp. 190-191.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 12, 18, p. 110.

<sup>43</sup> Gonzalez, *Christian Thought*, Vol. II, p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> See the discussion of Augustine's reliance on Platonism in John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Great Britain: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1966), pp. 46-49.

<sup>45</sup> *NPNF*, First Series, Vol. IV: *St. Augustine*. "On the Morals of the Manichaens" by Augustine, 1, 2-6, 2-8, pp. 69-71; *Confessions*, 7, 12, 18, p. 110.

<sup>46</sup> *NPNF*, First Series, Vol. IV, "Concerning the Nature of Good, against the Manichaens" by Augustine, 4, p. 352.

<sup>47</sup> *NPNF*, First Series, Vol. IV, "Against the Epistle of Manichaeus Called Fundamental," by Augustine, 40, 46, pp. 149-150. See also Hick, *Evil*, p. 55.

<sup>48</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *The Roots of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1978), p. 47.

<sup>49</sup> Gonzalez, *Christian Theology*, Vol. II, pp. 40-41.

<sup>50</sup> Augustine, *Epistle of Manichaeus*, 38, 44, p. 149.

<sup>51</sup> Idem, *NPNF*, First Series, Vol. III: *St. Augustine*. "The Enchiridion," 23, p. 245.

<sup>52</sup> Idem, *Confessions*, 7, 16, 22, p. 111.

<sup>53</sup> Idem, *NPNF*, First Series, Vol. V: *St. Augustine*. "On Rebuke and Grace," 31, p. 484.

<sup>54</sup> *The Library of Christian Classics* (hereafter *LCC*), Vol. VI: *Augustine: Earlier Writings* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953). *On Free Will* by Augustine, 17, 49, p. 200.

<sup>55</sup> Augustine himself recognized that he was charting a new course with regard to the issues of free will, original sin, and irresistible grace. See Alderfer, "Inquiry," pp. 18-19.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, "On Rebuke and Grace," 12, p. 476; 31-33, pp. 484-485.

<sup>57</sup> Idem, *NPNF*, First Series, Vol. V, "On Grace and Free Will," 33, p. 458.

<sup>58</sup> Idem, "On Rebuke and Grace," 42, p. 489.

<sup>59</sup> Idem, "Enchiridion," 105, p. 271.

<sup>60</sup> Gonzalez, *Christian Theology*, Vol. II, p. 46.

<sup>61</sup> Augustine, "On Rebuke and Grace," 11-19, pp. 476-479.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 40, p. 488.

<sup>63</sup> Hick, *Evil*, p. 69.

<sup>64</sup> Augustine will frequently cite Romans 9:14 and 11:33 to deflect any suggestion that God's dealing with humanity is unjust.

<sup>65</sup> Hick, *Evil*, p. 88.

<sup>66</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, 7, 13, 19, p. 110.

<sup>67</sup> Idem, "Enchiridion," 11, p. 240.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 104, p. 271; see also 101, p. 269.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 102, p. 270.

<sup>70</sup> Idem, *NPNF*, First Series, Vol. IV, "Acts or Disputation against Fotunatus," 15, p. 116.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Augustine interprets the statement in Isaiah 45:7 that God creates evil along these lines. See *Epistle of Manichaeus*, 39, 45, p. 149.

<sup>73</sup> John E. Sanders, "God as Personal," in *A Case for Arminianism: The Grace of God, The Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1989), p. 172.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>75</sup> Clark Pinnock, "God Limits His Knowledge," in *Predestination and Free Will*, eds. David Basinger and Randall Basinger (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), p. 150.

