"Even the Dark Is Light to You"

Reconsidering the Doctrine of Sin and the Problem of Evil

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Abstract

How did evil come to be? Who is to blame for it? Why did God allow it to happen? Familiar answers, and the traditional doctrines that they represent, can and often have been understood—and perhaps more often *mis*understood—to bad, even disastrous effects. So, after a brief sketch of the traditional Augustinian doctrine of evil as received through John Wesley's teaching, which in one form or another shaped the deep structures of American Pentecostal theology and spirituality, I propose an alternative, one that holds that evil is truly nonsensical and so inexplicable; that no one is to blame for its advent, although all are responsible to resist it; that God had no purpose in allowing evil or the suffering it unleashes, but always only works to undo it and to heal those who have been broken by it; and that we are welcomed by our share in the Spirit into Christ's long resistance to evil and the Father's final victory over it.

Introduction

"A tradition is an act of forgiveness." Charles Mathewes

"It is sheer nonsense to speak of the Christian religion as offering a solution of the problem of evil." Donald MacKinnon

"God does not compromise with evil; he conquers it." David Bentley Hart

How did evil come to be? Who is to blame for it? Why did God allow it to happen? Most of us will have been taught that in the beginning Lucifer caused evil to emerge (in heaven) by his rebellious choice, and that Adam and Eve later caused evil to emerge (on earth) by their choice to believe the serpent's lies. And most of us will have been taught that God chose to allow this to happen either because the freedom he desired for angels and humans necessarily entails the possibility of conceiving and choosing an alternative to the divine will, and/or because he desired to bring about goods that would have been impossible apart from sin and death, misfortune and injustice, destruction and tragedy. But these familiar answers, and the traditional doctrines that they represent, can and often have been understood—and perhaps more often *mis*understood—to bad, even disastrous effects. So, after a brief sketch of the traditional Augustinian doctrine of evil as received through the teaching of John Wesley, teaching that in one form or another shaped the deep structures of American Pentecostal theology and spirituality, I propose an alternative, one that holds that evil is truly nonsensical and so inexplicable; that no one is to blame for its advent, although all are responsible to resist it; that God had no purpose in allowing evil or the suffering it unleashes, but always only works to undo it and to heal those who have been broken by it; and that we are welcomed by the Spirit into Christ's long resistance to evil and the Father's final victory over it.

Augustine and Wesley on the Origin, Consequences, and Purposes of Evil

In terms of the doctrine of *creation,* traditional or "classical" Christian theologies of evil always have affirmed that God did not, and indeed could not, create evil. According to this tradition, evil must be regarded as no-thing, a lack of good actualized against God's perfect will (if not also against God's purposes) by the sins of angels and humans. In terms of the doctrine of *providence*, these theologies of evil have affirmed that God, without in any way doing wrong, allowed and continues to allow evil to happen in order to bring about the greater good. And in terms of the doctrine of *salvation,* these theologies have affirmed that God in the end triumphs over the evil allowed in the beginning, destroying it absolutely, and healing the damages done to the elect. As a rule, these "classical" theologies also have contended that a creation that has been redeemed from evil through the incarnation of God must be acknowledged as superior to a creation that needs no such redemption,

because in redeeming creation God has revealed himself more fully than he could have done otherwise.[1]

During his long career, Augustine returned again and again to the doctrine of sin and the problem of evil. And his reflections have proven to be enormously influential, at least in what is often referred to as the West, for Protestants as well as Catholics, and for free church as well as so-called high church traditions. His accounts are rooted in an unqualified affirmation of the catholic belief in the essential goodness of God and God's created order. But he is careful to say the creation is not good in the same way that God is good, because creaturely goodness, unlike God's, is essentially contingent and changeable, and, therefore, vulnerable. He agreed with others that creaturely goodness may be increased or diminished—even lost (and, thanks to the Spirit, regained). But he speculated that this is so because creation, which was called into being from nothing, lacked ontological perfection even at first, and lacking that perfection, proved inherently susceptible to an unfaithful change.[2] And that change, in actual fact, is precisely what took place, not from necessity but in freedom. In the beginning, God wisely and lovingly made all things mutable and conditional. But some angels, led by Lucifer, "the anointed cherub," took advantage of their nature's perfect imperfection, turning against or falling away from God's will, plunging themselves into ruin and throwing the entire created order into peril.

The angels did this, Augustine contends, for no good reason. They freely became puffed up by their self-knowledge and carried away by their own goodness, and so lapsed from God and fractured their relation to the rest of creation. No explanation can be discerned for their turning away:

> No one, therefore, need seek for an efficient cause of an evil will. Since the "effect" is, in fact, a deficiency, the cause should be called "deficient." The fault of an evil will begins when one falls from Supreme Being to some being which is less than absolute. Trying to discover causes of such deficiencies—causes which, as I have said, are not efficient but deficient—is like trying to see darkness or hear silence *(The City of God* XII.7).[3]

After having been cast down for their wickedness, the bad angels were allowed by God's providential design to serve in the human drama as tempters and punishers. And right at the start, they showed their power: Lucifer tempted Adam into sin through Eve in the garden, and, through Adam's sin, humanity as a whole suffered the desolation of total depravity:

After he had sinned, man was banished, and through his sin he subjected his descendants to the punishment of sin and damnation, for he had radically corrupted them, in himself, by his sinning. As a consequence of all this, all those descended from him and his wife (who had prompted him to sin and who was condemned along with him at the same time)—all those born through carnal lust, on whom the same penalty is visited as for disobedience—all these entered into the inheritance of original sin (*Enchiridion* VIII.26).[4]

The fall of the angels was ordained by God, Augustine believes, although it was not in any sense *approved* by God, because he foresaw the good he could make from their rebellion, as well as the good uses he could make of the evils that resulted from it. He takes pains to defend God against the accusation that God's use of evil makes evil good. But he nonetheless upholds the claim that evil, as God makes use of it, does make a better good.

In at least a few places, Augustine argues that the fallen creation is good in the way a poem or a painting is good:

God would never have created a single angel—not even a single man—whose future wickedness He foresaw, unless, at the same time, He knew of the good which could come of this evil. It was as though He meant the harmony of history, like the beauty of a poem, to be enriched by antithetical elements (*The City of God* XI.18).[5]

The world, fallen as it is, remains fundamentally good. And much that is in the world is more or less untouched by evil:

If no one had sinned, this beautiful world could have been filled with created natures that are good. Even now, with sin in the world, it does not follow that all things are sinful. The great majority of those in heaven preserve the integrity of their nature; and not even the sinfulness of a will refusing to preserve the order of its nature can lessen the beauty of God's total order, designed, as it is, according to the laws of His justice. For, as the beauty of a picture is not dimmed by the dark colors, in their proper place, so the beauty of the universe of creatures, if one has insight to discern it, is not marred by sins, even though sin itself is an ugly blotch (*The City of God* XI.23).[6]

In his letter to Optatus, the bishop of Milevis, written before *City of God* and nearer the beginning of the Pelagian controversy, Augustine praised God's "good use of sinners":

[B]estowing on them many natural and temporal goods and adapting their malice to test good people and to warn them by comparison with sinners so that through sinners the good may learn to thank God that they were separated from them not by their merits, which were the same in the same lump of clay, but by God's mercy (Letter 190).[7]

Although John Wesley was more than willing to challenge Augustine's authority, perhaps especially the Augustinian doctrine of predestination and its implications for sanctification, his account of evil remains recognizably Augustinian.[8] He held, as Augustine did, that Lucifer's sins—first pride, then self-will—are the primal cause of evil.[9] And he agreed that evil has no cause other than the angels' faithless decision. God did not force it on them, and their nature did not require it of them; instead, they chose it without understanding what they were choosing. But Wesley avers a difference between Lucifer, who tempted himself and so fell into sin,[10] and Adam, whose temptation arose not from within but from without. Evil seduced him through the serpent's guile.[11] Thus, his sin is not inexplicable, as Satan's is. "Adam's perfection was different in degree if not kind from Lucifer's, and, under the power of external temptation, Adam turned from his perfection, and 'by his apostasy from God, he threw not only himself, but likewise the whole creation, which was intimately connected with him, into disorder, misery, death.'"[12]

Like Augustine, Wesley desired to protect God from accusation, to save God's face. And he was confident that a libertarian free will defense accomplished that aim, obviously and irrefutably absolving God of any blame for what went wrong with creation. "Upon this ground, I say, we do not find it difficult to justify the ways of God with men."[13] He agrees that God allowed first the angels and then the first humans to sin, knowing what these failures would mean for his creation. But he avers that God did so because he foreknew what he would make from this catastrophe. And this confidence in God's providential foresight affords believers a ground for adoration and thanksgiving: God is to be praised not only for the good God has done but also for allowing the evils through which a greater good has been brought about. "When we consider [that] all the evils introduced into the creation may work together for our good, yea, may 'work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,' we may well praise God for permitting these temporary evils, in order to [bring about] our eternal good."[14]

Wesley could make such an audacious claim because he stood convinced that God often if not always blesses in and through sufferings

and that if there had been no suffering, then much good, even the highest good, would have found no place in creaturely existence. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this conviction for Wesley. Indeed, this conviction was, for him, "the ground for resignation to God."[15] And so, it was the key to his theodicy, as well, leading him to contend, at least as strongly as Augustine did, that without evil—natural, moral, penal—there would have been no moral or natural development, and so no perfect virtue. Without evil there simply would have been no way for humans to become good themselves and or do good for others. Wesley is persuaded that patience, meekness, and gentleness; mercy, compassion, and forgiveness; faith, hope, and love—these virtues mature only in adversity, and happiness depends on being virtuous; therefore, happiness is only possible on the far side of the struggle against evil and its woes. Above all, without evil there would have been no possibility of sharing in the life of God: "The fall of Adam produced the death of Christ."[16] For this reason, believers can and should sing the *O Felix Culpa.*[17]

Especially later in his life, Wesley insisted on the rightness of the absolute libertarian freedom God gave to angels and humans, a freedom that was self-guided and self-determined.

> Man was made with an entire indifference, either to keep or change his first estate: it was left to himself what he would do; his own choice was to determine him in all things. The balance did not incline to one side or the other unless by his own deed. His Creator would not, and no creature besides himself could, weigh down either scale. So that, in this sense, he was the sole lord and sovereign judge of his own actions.[18]

Wesley insists that human freedom is truly like God's, and as such is a reality God cannot undo or violate without contradicting himself. In the end, then, in his (anti-Augustinian) account of "free will," human beings must decide for the light and against the darkness by following their own lights toward the light that beckons them on. Wesley countered the charge of Pelagianism by insisting that God's "prevenient grace" counteracts the effects of the Fall, so that our actions, like Adam's, are freed to be free in an absolute libertarian sense; thanks to the Spirit, we are in no way necessitated or determined by anything or anyone else. And this freedom, Wesley acknowledges, is meaningful only under the condition of testing.[19] Therefore, God sets before us life and death, and makes it so that the choice is ours, first and last.

Were human liberty taken away men would be as incapable of virtue as stones. Therefore (with reverence be it spoken) the Almighty himself cannot do this thing. He cannot thus contradict himself, or undo what he has done. He cannot destroy out of the soul of man that image of himself wherein he made him. And without doing this he cannot abolish sin and pain out of the world. But were it to be done it would imply no wisdom at all, but barely a stroke of omnipotence. Whereas all the manifold wisdom of God (as well as his power and goodness) is displayed in governing man as man; not as a stock or a stone, but as an intelligent and free spirit, capable of choosing either good or evil. He commands all things both in heaven and earth to assist man in attaining the end of his being, in working out his own salvation—so far as it can be done without compulsion, without overruling his liberty.[20]

In spite of his disagreements with the Calvinists as heirs of Augustine's doctrine of predestination, Wesley affirmed God's sovereignty as surely as they did. He agreed with them that providence allowed evil at the first and continues to use evils (such as the Lisbon earthquake) against the unfaithful for the instruction and inspiration of the faithful. This comes clear, for example, in lines from one of Charles's earthquake hymns (Hymn V):

3 The pillars of the earth are Thine,
And Thou hast set the world thereon;
They at Thy sovereign word incline,
The center trembles at Thy frown,
The everlasting mountains bow,
And God is in the earthquake now.

4 Now, Lord, to shake our guilty land,
Thou dost in indignation rise;
We see, we see Thy lifted hand
Made bare a nation to chastise,
Whom neither plagues nor mercies move
To fear Thy wrath or court Thy love.[21]

In summary, then: John, like Augustine, seeks to advocate for God against the accusations of the impious, teaching that God wisely, justly allowed and allows both evil and evils because of the good and goods that he can bring about through them. But in his sermon on providence, he offers yet another reason for evil's continued presence: God cannot, within the bounds given to historical existence, undo evil without also

undoing good. "God cannot counteract himself, or oppose his own work. Were it not for this, he would destroy all sin, with its attendant pain in a moment."[22] That is, for the sake of his own holiness and human integrity, and for the sake of his and their collaborative work in sanctification, God waits to the end of history to destroy evil and to redress its damages. In the meantime, God mercifully works to protect human beings—especially the most faithful Christians—from undue, unnecessary suffering so that the greatest good might be made of the evil they are required to suffer.

Imagining an Alternative

The Pentecostal movement (or, better, family of movements) emerged in various places around the globe at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century. And in many if not all of those places, Pentecostal teachings about evil and sin reflected broad understandings (and, more often, misunderstandings) of classical Augustinian and Wesleyan speculations, inflected by Romantic sensibilities and premillennial concerns, that together led them to emphasize even more emphatically the enduring conflict between good and evil, the cosmic war playing out in history and in the human heart.[23] But these Wesleyan-Pentecostal teachings remain, at least for some, unsatisfying and unsettling, because they insinuate a Pelagian-like competition between divine and creaturely freedom, denigrate humanity, vilifying the other, and effectively justifying evil. As Metz discerns, the Augustinian tradition "makes a guilty humanity alone responsible for this history of suffering," and in its cruelest forms, "arouses the impression that it is trying to reconcile itself to God and ally itself with God behind the backs of those who suffer namelessly, innocently."[24] We need, then, to consider alternatives that reject the attempt to justify God and refuse to accept that our relation to God is either libertarian or deterministic. We need to consider alternatives that affirm God's goodness without qualification, avowing that God has no use for evil but is always only ever opposed to it, so the human vocation can be recognized as a call to stand with God against evil and evils in the freedom Christ has made possible.

    Charles Mathewes argues that Augustine's iconic depiction of the angelic rebellion offers a "non-discursive image" of our fallen condition, one that does not so much afford a philosophical grasp of evil, or even "an increased knowledge of our own badness, a heightened awareness of guilt," as move us toward hope in love, making it possible for us to

appreciate why we innately resist the gone-wrong-ness of the world, and why we find ourselves "driven inevitably towards affirming the good."[25] Mathewes accepts that the event symbolized in the image of the Fall is in truth "wholly inexplicable," not because the event is mysterious, but because it is nonsensical. Evil's origin is not a thought too high or too deep for us; it is flatly unthinkable. In Mathewes's words, "there is no 'there' there."[26] Still, as an Augustinian, Mathewes is persuaded that we should accept our responsibility to God for what has gone wrong, not only in our own lives but also in the cosmos. We should, he says, understand original sin as a "self-inflicted wound."[27] He also holds that the mystery of evil and the mystery of creation are revealed to be mutually indicative by the mystery of Christ.[28] To be sure, Mathewes's articulation of the Augustinian tradition is learned and forceful, stimulating even when it is not fully convincing. But, as Mathewes, to his credit, admits, Ricoeur's criticisms remain to be answered: "Augustinian thinkers have often not fully plumbed the deep reality of evil, but have rather wavered between an optimistic denial of its reality and a pessimistic naturalization of its power."[29] The same holds true for much Pentecostal teaching, as well. And the consequences for the church's ministry and theology are dire.

In her 2020 Schaff Lectures, Sarah Coakley warns against asking and seeking to answer who was to blame for the Fall. Pointing to the history of white supremacist racism, she maintains that blaming and shaming the other for a suffered calamity is itself an act of misaligned or misaggregated desire.[30] Following her lead, we can contend that evil itself, and not any creature, not even Lucifer and the other fallen angels, is to blame. And on this point, Aquinas proves helpful: evil is accidental—in the strictest sense, uncaused (*ST* I.49.3).[31] And there is no supreme cause for evil, no equal opposite to God, who is the supreme good. Thus, there can be no "pure evil": good is essentially good, but the bad is not essential at all, only a lack, a deficiency (*ST* I.49.3).[32] All to say, we should accept that the rise of evil cannot be explained. We can only insist God did not will it and that no creature caused it, so that we can reject the "blame game," giving ourselves wholeheartedly to resisting evil by aligning ourselves as tightly as we can with God for the sake of our neighbor.

Pentecostals, on the whole, follow Wesley in affirming libertarian free will. They hold, as Wesley did, that what obtained before the Fall by nature obtains after the Fall by grace. But in reacting against determinism, this model of freedom runs the risk of misconstruing the relation of the creature to God, imagining true freedom as freedom *from* God's influence rather than freedom *for*, *in*, and *by* God's inspiration

and guidance. In truth, our relation to God is non-competitive and non-oppositional—neither deterministic nor libertarian. And more than that: it is truly co-operational and mutual. As David Bentley Hart explains, free will is "inherently purposive . . . oriented toward the good," drawn toward God as its fullness. No one can freely will evil as such; to will at all is to will something good, and that good is always God's, always God. The more completely we are aligned with God's will, therefore, the freer we are, the more we are ourselves.[33] "Self-control" is the fruit of the Spirit, after all (Gal 5:23)! And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets (1 Cor 14:32). How can this be? Do we not need God to "let us be" if we hope to "be ourselves"? No, because the God who is love is infinite fullness, gracefully transcendent in immanence and immanent in transcendence.[34] Once we grasp this truth, we can say meaningfully that evil is not a mystery, as God is, but simply an absurdity against which God is always mysteriously working, exposing its nothingness by healing the damage it has done to us and to the creation entrusted to our care. And in that realization, we can decide—freely, at last—to partner with God in resisting evil, including the evil of assigning blame to others or shaming ourselves.

Evil, Suffering, and the Permissive Will of God

Aquinas argues that God neither wills evil to happen nor wills for it not to happen, but wills only to permit it (*ST* I.19.9).[35] And he holds that God permits evil in this present age, but prohibits it in the age to come (*ST* I.19.12).[36] But perhaps it is better to say God has no *purpose* for evil, but does have a *reason* for allowing its possibility? In this way, we find ourselves assured that nothing, not even our rejection of him, alters his love for us or thwarts his purposes to lead us into full flourishing. The freedom God creates for angels and humans includes the potential to turn away from him, at least at the beginning of their movement from immaturity ("in Adam") into maturity ("in Christ") not because that potential is *necessary*, but because it is *gracious*. God is the one who determines the essence of all things, so he could have created a freedom without the potential for self-destruction. And that is precisely what he has done in the incarnation. Assuming human nature, God fills it with his own free will, which, unlike the will of innocent or fallen creatures, is not deliberative and arbitrary, but absolutely at one with the truth.

True to the wisdom of the Augustinian and Wesleyan traditions, Pentecostals have always insisted that God is not in any sense evil and does not create evil or do evil of any kind. But many have also held, as

Augustine and Wesley did, that God uses evils (like prolonged illnesses or so-called "natural disasters") to test and form character. And, of course, Scripture itself can be read along these lines. Not for no reason, Wesley loved Romans 5:3–5: "We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us." But this passage need not be taken to mean that suffering in and of itself produces endurance. After all, everyone knows that many people suffer terribly without being made more patient by it. And it goes without saying that patience, like self-control, is a fruit of the Spirit, not a product of painful experience. So, Paul can be understood to mean that suffering, endured faithfully, is the site or occasion of the Spirit's patience-creating work. Suffering does not yield patience. But it does yield *to* patience, which God works for the good of those who are hurting. Wesley was right to say God is pleased for us to "own him in the face of danger: in defiance of sorrow, sickness, pain, or death."[37] But this does not mean God is pleased for there to be sorrow, sickness, pain, and death so we can prove our loyalty and devotion. Precisely the opposite, in fact: God delights in our faithfulness because in it we discover that God "owns" us, and defies the evil that threatens our existence. We need to say it sharply and forcefully: God is opposed to evil always and entirely in all of its manifestations. God cannot do evil any more than God can create it. For that reason, it is misleading to talk about God *using* evil. It is better to say that he raises up good *after* evil than to say that he makes good *from* it. And the good that he brings about after evil does not retroactively justify it, but condemns it, exposing it as altogether useless and meaningless. In the crucifixion, the just one justifies the unjust. But he does not in that way justify the crucifixion. God raised up the black church under the darkness of slavery, but that does not justify slavery. Instead, it exposes it as unjustifiable on any grounds whatsoever. And the same goes for all evils. None is necessary.

The Death of Jesus and the Perfect Will of God

On the cross, Christians believe, Jesus triumphs over the powers of evil. And he ends it in such a way that we know evil's beginnings never could have been God's will. On the cross, he also creates a new beginning for us, one we enter only through death. According to St. Irenaeus, in our first beginning we were made innocent but not perfect, and so we were capable of turning from the good to our hurt. But in this new beginning

we *are* made perfect, made to share in the freedom God creates in the incarnation. And that means evil has been ended so that no new beginning is possible for it. For now, of course, as we long for that end that is our beginning, evil remains very much a reality—in us, against us. And so long as we imagine that God ordained the rise of evil in the beginning and from all times desires Jesus' crucifixion as the way to bring about our justification, then we can never be sure that other evils do not somehow fit into the divine masterplan. And that confusion will paralyze us, leave us numb, both to our own suffering, and to the suffering of others.

We talk sometimes as if the Father (or justice, regarded as a principality to which even God must answer) demanded the death of the Son. But what the Father willed was not the death of the Son but the death of *death*—and the redemption of all who have been lost to death. Contrary to what many have heard, then, the story of Christ's last days does not reveal God against God or God against us. It reveals God for us and with us against evil. Jesus' death is God's will only in the sense that God desires through it to defeat evil once for all. God, in his goodness, wills no one's damnation. And for that very reason, he gives himself up to death for the sake of those who have been damned by evil.

Suffering unto God against Evil

Some might contend we need evil and suffering in order to attain the sanctification God requires of us. But this line of thinking emerges only if we imagine we have to work out our salvation independently from God. In truth, however, we can work out our salvation precisely as God is acting in and among us, bearing us toward the fulfillment of his will (Phil 2:12–13). And the God who is at work for us and on us is the creator Spirit who creates out of nothing, and so does not need evil to make good possible. And for the same reason, we do not need evil and suffering in order to know or welcome the good. To confess God as sovereign is to acknowledge that God is not one cause among many causes, not even the most powerful or effective. It is to acknowledge that God does not cause at all, but *creates*—and in this way lovingly frees, sustains, and completes all things, without doing violence to anyone or anything.[38] God, therefore, needs nothing to overcome evil and so does not collaborate or compromise with evil in the short run in order to defeat it in the long run. God does not make an ally of evil. Instead, God destroys it, enfolding the whole creation in the movements of his own triune life, filling all things with his own life-giving fulness.

St. Paul, in his letter to the Romans, acknowledges that the Christian life is a life of profound suffering. But his words should not be taken to mean that we have to suffer evil in order to understand the good or to be one with God. The Son "learned obedience through the things that he suffered," not in the sense that he had to suffer to come close to the Father but in the sense that he had to suffer to come close to *us*. In the same way, if we suffer faithfully, we come to share the place of Christ among others who are suffering—caring for them, bringing grace to bear in their day-to-day lives and against the grain of common sense. Hence, God wills us to go through suffering for the same reason that he willed suffering for himself: because that is where those most in need of mercy and justice can be found. "Suffering leads into nothingness if it is not a suffering unto God."[39] And it can lead into God only if it leads to our neighbor most in need.

Scripture *does* say if we suffer for doing right, we are blessed (1 Pet 3:14). And it does say that we should glory in our sufferings (Rom 5:3–4). But this does not mean that suffering itself is in itself a blessing. And it does not mean we are blessed because we suffered well. No, Christ suffered "to bring you to God" (1 Pet 3:18). And what he does for us, we do for others. God does not will for us to go through suffering. But God does will for us to go to the suffering ones, so that their suffering in turn can go through us. If we are present to their sufferings, then God is near, and evil must yield to his goodness as darkness yields to light. Suffering does not make saints. Saints make suffering into witness—witness against the evil that causes suffering and to the God who is eternally and absolutely opposed to evil.

The End of Evil and the End of History

In the end, God will be all in all, expelling the shadows of nothingness with the radiant darkness of his everythingness. But if it is true that God does not change, then even now God must be resisting evil absolutely at every turn and on every front. It only appears otherwise to us because we are fallen, inhabiting a reality "subjected to futility" (Rom 8:20) in relation to a God who is not a factor in what happens with us. If "creation" names whatever it is that God does so history can happen, then "consummation" names whatever it is that God does so that history can happen as God desired for it to happen. History as it has happened, as we know it to have happened, is not what God intends, because God intends no evil. But we cannot know now the truth of creation's history at its depths, and we cannot know what creation's history will become

when God acts upon it eschatologically. For us, events come and go, and having come, they are gone. But in the "appearing" of the holy, holy, holy God that brings cosmic history to its telos, God happens to those events that have happened to us, and, as Scripture says, "eye has not seen, ear has not heard" what that will mean. We know only that it will be for our glory, as well as God's (1 Cor 2:7–9). Then, what St. Paul says of our bodies will be true of our stories, as well: the "flesh and blood" of our experiences will be "changed" from their natural glory into their eschatological, divine-human glory, into the full flourishing that is God's own way of being (1 Cor 15:35–57). For now, obviously, we know only in part (1 Cor 13:12). We travail because we do not yet see what we hope for (Rom 8:24). But thanks to the Spirit at work in us, we remain confident that what is already true for Jesus shall be true for us; he was and is the "author and finisher of our faith"; therefore, everything that happened with him was in fact happening to all things, and working its effects into the past, as well as into the future (Heb 2:8–9; 12:2). And when the end does come, not as the last event in the succession of historical events, but as their transcendent transfiguration, we shall know evil as God knows it now, not by what it did to us but by who we are without it.

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Notes:

1 See David Fergusson, *Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

2 See Rowan Williams, *On Augustine* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 79–106; G. R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and William Mann, "Augustine on Evil and Original Sin," in *The Cambridge Companion to Augustine*, eds. Eleonore Stump and Norman Kretzman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40–48. It should go without saying that other readings of Augustine's and Wesley's work always remain possible.

3 St. Augustine, *The City of God VIII–XVI*, Fathers of the Church 14 (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 257.

4 St. Augustine, *Enchiridion: On Faith, Hope, and Love*, 1955, VIII.26, https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/augustine_enchiridion_02_trans.htm#C8 (28 January 2022).

5 St. Augustine, *The City of God VIII-XVI*, 213–14.

6 St. Augustine, *The City of God VIII-XVI*, 222.

7 St. Augustine, *The Works of St Augustine II.3*: *Letters 156–210* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2004), 267.

8 As can be seen in Wesley's attempts to repristinate Pelagius's reputation. See John C. English, "References to St Augustine in the Works of John Wesley," *Asbury Theological Journal* 60:2 (Fall 2005), 5–24.

9 See Barry E. Bryant, "John Wesley on the Origins of Evil," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30 (1995), 111–33.

10 Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 58.

11 Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley,* 59.

12 John Wesley, "God's Approbation of His Works," *The Sermons of John Wesley*, 1872, § 2:3, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-56-gods-approbation-of-his-works/ (28 January 2022).

13 Wesley, "God's Approbation of His Works," § 2:3.

14 Wesley, "God's Approbation of His Works," § 2:3.

15 John Wesley, "God's Love to Fallen Man," *The Sermons of John Wesley*, 1872, § 1:7, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-59-gods-love-to-fallen-man/ (28 January 2022).

16 Wesley, "God's Love to Fallen Man," § 1:13.

17 Jerry L. Walls, "'As the Waters Cover the Sea': John Wesley on the Problem of Evil," *Faith and Philosophy* 13:4 (1996), 534–62.

18 John Wesley, "The Image of God," in *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*, eds. Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), § 1:3.

19 Wesley, "The Image of God," § 2:1.

20 John Wesley, "On Divine Providence," *The Sermons of John Wesley*, 1872, § 1:15, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-67-on-divine-providence/ (28 January 2022).

21 *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley VI* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1870), 25.

22 John Wesley, "On Divine Providence," § 1:15.

23 See, for example, Gilford E. Tippins, "The Origin of Evil," *Church of God Evangel*, March 15, 1924, p. 2; Aimee Semple McPherson, "Resist the Devil," *The Foursquare Crusader*, August 3, 1938, p. 3; F. J. Huegel, "The Power Behind World Upheaval," *The Pentecostal Evangel*, April 25, 1942, p. 2; French L. Arrington, *Christian Doctrine: A Pentecostal Perspective Vol. 2* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 1993), 119–55; Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleve, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (San Dimas, CA: L.I.F.E. College, 1983), 145–71; Jonathan Black, *Apostolic*

Theology: A Trinitarian Evangelical Pentecostal Introduction to Christian Doctrine (Luton, UK: The Apostolic Church, 2016), 111–33.

[24] Johann Baptist Metz, "Suffering unto God," *Critical Inquiry* 20:4 (Summer 1994), 618.

[25] Charles Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 245.

[26] Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, 246.

[27] Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, 246.

[28] Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, 246.

[29] Mathewes, *Evil and the Augustinian Tradition*, 99.

[30] Sarah Coakley, "In the Jail: Systemic Racism, Contemplation, and the Problem of 'Seeing,'" December 18, 2020, YouTube video, 1:33:08, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=shG0fBkHxCA&t=11s.

[31] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1920, I.49.3, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1049.htm#article3 (28 January 2022).

[32] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I.49.3.

[33] David Bentley Hart, "God, Creation, and Evil: The Moral Meaning of *Creatio Ex Nihilo*," *Radical Orthodoxy* 3:1 (September 2015), 1–17.

[34] See Kathryn Tanner, *God and Creation in Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 56–57.

[35] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1920, I.19.9, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1019.htm#article9 (28 January 2022).

[36] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1920, I.19.12, https://www.newadvent.org/summa/1019.htm#article12 (28 January 2022).

[37] Wesley, "God's Love to Fallen Man," § 1:7.

[38] Even the incarnation, transfiguration, and resurrection are not simply caused; they are uniquely creative events. That is, as "singularities," they are creative even of their own causes, creatively determining everything else, as well, from first to last and from top to bottom. Nothing happens to God. God happens to everything. So, in the incarnation, everything that happens to Jesus becomes the occasion of God happening to everything in a created and so newly creative way.

[39] Metz, "Suffering unto God," 619.