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NINE

Redemptive Suffering

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A religion worth its salt illuminates suffering and death—it gives an understanding of these things, and also a way of preparing for and soldiering through them. I don't intend this as a bold or a profound statement, still less as an "analysis" of religion. It is an observation. This is something religions do, and something they need to do. Religions provide for us a framework in which sense can be made of suffering and death, and in which hope or serenity might persist in their presence.

This is uncontroversially true of the Christian religion, in which Jesus' suffering and death (along with His resurrection) are central to all else. On a Christian interpretive scheme, these events give meaning and purpose to our own suffering and death, as well as grounds for our own hope.

How? Christ's suffering, death and resurrection were not pointless but redemptive. And because of this, death has "lost its sting" and suffering is (or can be) salutary, even occasion for joy. Again, *how?* Because: our death and resurrection of Jesus, so as to render them not pointless but redemptive as well.

This answer is given by wide swaths of philosophers and theologians within the Christian tradition, and it raises questions. Among them, and central to my discussion here, is the nature of the "link" between our suffering and death and those of Christ, and the manner in which this link invests our suffering and death with redemptive value.

Attempting to categorize and explain ways in which we might thus participate in Christ's redemptive suffering is not an exercise in theology as such, because it need not have theistic defense or any "justification of

God" in its sights; soteriological or Christological questions may motivate the try instead. But the problems of evil and the aims of theodicy can serve as useful touchstones in any analysis of redemptive suffering, and it is evident that renewed interest in this topic amongst Christian philosophers has been fueled by its perceived theological payoffs. In particular, the theme of redemptive suffering stands front-and-center within the contemporary Christian Understanding (or Christian Explanation) projects, which began in earnest a few decades ago and have steadily picked up steam since.

By "Christian Understanding (or Explanation) projects" I mean those approaches to the problem of evil that plumb the depths of Christian theological tradition specifically, and which are written by Christians for Christians—as opposed to approaches that use the resources and theoretical parameters of which are set by an in-common Abrahamic vision of God, or by a philosophical theism more general than that.¹ This isn't to say Christians (on this approach) cannot avail themselves of any God-justifying explanation of evil non-Christians could as well endorse, nor that redemptive suffering may be *experienced* by professing Christians only. It is to underscore that those engaged in Christian Understanding projects view the distinctly Christian shape of their contributions as satisfying something between a criterion of adequacy and a strong presumptive desideratum. If the "Christ Event" is foundational to Christianity, and if this event constitutes God's last and clearest word to humanity, then we should expect that—to the extent human sin, suffering and death can be made intelligible at all—Christ's passion and death are key to understanding how. "Through Christ and in Christ, light is shed on the riddle of sorrow and death. Apart from His Gospel, it overwhelms us" (*Gaudium et Spes* 1965, §22).

With this in mind, I want to consider some recent Christian meditations on redemptive suffering, focusing principally on the analyses given by Alvin Plantinga and Marilyn McCord Adams. My evaluation of their accounts takes as read their intention to deliver theodicies or explanations fit for consumption by Christian theists, who wish to understand the purpose of suffering and death from a Christian point of view.² I shall argue that their presentations, though suggestive and helpful, fall short of that objective. In the final section I will outline the work remaining to be done in order to fill out a Christian theory of redemptive suffering. I begin with a few brief remarks on suffering and redemption to aid in what follows.

SUFFERING AND REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING—PRELIMINARIES

Forgoing any serious treatment of redemption as a religious category, or of its role within Christian theology, we can at least say redemption is a

process whereby some person, group or thing is raised from a sub-optimal condition to an optimal or better one.³ The locus of redemption for Christians is of course Christ's atoning work "for us men and for our salvation," by which the rescue of His people (from their sin) and the world (from its curse) is gained. "Redemption" in this tradition therefore frequently names an outward-focused soteriological act, enacted by a redeemer on behalf of others. However, it refers as well to the effect of this act on its recipients, just as the allied concept of atonement designates variously the act of offering atonement or the state of at-onement it brings. But here it is important to mark that the "active" and "passive" (or cause/effect) senses of "redemption" should not be rigidly dichotomized. It was, for example, through Christ's redemptive efforts for us that He Himself "learned obedience through what He suffered" (Heb 5.8) and was "made perfect through suffering" (Heb 2.10). So an *act* of redemption, alongside its outward looking purpose, may also produce changes in the agent of redemption. (The changes or improvements in Christ—learning obedience, being perfected—do not imply an anterior sinful defect on His part according to tradition. But this just means redemptive activity need not in all its dimensions involve change from a categorically bad condition to a state of relative sinless purity.)

Now, two upshots: if we too may suffer redemptively, by actively participating in Christ's work, then this suffering redounds to our salvific benefit. Moreover, our participatory redemptive suffering (like Christ's suffering) may be both inwardly and outwardly directed. That is, if we participate in Christ's suffering there is conceptual space for the venerable idea that even our own suffering can work to the benefit of others, by "filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ" for their sake (Col 1.24). I'll return to these points below.

Turn now to suffering. This is a wide category, inclusive of physical and mental anguish, of death or dying, and also of sinfulness. With respect to the last, I agree with Eleonore Stump (2010) that a person might suffer objectively (by dint of disorder in mind, heart or will) without subjectively experiencing his disorder as an instance of suffering (ch. 1). It is however difficult to see how suffering-as-sinfulness could be of redemptive value—in contrast (say) to battling through the temptation or despair such disorder brings in its wake.⁴ Rather, sin or sinfulness is something from and for which we need redemption, whereas suffering of other kinds may be (necessary) means to it.

Suffering sans an experiential or broadly epistemic component is therefore not how I wish to view it here. On the other hand, I do not wish to strengthen the experiential/epistemic component to such a pitch that all suffering is in Adams' (1999) sense "horrific," or as providing *prima facie* reason to believe that one's life could not be a great good to one on the whole. For one thing, I am unsure how *prima facie* reasons function in this context—Job, Judas and Jesus each in their own ways participated in

horrors; that they might have evaluated the apparent worth or integrity of their lives similarly, in light of these events, seems questionable. More to the point, room must give way to lower-grade forms of suffering as potentially redemptive, and this Adams would not wish to deny.

So for the present, let's say (a) suffering of potentially redemptive value excludes the "objective suffering" that just is sinfulness or moral disorder—though these things do give occasion to redemptive suffering—and (b) it includes suffering not severe enough even *prima facie* to void one's life of positive meaning, as well as including Adams' "horrors." This is a vague description, but it will serve. My aim in this paper is to understand how our suffering (so described) can stand in a participatory relation to Christ's, so that it is geared toward a salvific end or endowed with redemptive significance.

REDEMPITIVE SUFFERING IN PLANTINGA'S FELIX CULPA THEODICY

In "Supralapsarianism, or 'O Felix Culpa,'" Alvin Plantinga (2004) rehabilitates and defends an explanation of evil that he commends as a "successful theodicy," one that at least approximates to the actual reasons for which God ordained the patterns of sin, suffering and death exhibited through history (12). In outline, his theodicy says that the divine decree to save (some of) us through the atoning death of Christ, the Incarnate Son, logically precedes God's ordination of the Fall and its consequences. The latter are directed toward God's prior intention to redeem (some of) us, in that they provide the intelligible grounds for incarnation and atonement—goods of such enormous value that all actual evil and suffering, sin and death, is outbalanced by them and worth their cost.

Plantinga's theodicy has been searchingly critiqued by others; here I review just two aspects of it, both related to his portrayal of redemptive suffering. The first of these is that Plantinga treats incarnation and atonement as a unit, or as a kind of singular extended event. The second is that the value he assigns this event is so overwhelming that it swamps the collective disvalue of all actual evil and suffering, without regard to its effects. Take the second point first.

According to Plantinga, the incarnation and atonement is an unrivaled and indeed unsurpassable display of divine goodness and love. In His condescending assumption of human nature, in His willingness to suffer excruciating pain and sorrow—even to the death—God sets forth His glory and loving-kindness to the fullest possible extent. To be sure, God's character is what it is irrespective of His contingent choice to create a world in which He thus reveals it, so the divine reality is no more valuable in fact than it would have been had He created nothing at all. But the *expression* of His goodness in creation, incarnation and atonement

magnifies and reflects His glory, which is itself a magnificent good. Plantinga therefore maintains that worlds including incarnation and atonement are better, more valuable, than any possible world absent this feature.

I believe this value assignment flows primarily from the religiously commendable impulse to give all glory, laud and honor to God. But it has the unfortunate effect of sidelining what may have moved a loving God to secure our redemption, and this in a couple ways.

Consider a world in which God forges a path to salvation and beatific intimacy via incarnation and atonement, but in which no one takes up the offer. If the manifestation of divinity through incarnation and atonement is of such value as to render the good of its influence on creatures negligible, then there is a straightforward sense in which such a world is just as valuable as ours.⁵ And that seems wrong. Kevin Diller (2008) makes vivid the oddness of this result when he notes, "the traditional interpretation of the atonement is that it is the means to accomplish the end of our redemption," whereas Plantinga's theodicy reverses the end and the means:

The fall now becomes the means to the ultimate end of the display of God's love in the suffering of the atonement. What makes the world great on the *Felix Culpa* view is the towering good of the costliness of God's loving action, not *primarily* what is accomplished by that action. . . . If God's purpose in atonement is to restore relationship with us, then it is proper to think that close relationship with creation is to God of greater value than the cost of the atonement. Restoring relationship is worth the sacrifice. The *Felix Culpa* approach swaps cost and value in the equation such that the value of the sacrifice of atonement is considered worth the cost of breaking relationship with creation. (92–3)

Whether Plantinga ignores the (secondary?) value of restored or augmented relationship will be addressed below, but it is fair to say the language and tenor of his presentation exacerbate the complaint that he does. It's strewn with descriptions of the "display," the "demonstration," the "manifestation" and "enactment" of God's goodness before our watching eyes, in the incarnation-and-atonement event, but the age-old theme that God glorifies Himself by *diffusion*—an inherently relational notion—is comparatively neglected throughout.

Further aggravating this worry is his reply to the "Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy" objection—an objection to which he devotes considerable time—which says that God on this picture is rather like a guardian who throws those under his care into grave predicaments, only to swoop in and save the day to the applause of all. Plantinga doesn't exactly seek to dispel the aptness of the comparison, but he does insist God's decisions are overall for the best, and that the epistemic distance between God and us should give judgment pause. Perhaps (he says), if we were

perfectly apprised of the reasons God ordained sin and suffering, and if our wills were perfectly attuned to His, we would voluntarily serve as (sinful and suffering) means to His end—the depiction of His glory—even if we weren't in fact consulted on the matter. So perhaps the judgment that God is an uncaring, utilitarian calculator on the Felix Culpa line owes simply to our sin or ignorance.

All that's as may be. The point is his reply gives traction to those who'd charge him with ignoring the value of incarnation and atonement for us, in favor of the admirable qualities of divinity it parades. Now in my view, if Plantinga may be accused of imbalance in emphasis—as the supralapsarian cast of his theodicy pretty well ensures—he doesn't bypass the good of incarnation and atonement for creatures altogether. He says (for instance) that incarnation and atonement is the vehicle through which we attain an otherwise impossible degree of union with God—an incommensurate good for us—and that our sin and suffering are ordered to it: it is “by virtue of our fall and subsequent redemption,” he says, that “we can achieve a level of intimacy with God that can't be achieved any other way; by virtue of suffering we are invited to join the charmed circle of the Trinity itself” (2004, 19).

Here the disparate categories of sin and suffering, redemption and participation, make contact in Plantinga's theory. The idea is that sin gives rise to atonement, which itself calls for incarnation and divine suffering, with the result that human suffering and sin become avenues for participation in God's eternal life. But all this needs scrutiny. I mentioned above that Plantinga treats incarnation and atonement as a package, and now I can refine this claim. Atonement is clearly bound up with sin in Plantinga's estimation: this is why he transitions to the purpose of *suffering* as a further question (17ff).⁶ So he distinguishes *conceptually* the reason why God ordains sin from the reason why we suffer—and he certainly does not comment being sinful as a way of growing close to God! Nevertheless, the value of *suffering* as a vital bridge to divine intimacy is something left mysterious. And the mystery only deepens when we reflect that incarnation is metaphysically as well as conceptually distinct from atonement, and looks motivationally distinguishable too.⁷ The good that is the hypostatic union by itself exhibits God's humiliating love, and itself paves way for humanity's inclusion in His life. What's suffering got to do with that? How does it enter the redemptive equation?

Plantinga is not without reply. Beyond noting with approval Hick's contention that suffering is instrumental to character development, and nodding toward a natural law theodicy, he cites a few Biblical texts⁸ from which he draws these conclusions: (i) “sharing in the suffering of Christ is a means to attain . . . salvation”; (ii) sharing in Christ's sufferings “is a means of fellowship with him at a very profound level” and a way “to achieve a certain kind of solidarity with him”; (iii) by sharing His suffer-

ing, we “come to resemble Christ . . . thus displaying more fully the image of God” (18).

It is therefore possible to participate in Christ's sufferings to redemptive effect, according to Plantinga. But for purposes of Christian Understanding we want to know how this “works”—to understand the “mechanics” or form of participation, to see why suffering is the optimal or necessary path to salvation, solidarity and the rest. Yet here Plantinga pulls back:

I say that our fellowship and solidarity in Christ's suffering and our resembling him in suffering are good states of affairs. I do not say that we can clearly see that they are indeed good states of affairs. My reason for saying that they are in fact good is not that it is simply obvious and apparent to us that they are good states of affairs, in the way in which it is simply apparent that severe suffering is intrinsically a bad thing. . . . So I don't say this because it is evident to us, but rather because we learn from Scripture that these are good states of affairs. . . . Someone might object that in a theodicy, one cannot appeal to goods we can't ourselves recognize to be goods; but why think a thing like that? A theodicy will of course make reference to states of affairs that are known to be good. . . . How this information is acquired is neither here nor there. (19)

But to know *that* something is so does not disclose understanding of why it is so, and this is just where (as I think) understanding is required. Granted, my focus is not Plantinga's, and what's central to my interests are perhaps orthogonal to his. But if the promissory note of Christian Understanding theodicy can be cashed—if a unique and uniquely potent explanation of suffering is there in the Christian religion—then we must pick up the thread where Plantinga leaves off.

REDEMPTIVE SUFFERING IN ADAMS' CHRISTOLOGICAL “THEODICY”

Like Plantinga, Marilyn McCord Adams (1999) draws from the well of Christian tradition in her treatment of sin and suffering: with respect to these, she too holds “the central doctrines of Christian theology—Christology and the Trinity—have considerable explanatory power” (164). However, her approach is different and more demanding in orientation than Plantinga's. If Plantinga explains sin and suffering by connecting them to God's ultimate end—actualizing a world in which He magnifies His greatness—and this end outweighs in value the intrinsic badness of its prerequisite conditions, Adams insists sin and suffering be “defeated” within the context of each individual life (not just “outweighed” by an aggregate, global good). It isn't true, according to Adams, that God's justice obligates Him to ensure such an outcome for each of us; it is rather

God's love that moves Him to secure the good for His creatures, through the suffering they undergo.⁹ So there is between Plantinga and Adams a reversal of explanatory direction—suffering is related organically with some great good for us, and God enters into our sufferings that this good for us may be vouched safe.

The tremendous breadth and richness of Adams' writings on this topic make it impossible to summarize her contribution to Christian Understanding in such limited space. Still, as before, we may gainfully review her work with an eye toward the nature of participatory redemptive suffering as she develops it.

Central to her concern is *horrendous* suffering—suffering so profound as potentially to destroy the meaning or worth of life for those who participate in it. Since suffering of this order works to erode meaning, the *defeat* of suffering is meaning-*restorative*: it lays bare the significance of horrendous suffering such that participants can retrospectively affirm the value of their lives, despite (even *in*) the horrors they've endured.

It is important to emphasize that the "meaningfulness" of horrendous suffering is in principle subjectively recognizable *as* meaningful, as well as really or objectively purposive. For despite the corrigibility of our judgments about the value of a life lived, one essential component of a life worthwhile on the whole is the individual's estimation *that* it is (see 1999: 27, 81, 145–6). But it is only too evident that those who suffer horrendously sometimes judge their lives a loss, regardless of the piecemeal goods they've met with in their earthly careers. It follows, according to Adams, that no aggregate of finite or creaturely goods could guarantee for all a subjective assessment of life's worth, and that a loving God must therefore stand ready "to preserve them in life after death, to place them . . . in new and nourishing environments where they can profit from Divine instruction on how to integrate their participation in horrors into wholes with positive meanings" (84).

Three aspects of this eschatological conclusion need noting: if we are to appreciate the meaningfulness (thus the "defeat") of suffering as she conceives it. First, the postmortem reality she envisions is no mere continuation of the "vale of soul-making" experienced here below. Rather, it is tied to the incommensurate good of beatific vision, existential union with the Triune God, which engulfs and absorbs all the minuses of life so as to ensure positive assessment of its great worth. Second, the retrospectively recognized meaningfulness of suffering consists chiefly in awareness that participation in horrors was in each case a point of contact with God, who threw in His lot and suffered there with us. Third, it is precisely in the suffering of God *Incarnate* that this identification occurs: "It is *God's* becoming a human being, experiencing the human condition from the inside, from the viewpoint of a finite consciousness, that integrates the experience into an incommensurately valuable relationship" (168). Postmortem revelation that God-in-Christ *met us* there, in and through suffer-

ing, fixes it so that no episodes of horrendous suffering would be wished away by any who had experienced them.

Given this admittedly skeletal gloss of her theory, we can begin to evaluate the extent to which it enhances understanding of suffering's redemptive power. Unquestionably she ventures beyond Plantinga's theodicy in lots of ways, yet I worry a basic lacuna we saw in his theory reemerges in hers—namely, that the redemptive purpose of suffering itself remains tantalizingly obscure. We have seen her distinguish two senses in which horrendous suffering is "meaningful," by pointing up an objective or metaphysical *purpose* to suffering (in facilitating real contact with God) and an epistemic sense, in which suffering is later *recognized* to be an occasion of divine/human identification. To this we may add a further disambiguation of "meaningfulness," which signals our ability to see how such identification is effected in suffering, and why suffering should be the specific framework for it. It is in this last sense (I think) that the meaningfulness of suffering in Adams' theory is not fully clear.

What I mean is her requirements for the defeat of suffering in context of a person's life are not equivalent to the requirements for Christian Understanding of suffering. For the Christian may well take on faith (or with reason!) that the puzzle of horrendous suffering will eventually dissolve into beatific bliss, without seeing in the meantime how Christian Faith divulges the redemptive value of suffering as it's been advertised to us. Indeed, even the privileged afterlife perspective doesn't look to ensure "*recognition*" of suffering's redemptive value—as opposed to incentivizing affirmation that some (perhaps unknowable) redemptive purpose was there at work within it.

Several considerations underwrite this conclusion, from my viewpoint. Notice first that Adams' soteriological universalism (concerning which I have no present quarrel) entails that all will experience beatific intimacy in the end, whether they participated in horrors or not. Now on one hand, her universalism seemingly extends the reach of redemptive suffering even to those whose lives are not marred by "horrors," which is by my lights a desirable result. For there is no reason to suppose a person cannot identify with Christ in his suffering, unless he is tempted by the thought that he's better off dead. But this result is also double-edged, because it tends to detach horrendous suffering from its promised organic relation to the good of beatific union. On this score, Adams writes:

[My] view does not make participation in horrors necessary for the individual's incommensurate good. A horror-free life that ended in beatific intimacy with God would also be one in which the individual enjoyed incommensurate good. My contention is rather that by virtue of endowing horrors with a good aspect, Divine identification makes the victim's experience of horrors so meaningful that one would not retrospectively wish it away. . . . As a point of identification with God it is *partially constitutive* of the relationship that makes one's life over-

whelmingly worth living and, so, is meaningful apart from any putative causal . . . consequences. (167)

But then the meaningfulness of horrendous suffering is not intelligible through its organic relation to beatitude, which would anyway occur without it.

My point is not that the lower-tier suffering of souls who escape horror participation shouldn't "partially constitute" meaningful identification with God—I think it should. It is that the obscurity of *horrendous* suffering's relation to the beatific outcome frustrates Christian understanding of suffering *tout court*. Any affliction of life—horrific or not—appears as nothing when compared to the eternal weight of glory, awaiting us all. Thus all suffering (horrific or not) will inevitably be judged in some way to just *not matter*. I hope so. But this does not illuminate why suffering and death (whether human or divine, horrific or pedestrian) is redemptively significant in the end, nor why any of it was introduced to start with.

Note, here, that Adams considers (and rejects) process theology's contention that a world of suffering is metaphysically inevitable, and that God's suffering-with-the world is a metaphysical inevitability too. Against this she maintains it is God's free choice to create, and divine suffering is a function of His loving-care: neither of these things simply had to be.¹⁰ Now I agree with her here. But this posture only sharpens the problem of suffering, since the *contingency* of suffering (both creaturely and divine) only escalates explanatory standards. That is: God's unconstrained willingness to suffer and (in Christ) to die alongside us does inspire conviction that Wisdom weaves these things into creation for good and satisfying reasons; but that this course was freely chosen, as opposed to strictly unavoidable, just heightens expectation that suffering should be teleologically and redemptively intelligible from a Christian point of view.

I think Adams would agree.¹¹ Her primary problem with process theism isn't really that it makes divine and creaturely suffering metaphysically inevitable, but more that it sidesteps the incarnation—and with it the "considerable explanatory power" of Christology—in its account. Under this heading, she argues that (i) God's love for creation culminates in His assumption of a particular human nature as His own; that (ii) the suffering of God-as-man "cancels the curse of human vulnerability to horrors," because "the very horrors, participation in which threatened to undo the positive value of created personality, now become secure points of identification with the crucified God;" and that (iii) this "shifts metaphysical frameworks" by locating divine participation in horrors squarely in "God's assumed human nature" (165–8).

I believe this Christological focus is what we need to make good on the promise of Christian Understanding. But we must ask what these

Christological affirmations have bought us, in comparison with the alternate theistic approaches to suffering she pits them against. Notice that Adams, like Hartshorne and Rolt (and, for that matter, Plantinga) affirms passibility in the divine nature itself (see 1999, 168ff). From this it follows that God's emotive and sympathetic investment in creaturely suffering is independent of divine incarnation, at least to a significant degree. Thus the value of identifying with God in suffering can plausibly be had without His entering the human condition literally. Moreover, if God shows love's meaning through solidarity with us, and invites us to join Him in His redemptive mission, we may find purpose in suffering (even in martyrdom) as acts of service to and identification with God. Adams is of course aware of all this, but considers the points inapposite. None of the proposals "is exclusively Christian," she says, since such points "would constitute satisfactory responses within Judaism" (1999, 164) (and to this we can add at least Shi'a Islam)¹²—whereas Christianity should, if true, shed more light on suffering and death than non-Christian religions are able to do.

What remains to be seen, then, is how God's suffering in *Christ* lets us move past empathic solidarity with God—together with a dash of soul-making and the promise of heavenly reward—to participation in His redemptive victory, through our voluntary submission to suffering and death. I explore these themes next.

REDEPTIVE SUFFERING AND SELF-SACRIFICE— CHRISTOLOGY REVISITED

At this point it is sensible to pause and ask whether I'm expecting too much of "Christian Understanding," and whether my expectations have led me to pass too lightly over the Christological elements integral to Adams' view.

In answer, I deny it is asking too much for Christian Understanding to further the teleological intelligibility of suffering and death within a Christian framework.¹³ Such intelligibility does not as I see it require disclosure of a morally sufficient reason for God's ordination of suffering (by which He is "justified"), so I'm not holding Adams' theory to a standard she rejects. Nonetheless, the forward-looking promise that suffering will be considered meaningful retrospectively, as she develops this claim, seems to me insufficient for purposes of understanding it at last—even while the breathtaking vision of God's suffering in *Christ* looms large.

At the same time, I believe the Christological and traditional theological themes she canvasses¹⁴ can be appropriated and pressed into further service. In this final section, then, I propose an approach to human death and suffering through the categories of sacrifice and participation, with the hope of framing the Christian context of participatory redemptive

suffering. In outline, the frame is this: (i) death is intended by God to be an occasion for the complete gift of self back to God; (ii) Christ's sacrificial death purifies and elevates the sacrificial gift of death for those who participate in it; and (iii) suffering (exclusive of death) should be understood as a prolepsis or advance extension of death itself, through which it acquires its meaning and redemptive significance.¹⁵ Begin with the first element.

Death is commonly viewed as a curse, introduced through sin and disobedience. Since sin did not have to be, it seems that death did not have to be either—that it is an alien and unintended end for us, from the God's-eye view. It's also natural to see the resurrection of Jesus as signifying the reversal of this curse, brought about (in soteriologically ironic fashion) by Christ's own obedience unto death. Now I don't deny any of this. However, I want to temper the claim that death is a curse, a punishment of sin *simpliciter*, by considering what in Christ's death was pleasing to God and why it constituted the paradigmatically "acceptable" sacrifice.

Clearly, Christ's demonstrated willingness to offer Himself up without sin and spite made His death a singular token, and indeed an exemplar, of martyrdom. But the dispositional willingness to lay down His life in this way could have been recognized by God without needing actually to see His willingness executed in act. So Christ's love for and commitment to the Father, while powerfully expressed in the passion, does not look to have been metaphysically grounded in it. Yet there must for all that be something in the *going through with it* that rendered His submission to death such an extraordinary act of God-ward love—even apart from its soteriological consequences for others. I think it is that "This is My Body, given for you," "this is the Blood of the New Covenant, shed for you"—the words that designate Christ's giving to us His life, pick up their sacrificial significance in that they are quite as properly addressed to the Father as to us.

There is a tradition according to which Adam failed at precisely this point: in his unwillingness to lock horns with the serpent, which represented mortal danger, for the sake of God and his bride. The Second Adam is tempted in the same way, but (in familiar typological reversal) succeeds where the First had failed. Working backward from the victory of Christ, my suggestion is God gave Adam (therefore in some way all of us) the opportunity to give body and blood as the only fitting gift to the Creator—the gift of *this* life for *this* life. Our failure to do so willingly, and the implicit knowledge that nothing less will really do, then resulted in repetitious blood sacrifices as propitiating substitutes for the lives we find so hard voluntarily to give. I'm suggesting God wants those lives, and wants them freely given. What the sacrificial gift of God Himself (in the person of Christ) accomplishes, at least in this connection, is the pos-

sibility of transforming death into the perfect gift of self that God intends it to be.

There is some indication this line of thought was present to the minds of early Christian martyrs (or their hagiographers), for whom the idea of martyrdom as sacramentally-informed participation in Christ's sacrifice was evidently vivid. Thus St Paul foresees his life poured out as a libation (see Philippians 2.17; 2 Timothy, 4.6); Ignatius looks with notorious enthusiasm to the day his flesh will be "ground fine by the lion's teeth, to be made purest bread for Christ" (Roberts and Donaldson 1999, 74); Polycarp's immolation gives off the aroma of baking bread (Roberts and Donaldson 1999, 42); and so forth. The Eucharistic overtones, lying on the surface in such descriptions, push Christian martyrdom past "witness-bearing" and solidarity with divine aims into the territory of participation in the life and death of God-as-man. But if so, there are attendant implications for a Christian view of death generally—not only the elite and spectacular death of the martyr, but anyone's death may be elevated into pure and undefiled gift of self, when united to the offering of Christ. That is, the *meaningfulness* of a person's death lies in its quality as a perfect gift of love, irrespective of the conditions in which it occurs; and the *purpose* of death is the making of this gift.

But how exactly does Christ's sacrifice "elevate," "transform" our own deaths into perfect gifts of love? I remarked previously that we'd need to understand the "mechanics" or form of participation—what mystical-metaphysical union with Christ amounts to, and how it comes to be effected—in order to fill out a Christian theory of redemptive suffering. I find I don't know how to do this, in a way that (a) can be reasonably articulated and (b) does not reduce to psychological identification or empathetic solidarity, for example; so an essential element of my proposal remains underdeveloped. But I stand by the claim. I think it is tolerably clear that penal substitution theories of atonement leave the purpose of human death hanging, while participatory accounts hold promise of something more. But the payoff of such theories for Christian Under-Peter 1.4) that I am presently unable to provide.

I do however wish to say something about suffering in life, in contrast to the suffering that is death. My strategy so far has been to relate the sacrificial death of the martyr to "the good death" generally, by arguing that participation in Christ's redemptive death can sanctify both. What I want now to suggest is that suffering in general may be viewed as an extension of death, and can pick up its redemptive significance through the same route.

A number of philosophers have argued that vulnerability to physical and psychological harm is unavoidable for material creatures, and I see no reason to contest this. If the benefit of creating a regular, natural order in which living beings can thrive comes at this cost, it is perhaps worth it

on the whole. But the thought that living things are prone to suffer by virtue of finite power and physical frame draws attention to their essential mortality, or inevitable disintegration of the physical and mental capacities vital to creaturely persistence. The bodily and mental suffering of this life is therefore at no great conceptual remove from the fact of death: both arise from the conditions of material, created being. So, if death gives opportunity for the gift of oneself back to God, and if suffering is a kind of proleptic harbinger of death's eventuality, then suffering may serve by extension as a gift of created life given back to its Author. Perhaps, reaching back again to St Paul, our suffering is a way to fulfill the (Rom 12.1) injunction to "offer [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God," as a "proper act of worship." It is platitudeous to say we are born to die, that the process of dying begins concomitantly with life. But there is a metaphysical point to the platitude, which Christian Understanding would do well to mine.

The proposed approach I've put forward in this section is sketchy and programmatic. Each element of it requires clarification, elaboration, and support. And I'm under no illusion that seeing to the bottom of these things will be any the easier for us than it is for the angels, who long to look in on them. But my hunch is that Christian Understanding of redemptive suffering can still labor on, before it runs up against the impregnable wall of divine mystery; and I hope the avenues of exploration I have identified here will be found to shoulder some of that load.

NOTES

1. A generic philosophical theism may support theodicy along the periphery, but will be anemic in comparison with the riches afforded by the western theistic religions in all their robust particularity. On the other hand, as Stump (1985) points out with respect to these religions, there is the danger of embarrassment by this abundance if "attempted solutions to the problem of evil based solely on a few theistic assumptions common to the major monotheisms are likely themselves to be incompatible with Jewish or Christian or Islamic beliefs" when spelled out in detail (398). But beyond these considerations lies the Christian conviction that God's assumption of human nature in Christ alters the field entirely, and that a Christian theodicy done well will highlight and explain why this is so.

2. Thus Plantinga (2004) contends that it is time for Christian philosophers to move beyond defense "to a different task: that of understanding the evil our world displays from a Christian perspective. Granted, the atheological arguments are unsuccessful; but how should Christians think about evil?" (5). Adams (1999) argues in the same vein that Christians should write from within the framework of a Christian value system (as opposed to a system neutral as between secularism and Christianity), and should draw from the store of their particular array of religious beliefs, in order the better to explain how God's love is consistent with participation in horrific evil.

3. Forensic or debt-repayment etymological connotations of "redemption" are not hereby ignored, since to go from being a debtor to being debtless is a terrific way of moving from a sub-optimal to a better condition. Or so I can imagine.

4. Adams (1999) has argued that a person may identify with Christ even in the commission of horrific evil, since Christ was ritually accursed on the cross and thus

(symbolically) made a "perpetrator" of evil Himself. I am not altogether sure I understand her suggestion, though I applaud the motivation behind it. If she means at a minimum that acting sinfully or "being in sin" might catalyze profound sorrow-leading-to-repentance, then what I say here supports her claim.

5. See Plantinga (2004): "the value of incarnation and atonement cannot be matched by any aggregate of creaturely goods. . . . And no matter how much evil, how much sin and suffering, a world contains, the aggregated badness would be outweighed by the goodness of incarnation and atonement, outweighed in such a way that the world in question is very good. In this sense, therefore, any world with incarnation and atonement is of infinite value by virtue of containing two goods of infinite value: the existence of God, and the incarnation and atonement" (10).

6. More accurately, he distinguishes the purpose of sin from the further question why suffering to the extent and in the ways it actually occurs is needed. That sin inevitably brings some measure of suffering with it seems very plausible, but this does not shed light on the "why so much?" question or the question of suffering's *telos*.

7. See Diller (2008) and Adams (2008) for discussion.

8. See 2 Cor. 4.10-11, 14, 17; Philippians 3.10-11; Heb 12.10-11.

9. To be more precise, she assumes "that small- or medium-scale evils—such as a childhood case of measles or not getting into the best graduate school—might simply be overbalanced by a good life. Unless horrendous evils, which call into question whether one's life can be worth living, are defeated, however, evil's victories will be too large" (43 n.14). Nonetheless, the thrust of her approach to suffering remains teleological or prospective, and her solution to the problem of horrors is of course relevant to how suffering of lower orders may be of redemptive significance as well. For example, universalism falls out of her criterion that God be good to every created person. In her gloss on this she states that God wouldn't create creatures with "such radical vulnerability to horrors, unless Divine power stood able, and Divine love willing, to redeem" (156). The beatific end that renders horrendous suffering meaningful is thus evidently the end for each creature, and there is reason to suppose that God weaves every life into positively meaningful wholes thereby.

10. See her appraisal of Hartshorne and Rort (159ff.). Her affirmation of divine freedom in creation and the contingency of suffering is qualified by her claim that human nature is independent of God's will, and that the creation of humanity in the natural order inevitably renders us vulnerable to horrendous suffering (171). My point is that (freely) creating a natural order in which suffering is inevitable calls legitimately for a kind of explanation process theism does not have to provide.

11. For example, she notes (1986) that Christian mysticism has frequently portrayed suffering as a vision into God's inner-life, which somehow reveals creaturely suffering as connected logically to beatific vision (264). However, this limited affirmation is qualified by her remarks, recorded in note 13 below.

12. On redemptive suffering in Shi'ism see Mahmud Ayoub (1978).

13. I do not mean that we should be able to entirely close the epistemic gap between God's reasons and our own ability to apprehend them. Adams may be right that we should not "envision postmortem cries of *'felix culpa!'*" or imagine "participants in horrors would ever think it reasonable to have consented to them in advance as constituent and/or instrumental means to the goods God brings from them" (1999, 203). But if there are no instrumental or constitutive goods to suffering and death then I do not see that we can be said to have understood or explained their purpose from a Christian perspective.

14. Especially in her (2006).

15. To clarify: (i) does not entail that God "intends" death; rather, in my view, God intends that there be corruptible (mortal) beings, for whom death is an inevitability. Thanks to Mark Murphy for pressing me on this point.

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TEN

Predatory Goodness in the Discourse on Evil among Anglo-American Philosophers of Religion

Nathan Loewen

I imagine that you are likely familiar with the topic of this volume; or, at the very least, you have a strong hunch of what the parameters of the discussion will be when you read a title such as *The Problem of Evil: New Philosophical Directions*. To a non-specialist, this title might seem lofty or even esoteric. Any reader with a passing familiarity with philosophy will likely know that the title marks out well-known topical territory that ranges from Socratic dilemmas to earthquakes in eighteenth-century Spain on past the horrific events of the twentieth century up until present contexts. I think it safe to assume that most readers readily accept that these are the borders of the general philosophical discourse on evil. In fact, it is by acknowledging the themes within these borders that may allow authors within this volume to propose variations on the typical approaches to evil. This chapter is no different.

There is an indicator that narrows the discursive territory under consideration in this volume. The title is in English. My mention of this fact may well tip off readers to the traditional focus of this chapter. Recent English-language philosophical discussions of evil are less concerned with the philosophy of the classics, the Enlightenment, or events on the European continent. Instead the discussion revolves around specific questions related to whether or not "evil" justifies theistic belief. Over the last 60 years, a discourse has evolved with increasingly clear borders on the topic of the "problem of evil." The focus of the problem is derived primarily by focusing upon a particular abstraction, of Christian doctrine