

Divine Agency and Human Suffering¹

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Abstract.

The scientific approach to human suffering is difficult to justify in the light of divine omnipotence and love. Assigning evil to human responsibility provides an explanation for human suffering but appears to do so in the light of an absentee divinity. The solution to the paradox exists beyond the range of causal explanation at a place in subjective truth where God's emergence invites us to co-create the world with Him. God does something extraordinary about human suffering.

Key Words: omnipotence, suffering, causes, redemption, subjective truth.

According to John Hick, the fundamental problem of theodicy is to explain the existence of evil, that is, "If God is perfectly good, He must want to abolish all evil; if He is unlimitedly powerful, He must be able to abolish all evil: but evil exists; therefore either God is not perfectly good or He is not unlimitedly powerful."² Rabi Harold Kushner's solution to the suffering of innocent victims suggests that God is limited; "We can't ask Him to make us and those we love immune from disease because God can't do that."³ We need to put his statement in context because it forces us to choose between God's attributes. The choice between a God that is either unlimitedly powerful or perfectly good puts us on a slippery slope towards the denial of God's existence. The fact that we cannot answer the question in this form suggests that we have taken it out of context. Human suffering is a consequence of the Fall rather than God's poor workmanship or lack of good.

Why does God become accountable for the suffering of innocent victims? According to the biblical creation story, "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good."⁴ The human fall from grace explains why we suffer and die. Scripture says, "Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the Lord God had made. (...) the moment you eat of it (forbidden fruit) your eyes will be opened

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² Hick, John. *Evil and the God of Love*. London: Macmillan. (1977). 5.

³ Kushner, Harold, S. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Toronto, On.: Random House of Canada. (2004). 138.

⁴ Genesis 1:31.

and know what is good and what is bad. (...) Then the eyes of both of them (Adam and Eve) were opened, and they realized that they were naked;”⁵

The biblical story of salvation leaves no doubt that God loves us even though the Fall marks our decision to be at a distance from God. This is the source of our suffering. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knows all about the suffering caused by sin. He instructs Moses to tell the Israelites that God ‘I am who I am’ knows their misery in Egypt and will lead them to the promise land—a land ‘flowing with milk and honey.’⁶ What are we to make of this? Hick views suffering as an opportunity to develop moral character rather than the result of a fall from grace. He says that we did not fall from grace because we have yet to arrive. This view appears to implicate God in human suffering, and forces us to choose between divine attributes. C. S. Lewis, on the other hand, leaves no doubt that suffering is a consequence of sin. Our great sin, our deepest illusion, he says, is the belief that we can rely on self rather than on God; “This act of self-will on the part of the creature, which constitutes an utter falseness to its true creaturely position, is the only sin that can be conceived as the Fall.”⁷

Still, the tragic depth of human suffering is that God appears to ignore our cry for help. The cause of human suffering, whether it arises from divine apathy or the decision to sin, should be apparent from the nature of the creative act. The study of reality through the four causes of being provides an insight into the ways of God. The study of causes reveals that suffering is not the result of divine engineering. This opens the door to the reality that human suffering is the result of human action. In fact, not only is God not responsible for human suffering, He sends His Son Jesus Christ to redeem us from our self-will. God clearly does do something about suffering. God expects us to play a role in creation, however.

The four causes of being—efficient, formal, material, and final—exert a positive influence on the coming into being of things. To begin this study, the efficient cause is the source of all motion. No theist disputes the fact that God creates the world and all things contained in it. Human suffering arises as a product of human reason and will (formal cause) rather than God as efficient cause. The explanations of science illustrate how we think. The goal of science is to predict how nature behaves. This is essential for survival. We observe the relationships between the conditions affecting the properties of a substance in nature and the behavior of those properties. Science is concerned with what things do rather than with what they are. Thus, science establishes proportionality relationships between conditions such as disease and the effects of disease on us such as suffering and possible death. Does God design a world filled with human suffering? God’s omniscience suggests that God knows all contingencies before they happen, that is all at once. Nothing escapes the all-encompassing gaze of the divine mind. This view suggests that God is responsible for present and future suffering. We have no evidence of this from our study of nature. There are two main flaws with the argument. The first is that it maintains a wrong-headed view of creation. God does not create the world the way a builder constructs a road. Creation is an act of love. Our existence adds absolutely nothing to the divine essence, as Lewis observes; “God is Goodness. He can give good, but cannot need or get it. In that sense, all His love is, as it were, bottomlessly selfless by

⁵ Genesis 3:1-8.

⁶ Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15.

⁷ Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: The MacMillan Company (1967). 68.

very definition; it has everything to give and nothing to receive.”⁸ The second flaw with the mechanistic view of creation is that it reduces the human condition to forms of spectatorships. We are not mechanical entities or robots.⁹

Does formal causality suggest that God is responsible for human suffering? The formal cause is what makes us what we are rather than something else. What is the essence of a human being? The text of Genesis says that God makes us in his image and likeness “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.”¹⁰ At first brush, the fundamental thing about us is reason and will; “Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and the cattle, and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground.”¹¹ This suggests that suffering arises because of the way we use reason and/or human freedom. Freedom is a property of will. Intellect, will, and freedom function as a dynamic unit. Reason understands that an action is good whereas the will gives the command to use whatever power is required to pursue the good as understood by the intellect. The more insight we have into a proposed course of action, the greater the freedom of will to pursue it. Suffering often arises because of mistaken personal choices. Our bad choices arise from two main sources. The first source of error lies in the order of privative ignorance, that is, in the mistaken use of science and technology to generate outcomes that are not in our best interest. For example, no one would hesitate to classify the atomic bomb in that category. Fortunately, we can remove this source of suffering as we become better at predicting and avoiding the undesirable secondary consequences of technological developments. On the other hand, greed often clouds judgment. In our day, we mistakenly equate progress with economic development rather than human development. The state of the planet is worse now than it was fifty years ago. More people are sick, cold, and hungry than ever before in our history. Large multinational corporations control economic development. Developed countries control the dominion that God gave us over

⁸ Ibid., 38.

⁹ The mechanistic view of creation leads to the denial of God’s existence. It plays out fully in rational mechanics. The global deduction of reality from rationalist principles mirrors the ways of human understanding. For instance, the work of Emile Meyerson on the psychological principles that accompany all scientific inductions suggests that the ways of reason move towards the elimination of diversity and the goal of total identification. Explanation according to Meyerson is a process of reducing the complex data of explanation to increasingly comprehensive identity propositions. In this quest, reason will not accept irrationals or places where reality resists the all-encompassing probe of reason. Places of resistance stand as epitaphs to remind us of temporary losses in the struggle of reason to control the whole of reality. The goal of rational mechanics is to press on towards the elimination of irrationals and the ultimate explanation of the whole of reality. The goal of reason is to reduce the whole of reality to an increasingly comprehensive identity proposition, one in which the whole of becoming and time is emptied, one in which the whole of reality is reduced to space. God must be able to look at a speck of dust and see the whole of the universe. God must therefore see the expanding universe as fully expanded. God must see the big bang and the big crunch at once. To place a limit on God is to place a deficiency that God did not see fit to impose on our intellectual appetite. This suggests that an omnipotent and all loving God must have the capacity to know all possible outcomes, and the responsibility to prevent undesirable outcomes such as the suffering of innocent victims, and the conditions of disease. God as the efficient cause of all things would prevent suffering by designing a world free from poor workmanship, disease, unjustified suffering, and damnation. In that case, either God is asleep or non-existent. (See my Emile Meyerson in *IEP*).

¹⁰ Genesis 1:27.

¹¹ Genesis 1:26.

the earth. A few large economic corporations in these developed countries control economic outcomes of most of the world population. That transfer of power to the few increases suffering for the many. Greed and selfishness writes the agenda of human development. However, the environment is finite and our view of progress is forcing a change of heart. The choice is ours to make though forced on us, because the definition of free will means that God does not intervene in the area of formal causality.

This raises another problem, however. If we are totally on our own, God cannot come to our rescue. Yet, the presence of Christ on earth affirms that God does rescue us from the consequence of the Fall. If God genuinely cares, why does He allow the suffering of innocent victims? We face a paradox. We are free to act as we see fit. In order for us to be free, God must reclude Himself from us, that is, God must withdraw the divine influence from the realm of human activity. Only if we are independently free can we truly claim the autonomy required to implement personal outcomes. It seems possible to suggest that an all loving, perfectly good God would withdraw himself from the realm of human freedom. This is required to generate the epistemic space needed for us to 'have dominion over things.' God's love liberates us so we can direct our own outcomes. This fits what we think is the nature of love. In phenomenology, love suggests a 'letting be'. Nevertheless, the mix of divine love and omnipotence is as frightening as it is inspiring. Do we have to choose between an all-powerful, always present deity, and an all loving, always absent God to explain why we do not act in our best interest? What began as an attempt to understand the nature of the creative act leads to an impasse. We have to look elsewhere to make sense of the existence of evil.

The need to look beyond efficient and formal causality to explain human suffering arises because we cannot account for our own existence. This is what implicates God in our suffering. We turn our attention to the material cause of being, namely body and soul. Is this the source of suffering? The body explains the generation and corruption of things while the soul explains personal immortality. Lewis says that after the Fall, the organs of the body were no longer controlled by human will, "(they) fell under the control of ordinary biochemical laws and suffered whatever the inter-workings of those laws might bring about in the way of pain, senility and death."¹² The soul, on the other hand, carries our moral habits, including how we respond to pain, into the afterlife state. The soul is not reducible to parts because it is not composed of parts. For that reason, Thomas Aquinas says that the soul (or mind in René Descartes' Meditations) is immortal. We still need to clarify God's role in human suffering.

The shift towards material causality and the body soul co-principles of being human explains the how of suffering, but it does not explain why we exist. Even if we existed for all eternity, we would still need to explain why things exist rather than not exist. The simple answer is that God loves for us. The complex answer is that we reject God's love. The consequence of the Fall is suffering and death. A finite composite of body and soul is subject to disunity and therefore suffering. Body and soul function as a dynamic unity. The soul is the principle of organization. Thomistic philosophy is less precise than the medical definition of death (death of neo-cortex, and/or brain stem, or whole brain) but no less correct to define death as the (gradual) separation of the soul (mind) from the body. On the other hand, human suffering is division within the human unit rather than separation of body and soul. The parts of a living thing cling to

¹² Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: The MacMillan Company. (1967) 70.

themselves. Disease is the biological division of the part from the whole. The goal of medicine is to restore the integrity of the human body. To cure is to reverse the biological disintegration of the organism. To heal, on the other hand, is to integrate the mind body divide into a seamless whole. Suffering plays a positive role in the moral life of a person. It atones for sin. Perhaps the process continues into the afterlife state. Suffering provides an opportunity to develop moral character, as Hick says. Jesus invites us to take up our cross and follow him, turn the other cheek, love our neighbor. We could not make moral progress without suffering. It must undo the condition of self-will. Lewis explains the salvific role of suffering as a turning away from self towards the will of God. Those individuals that are too comfortable in this world are less likely to feel the need to turn their life and will over to the care of God; “Prostitutes are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God: the proud, the avaricious, the self-righteous are in that danger.”¹³ Lewis’ point is not that we should become prostitutes. Personal pain provides a tremendous opportunity for a change of heart. This brings us to the final cause of being and to a study of why our suffering alone cannot regain the lost kingdom.

The final cause is that for the sake of which things come to be. Our ultimate end is not hedonism and the development of a terrestrial system. God’s plan for us is eternal life. All human beings act towards that ultimate end, though we often mistakenly assign meaning to lesser goods. Fortunately the final cause is last in the order of execution though first in the order of intention. This provides opportunities for a change of heart. We can redirect misplaced spiritual energies towards their intended end. We can become discouraged as we recognize our insignificance and the fact that we can do nothing for God. God lacks nothing. For that reason, Christ comforts Peter, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Have faith in God and faith in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places; otherwise how could I have told you that I was going to prepare a place for you?”¹⁴

The final cause of being moves us towards the attainment of the divine kingdom as the ultimate end of human existence. However, we cannot earn eternal salvation in temporal history. Our fallen nature blocks the realization of our intended end. Pain allows us to move out of our self-will. Human spirituality—the innate tendency towards God—is frustrated by the Fall. Our fallen condition puts spirituality on a bad diet. It misleads us into thinking we are self-sufficient. Thus, we can transform human suffering into an opportunity for moving out of self. Suffering is not good in itself. Nor can suffering alone open the gates of the promised Kingdom. We could not attain our intended end without The Redemptive Cross of Christ. Clearly, God does do something about human suffering!

We attain our intended end because of divine suffering—the suffering of Christ provides a model for us to follow. The salvific character of suffering is a sufficient condition of salvation rather than a necessary condition of salvation. Thus, human suffering must align itself with divine suffering. For this reason, we cannot aspire to salvation until the doors to the kingdom open anew. Christ renews the possibility of salvation. His death and resurrection raises us above the temporal dimension of being fallen humans and places us in the presence of the Eternal Father.

¹³ Ibid., 86.

¹⁴ John 14:1-3.

Thus, Christ the Son of God intersects the course of human affairs. This is an indescribable miracle. We cannot imagine why a God that lacks nothing enters into loving relationship with us. We cannot fathom why God sends His Son Jesus Christ to suffer and die for us that we might have eternal life again. We do nothing to deserve God's love. We are insignificant tidbits of existence. Yet, God's love is all around us, in the environment, in other persons, and in ourselves, which we see with spiritual eyes. I think that most of us have experienced events that ought not to take place. They demand explanation. These events take place as synecdoche, that is, as the unexpected intersection of two or more lines of causality. The mystical experience is God's lifeline.

God's intervention in human affairs takes place as a blessed synecdoche. God does not cause human suffering. God does something about human suffering. We observe this at the gratuitous intersection of those four lines of causality. We do nothing to deserve it. On the contrary, the Fall from grace must be the utmost possibility of possible insults to God, not to be outstripped by anything imaginable. All humans share in this mighty fall from grace. The severity of sin is so great that it takes no less than the torture and execution of God's Holy Son to redeem us from our fallen state.

Our fallen condition requires extraordinary measures to explain why the division of soul and body can come together after the fall, or how God is present to us after we rejected Him. The suffering of Christ also explains the role of suffering in a human life. His death does for us what we could not do for ourselves. Imagine how much Christ suffered: He was tortured and hung on a cross to dry and die. Judas betrayed Him, Peter denounced Him three times, His apostles abandoned Him. His suffering is fully human: His father abandons him; He is alone. We heal from sin as we identify our suffering with the suffering of Christ.

This brings us to the core of the argument, as the experience of pain takes an abrupt turn. The experience is deepest at the level of personal suffering. In *A Grief Observed*, C. S. Lewis reflects on the death of his wife, Joy Davidson Gresham. Her death leaves him very troubled. Couples that are deeply in love become part of one another. The loss of a loved one translates into the loss of self. Your death means that a portion of me dies with you. When I look inwardly, I find emptiness and despair. Nothing, not religion, not prayer, nothing fill this terrible hole. Where is God now that I need Him? The profound experience of loss leads Lewis to resentment; he says, why do I make room in my mind for the filth and nonsense that God cares about me "Aren't all these notes the senseless writhings of a man who won't accept the fact that there is nothing we can do with suffering except to suffer it?"¹⁵ Suffering turns to anger, a 'yell rather than a thought'; "Is it rational to believe in a bad God? Any way, in a God so bad as all that? The Cosmic Sadist, the spiteful imbecile?"¹⁶ God often seems to be everywhere when things are going well but where is God when I need Him; "So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer."¹⁷

This marks a turning point in the experience of pain. The feeling that God abandons us in times of deep personal pain is exactly what leads us to question the Absolute nature of God. Our thinking goes something like this; if God does not help me, it must be because God does not care about me, or that God lacks the power to help me. I

¹⁵Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed*. New York, N.Y.: The Seabury Press Inc. (1976) 38.

¹⁶ Ibid., 35.

¹⁷ Ibid., 5.

think it fair to suggest that most everyone has this sort of experience with God. The feeling of abandonment arises out of our many varied losses; the death of a loved one, divorce and the loss of family, substance dependency and other forms of addiction. William James appears to have hit his own bottom for lack of a moral philosophy to live by. His reading of Charles Renouvier marks a turning point in his life. He writes in his diary; “Today I about touched bottom, and perceive plainly that I must face the choice with open eyes: shall I throw the moral business overboard as one unsuited to my innate aptitudes.”¹⁸ He accepts Renouvier’s definition of free will; “...the sustaining of a thought because I choose to when I might have other thoughts (...) my first act of free will shall be to believe in free will.”¹⁹ We find the experience of a ‘dark night of the soul’ as early as the biblical book of Job. Before the Common Era, personal loss is perceived as punishment from God. However, Job has done nothing wrong. Why is God punishing him? Job’s personal relationship with the Almighty is strong and he sees fit to put God in the docket. God’s reply to Job teaches us something very important about all our losses. In the absence of Job’s insight, can we make sense of our devastating losses? Can we not add our voice to Lewis’ call for help as we reach out for an absent God? Lewis lost his childhood faith around age nine when his mother died of cancer. He could not reconcile her death with the existence of a loving all-powerful God. He became an atheist. Lewis was a poet at heart, however, and he subsequently had several mystical experiences that filled him with great joy. He could no longer ignore God calling. He converted to Christianity at age 30. Lewis discusses his conversion in *Surprised by Joy*. Ironically, Joy is the name of the woman he marries years later (Joy Davidson Gresham) and mourns in *A Grief Observed*. Fortunately, Lewis’ spiritual roots are strong. Job’s spiritual roots also serve him well.

My own answer to the problem of suffering takes a first breath from the inspired writings of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1852) as he struggles to discover what it means to be a Christian.²⁰ God appears to be breaking his own ethical law when He asks Abraham to slay Isaac. Kierkegaard’s stroke of genius arrives through a distinction between objective and subjective truth. To be objectively in truth is to stand before it as an object of fact. It is objectively true that water boils at 100 degrees Celsius. Objective truth is a truth of reason; a truth we can verify, dissolve in a solvent, precipitate, centrifuge in a concrete manner. The causes of being operate at this level, but the lesson learned from Lewis, Job, and others is that God’s ways are not the ways of science. Abraham’s agreement to slay his son Isaac makes no sense from the point of view of objective truth. Fortunately, Kierkegaard explains that the experience of God takes place at a higher level in the realm of subjective truth. In subjective truth, the individual enters into relationship with objective truth. What counts is not only to know truth but also to risk everything because of it. This explains why God spares Isaac. Lo and behold, Kierkegaard exclaims, because Abraham believed rather than understood God spares his son. The subjective thinker risks everything because of God. He walks in anxiety, simultaneously attracted to

¹⁸ Ralph, Baron, Perry. *The Thought and Character of William James*. New York: Harper and Row (1964) 120.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

²⁰ Kierkegaard’s body of work is a life-long search for what it means to be a Christian, from his discussion of Abraham’s sacrifice in *Fear and Trembling* to his discovery of truth as subjectivity in *Concluding Unscientific Postscripts*.

the truth and repulsed by it. The cry of loss pierces the heart: I know God cares but God does not seem to hear my cry. For this reason, God's reply is often louder in the heart of spirituality rather than in the acoustics of church. Church is organized, objective, filled with a tradition of cherished rituals and symbols designed to introduce the Sacred into the secular and heal our broken selves. However, the mantras of organized religion only work if the spiritual decision to trust God is already in place. The experience of many that hit bottom because of all our losses gain insight into the ways of God after the fact of trying to bargain with God. The individual in subjective truth is like a tightrope walker without a safety net. The individual rises above objective truth to let go of reason in a complete act of faith that God will do for him what he cannot do for himself. This is what Lewis and Job learn about God.

The experience of pain from the point of view of subjectivity arises through a process of identification with the suffering of Jesus Christ. The dual nature of Christ as divine and human provides the basis for this resonance. We connect with Christ's humanity by viewing it as a gateway to the will of God. We cannot make sense of the divine sacrifice from the point of view of objective truth. However, the depth of God's gift stretches our human imagination to the breaking point. I can, for instance, see the courage and trust required to move beyond reason and objective truth into subjective truth, but how does God let go of God? Christ had unimaginably more to lose by his aloneness than we can ever imagine. The presence of Christ on earth is synecdoche. It intersects lines of causality at an uncaused temporal place where the vertical order of the divinity meets the horizontal order of human existence and suffering. It transforms objective truth into the ultimate act of unselfishness imaginable. The divinity of Christ exists eternally, while Christ as human functions in the temporal order of causality. The death of Christ enables us to meditate on the presence of the Eternal in the temporal scheme of things. The experience is possible because Christ is also human. Christ as human is like us in every way except sin. He is rational and has free will and experiences love and suffering, abandonment, denial, treachery, and the aloneness we all feel in the deepest recesses of personal pain magnified an infinite number of times. His death makes my experience of self-will less acceptable. His death makes my experience of doing God's will more attractive.

The Christian story of contrast between the eternal order of God and the new order of causes appears in all four gospels, but nothing surpasses Luke's diaphonic imagery of that story. Luke's gospel cleverly sets both orders side-by-side leaving no doubt that God is entering the house of David. Luke tells the story in seven main incidents which we now summarize: two annunciations, the visitation, two birth narratives, presentation of Christ in the Temple, and the boy Jesus in the Temple.

The sacred myth opens with the story of Israel. God gives a promise of salvation to the Israelites. The birth of Christ is the fulfillment of this promise. It removes the people's separation from God. It renews the promise of the kingdom of God. We could not attain our intended end (final cause) until we were redeemed from our fallen nature. By his holy cross, Christ redeemed the world!

By aligning Jesus' birth and the preaching of John the Baptizer with the facts of secular history, the evangelist indicates that the gospel tradition did not originate

in a myth about Gods, but was lived out by Jesus of Nazareth in the real world wherein all men are born, struggle over the meaning of their existence, and die.²¹

While Mary and Elizabeth are both from the house of David, the angel of God serves notice that something heavenly is about to take place in human history. First, Elizabeth is told that she is about to conceive a child and that she shall name him John.²² The angel then went on to inform Mary that she was to conceive ‘the Most High’ Jesus and that “He will rule over the house of David forever and his reign will be without end.”²³

Mary visits Elizabeth,²⁴ and the story gradually unfolds into two birth narratives. Elizabeth’s son John lived in the desert where he proclaimed the coming of Christ.²⁵ Then Mary gave birth to Christ; “This day in David’s city a savior has been born to you, the Messiah and Lord.”²⁶ The presentation of Jesus in the temple completes Luke’s diaphonic story of how God came to earth; “For my eyes have witnessed your saving deed displayed for all the people to see: A revealing light to the Gentiles, the glory of your people Israel.”²⁷

Jesus’ teaching in the Temple continues the diaphonic harmony between the Kingdom of God and the house of David. Jesus was absent for three days, as his parents searched for him in sorrow. Jesus said to them “*Why did you search for me? Did you not know I had to be in my Father’s house?*”²⁸

God’s presence in the world raises the relationship between God and His people from the realm of objective truth into the existential blood of subjective truth. God cannot change the course of human history, or undo the human decision to sin, but God loves us to death. We fell from the divine image because we placed self-interest above God’s interest. We emerged out of the eternal garden into a contingent world of space and time where suffering and errors in judgment abound. This is the path of sin. Incredibly, Christ redeems the world and gives us a fresh chance to follow the will of God and realize our intended end (final cause). This fulfills God’s promise to the Israelites. Before Christ, sin separates God from his people. The Temple curtain is the symbol of that separation; “*The curtain in the sanctuary was torn in two.*”²⁹ This is a new beginning for Christians. The death and resurrection of Christ marks a fresh round of relationship with the living Word.

The presence of Christ in the world proves that God does care about human suffering. God appears as simultaneously omniscient divinity and disinterested deity from the point of view of objective truth only. At a deeper level in subjective truth, *God does do something about human suffering*. His death and resurrection writes the guide of eternal life in the human heart. The divinity and humanity of Christ provides a model we can follow as we draw upon the divine likeness within us to move towards the *imago Dei* promised in Genesis 1:26. The death and resurrection of Christ heals the body and soul division caused by the Fall.

²¹ Gospel of Luke. Introduction. *The New American Bible* (1984-1985).

²² Luke 1:5-25.

²³ Luke 1:30-34.

²⁴ Luke 1:39-44.

²⁵ Luke 1:57-80.

²⁶ Luke 2:7-12.

²⁷ Luke 2:25-32.

²⁸ Luke 2:49-50.

²⁹ Luke 23:45. (italics added)

The Holy Eucharist is an ongoing source of spiritual nourishment that guides us towards eternal life. It assures the ongoing presence of the risen Christ with us. We do not receive Christ because we are worthy. We receive Christ because all is lost without Him. The Blessed Eucharist stands us in the presence of mystery. On the eve of his death, Christ offered a blessing in thanks:

Then, taking bread and giving thanks, he broke it and gave it to them saying: 'This is my body to be given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' He did the same with the cup after eating, saying as he did so: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.'³⁰

God is always with us and invites us to co-create the world with Him. This powerful concept assigns genuine responsibility for creation to humans. How is this possible in the light of divine omniscience? Richard Pendergast (1973) suggests that while God is infinitely aware of all possible outcomes, our choices come as a surprise to God. This view adds to the absolute nature of God's attributes because it manifests the range of His love for us. Mathew Fox develops his spiritual insights on creation spirituality from the point of view of redemptive theology. He disagrees with the church's historical decision to focus on the Fall and the Augustinian tears of contrition. He shifts focus to a celebration of redemption, and God's invitation to co-create the world with Him. C. S. Lewis, on the other hand, provides a much simpler defense of creation theology. In a passage where he discusses divine omniscience and the outcome of Abraham's sacrifice of his son Isaac he says "and the obedience which he did not know he would choose, he cannot be said to have chosen."³¹ Lewis adds; "To say that God 'need not have tried the experiment' is to say that because God knows, the thing known by God need not exist."³²

While I do not agree with Jean-Paul Sartre's atheism, his belief that we are the sum of our acts is not disagreeable. We are what we do. Human suffering is self-caused. We are free to promote love and peace or not. The redemption is not a get home free card. We are responsible for the construction of a better world. We can choose to empower other persons, the environment, and our own self, or not. God is now present in human history. He gave us reason so we could uncover the laws of nature and avoid undesirable consequences of nature. God also gave us free will so we could love one another. The most important thing God gives us is subjective truth, that is, God makes us in His image and likeness so that we could choose to be more loving like Him and less selfish like us. He guides us to love one another as we love our self. This is to empower one another as together we share in the responsibility of civilization. Love overcomes violence, oppression, cruelty, and torture, because it presents the other as an extension of self. We share in each other's joys and sorrows. To love the other is to do the will of God. We often succeed but we also fail to follow the will of God. The material cause composition of body and soul explains how we fail. The will is strong but the flesh is weak. The suffering of innocent victims arises because of our own body soul divide.

³⁰ Luke 22:19-20.

³¹ Lewis, C. S. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: The MacMillan Company. (1967). 89.

³² *Ibid.*, 90.

The Lucan text of the Prodigal Son provides a beautiful story of divine forgiveness.³³ It illustrates the wide range of human experience in the story of our sinful nature as we identify in turn with the father, the prodigal son, and at times, the envious elder son. It teaches us to rejoice and celebrate because though we sin, God welcomes us back warmly.

Conclusion

I never understood how to solve the ‘fundamental problem of Theodicy’ until I saw God’s silence in the face of human suffering as an invitation to trust Him by continuing to do His will. This is not a simple task. It is far easier to intellectualize the ways of God and mask self-centeredness with an exaggerated illusion of our importance echoed in a distorted lament ‘**Either** God is not unlimitedly powerful; **Or** He is not perfectly good.’ Pain still hurts, and growth is slow, but the invitation to stand in subjective truth before God is immensely rewarding. The greatest peace in my life arises when out of the depths of subjective truth I consciously decide to turn my life, my will, my intellect, my emotions—the whole of me—to the care of God.

The attempt to assign responsibility for suffering to God fails because it gives us importance we do not have. We are very important because of God not because of what we do. I remain convinced that I can do nothing to add a single ounce of value to God. On my own, I am insignificant. Human greatness does not even come from the fact that we know our insignificance as Blaise Pascal claims; it comes because God loves us! This, I think, is what Job saw when he put God in the docket.

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³³ Luke 15:11-32.