

**Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave
Evanjelická bohoslovecká fakulta**

V SLUŽBE OBNOVY

Vedecký zborník vydaný pri príležitosti
šesťdesiatych narodenín
Dr. h. c. prof. ThDr. Júliusa Fila

Zostavili
Milan Jurík, PhD.
Jozef Benka, PhD.

Bratislava 2010

Problems of Evil

doc. Paul R. Hinlicky, PhD.

Abstrakt

V nasledujúcom príspevku autor predstavuje názor, že takzvaný „problém zla“ je v skutočnosti záležitosťou niekoľkých „problémov“ zla a poznanie týchto druhov zla je dôležité pre pastoraľny kňazský úrad v cirkvi ako útecha svedomia. Používajúc odpoveď Augustína z Hippo na katastrofu barbárskeho vyplienenia Ríma, autor poukazuje na dôležité rozlišovanie medzi prirodzeným a morálnym zlom, a síce rozlišovanie medzi zraniteľnosťou trpieť, čo je prirodzené akékoľvek mysliacej bytosti a medzi spôsobovaním utrpenia druhým za účelom vyhnuť sa vlastnému utrpeniu. Využívajúc kresťanskú filozofiu súčasníka Diogenesa Allena, autor zakončuje príspevok náčrtom kresťanskej „teodicey viery“.

Key Words: Theodicy, suffering, moral evil, natural evil, Augustine, Diogenes Allen.

Problems, not problem. The pastor engaged in the care of souls is engaged first of all in a process of discernment. Evil is one word, but not one thing and the care extended to the suffering must accordingly be discerned. This is particularly true of Christian care, if Martin Luther was right in his *theologia crucis* to teach us that what is evil to the natural man is good to the spiritual man, and vice versa. This is a truth especially true for today over against the modern secular view of the sovereign human self, with its practical imperative to regard every and any kind of suffering as a meaningless evil to be overcome. In this essay, I wish to call attention to an ancient theologian, Augustine, and a contemporary one, Diogenes Allen, of Princeton Theological Seminary in New Jersey, USA, who help us to understand the problems, not problem, of evil. If I am right, such knowledge of evils is what makes practical theology theological: not chaplaincy to the modern self-understanding of the sovereign, egocentric human self, i.e. who lives *incurvatus in se*, but the promise and nurture an alternative, “ecstatic” self, i.e., who lives by faith in God, love for others and hope for the world to be redeemed.

What *Luther* meant by the theology of the cross is that God heals by first afflicting morally evil disputants whose egocentric unhappiness fueled by envy or greed drives them to rend the web of life in aggressive acts of exappropriation (*amor concupiscentiae*). If I may cite the *Heidelberg Disputation*: the theologian of the cross “knows that it is sufficient if he suffers and is brought low by the cross in order to be annihilated all the more. It is this that Christ says in John 3 [:7], ‘You must be born anew.’ To be born anew, one must consequently first die and then be raised up with the Son of Man. To die, I say, means to feel death at hand.”¹ The death of the centered self and the birth of an ecstatic self by union in faith with the crucified but risen Jesus Christ – that is what Luther meant by the *theologia crucis*. The negatives of human experience are to be lived with and engaged because, taken from our hands and restored to God’s, they become the “severe mercy” (Augustine) of “costly grace” (Luther, as cited by Bonhoeffer) that changes us in the aforementioned way.

There is no doubt that Luther’s *theologia crucis* raises dangerous and sensitive questions of theodicy,² which theology cannot in turn refuse to consider.³ The world in which the cross of Jesus stood is a world in which the One He called Father permits the natural evils of flood and famine no less than the moral evil of created wills actually contravening His

¹ *The Heidelberg Disputation* (1518) in LW 31:55.

² In criticism of the author, Daphne Hampson identifies a “Lutheran” anthropology of the “breaking of the self,” and calls it a “profoundly masculinist description” of the human relation to the divine, in *Christian Contradictions: The Structures of Lutheran and Catholic Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 2001) 239 - 40.

³ I deal with such objections, particularly from some Feminist theologians, in the conclusion of Luther and the Beloved Community: *A Path for Christian Theology after Christendom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010).

own. In such a world, affliction belongs to life and from birth day to death day human beings can no more disown their pain than the bodies which bear them. The gospel never delivers us from natural evil and does not easily or cheaply deliver us from moral evil. Indeed, even to understand this much as a theologian of the cross is to have owned one's affliction as birth pangs of God's new humanity. Such insights cannot be shared with the old Adam. *Theologia crucis* is wisdom for those who boast in "in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal. 6, 14). It is "epistemology at the turn of the ages."⁴

Augustine in Dispute about the Justice of God, or, Theodicy

While the name, theodicy, which Leibniz gave to the problem of evil in Christian thought, was new, the matter itself was not. Indeed, it arguably⁵ dominates theological reflection in the West since Augustine's *De civitate dei*,⁶ from the year 411, when the barbarian Goths sacked and pillaged Rome.⁷ The fall of Rome sent shock waves through the whole Latin-speaking world. At this time, Christianity had been legalized for one hundred years, and the official religion of the Roman Empire for thirty years, after Theodosius II outlawed pagan sacrifices in 381. For the previous millennium Rome had ruled the known world under the patronage of the old gods and their cult. In less than a hundred years under the Christian God, eternal Rome had fallen. The reaction from the pagan population was naturally to "blame Christ and the Christians." The challenge here was not easily met.

Augustine first of all had to "show on account of what virtues and for what reason the true God, in whose power are all kingdoms, vouchsafed His help to spread the [Roman] empire [in the previous 1000 years], while those fictions they call gods gave no help at all, but, on the contrary, worked untold harm by their deceptions and frauds" (I:36). Note the prophetic principle at work here: the God of the Bible is not only the God of the Bible, but the One who has also been at work in Rome's pagan history.⁸ In some sense yet to be specified He is responsible both for Rome's rise to power and now for Rome's fall. For in His power "are all the kingdoms." Uncovering this truth of God's providential purpose in Rome's history will in turn expose the false political theology of Rome, the "fictions...deceptions and frauds" which have worked so much evil. In contemporary idiom, we might call this a theological critique of ideology. By ideology one designates beliefs which legitimate and even "sanctify" a system of social power by making the existing order seem inevitable, theologically then, as an expression of divine order. In Augustine's case, it had to do with the polytheistic cult of animal sacrifice and the associated myths of the gods, rationalized and harmonized by Stoic theologians, which justified Roman imperialism and dictatorship in the name of cosmopolitanism.

Augustine exposed the cruelty and immorality celebrated in the myths of the gods, constantly portrayed in the public theaters as entertainment. But Augustine not only

⁴ I. Louis Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages: 2 Corinthians 5:16," *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* ed. W. R. Farmer et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 269-287.

⁵ For the argument, see Paul R. Hinlicky, "Theological Anthropology: Towards Integrating Theosis and Justification by Faith," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (Winter 1997: 34/1) 38-73.

⁶ St. Augustine, *City of God: An Abridged Version*, Ed. with an Introduction by Vernon J. Bourke (New York et al, Doubleday Image Books, 1958). The page numbers of quotation in this section are provided in parentheses.

⁷ In the following section, I am adapting previously published material in "Tough-Minded Augustinianism: Some Guidance for Christian Apologetics in our Day" Glaube und Denken (Sonderband, 1999) 157-172.

⁸ Wolhart Pannenberg, "The Appropriation of the Philosophical Concept of God as a Dogmatic Problem of Early Christian Theology," *Theological Questions in Theology*, Two Vols. II trans. G. H. Kehm (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972) II: 119-183.

demythologized the myths. He penetrated the Roman imperial ideology and revealed the "will to power and domination" which it dressed up and concealed. In the process he also exposed the fatalism which Rome's glorification of power betrayed, in that it regarded war as natural and domination as normal. Against this he defended the moral nature of providence as learned from the Hebrew prophets, and argued that the spread of the Christian church represents the progress through the world of the true ideal of a universal human community (what I call, after Josiah Royce, the 'Beloved Community'⁹), not the false ideal of empire. He thus proclaimed and interpreted to his contemporaries the gospel of the humility of the Son of God, who became a servant and died on a cross to save the arrogant human rebel, who wants to be God (according to his false idea of the imperial God). Accordingly the scandal of salvation through the cross of Jesus is not translated into an easy and attractive but false religious option alongside others within the reigning imperial ideology. Augustine does not present Christianity as one among many of the legitimate polytheistic cults nor recommend it as the best available option to religious consumers shopping for a church-home under the safe umbrella of the *pax Romana*. Rather Augustine is able to confront his Roman opponents directly with a difficult but intelligible choice between a society gathered under the cross of Jesus and a society organized around the power that once crucified him, *civitas dei* and *civitas terrena*, respectively.

This critique led Augustine to a powerful re-description of the change that the introduction of Christianity brought about the downfall of Rome. According to Augustine, God had rather blessed the civic virtues of early Roman republicanism to create a multicultural, world civilization into which the Son of God would be born at the providential "right time." But now God is executing long overdue punishment on wicked opulence, political tyranny and imperial cruelty. In God's plan the glory that was imperial Rome is now giving way to the progress in history of the City of God, a new kind of society, founded not on the love of glory but on the glory of love.¹⁰ Thus, the apparently self-evident presupposition of the accusers, that we should worship the gods in order to preserve the Roman empire, is exposed as false and unworthy of God, who is to be worshipped for God's sake, not for our supposed personal or political advantage (a theological position appropriated by the young Augustinian monk Martin Luther centuries later in his attack on *amor concupiscentiae* in the early Commentary on Romans¹¹).

In executing this critique of Roman paganism, however, a deeper issue arose. Augustine found himself allied with 'the Platonists,' as he calls them, those philosophical critics who also attacked the anthropomorphic myths of the gods and argued for a higher view of the divine nature, distinguishing God from the visible world. For the Platonists, Augustine acknowledges, "the gods are to be worshipped, not for the benefit they could bestow in this life, but for the sake of the life beyond the grave," i.e., the true God is "beyond" all the competing myths and cults here below in the realm of shadow and becoming. God is to be sought and found in a realm that transcends harvest and trade, politics and war, in "a life beyond the grave." We can see and acknowledge with Augustine a genuine similarity between the Platonic insight into the transcendence of God and the biblical rejection of idolatry. These two could join forces in attacking the myths of the gods and the sacrificial cults in urging that God is "beyond" all human imaging and conceptual representation — much as in contemporary

⁹ Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001). See my forthcoming *Luther and the Beloved Community*, especially Chapter Eight.

¹⁰ So Arthur Norris Cochrane, *Christianity and Classical Culture: A Study of Thought and Action from Augustus to Augustine* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1957).

¹¹ See Wilhelm Pauck's introductory essay in Luther: *Lectures on Romans* trans. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961).

French, post-modern apophatic theology.¹² But at one point the respective programs of Platonists and Christians came into irreconcilable conflict, as Augustine noted sharply already in his *Confessions* (Book VII). That point of irreconcilable conflict comes at the latter's kataphatic theology of the incarnation of the only Son of God, the Crucified Christ Jesus, and the ensuing claim that the only true worship now, on the earth, is the worship of His Father, by union with this One's death and resurrection, in the power of their Spirit, i.e., the Eucharist of the church as opposed to the civic sacrifices.¹³

The argument here is no longer with the crude polytheists "who hold Christ responsible for the evils which they deservedly suffer for their wicked lives" (I:3). No, the greater challenge comes from these sophisticated Platonists who argue that Christian exclusivism is ethically wrong because it causes friction among citizens, which weakens the empire, and is theologically wrong because it amounts to just another arrogant claim to possess the truth of the transcendent God that is in reality beyond representation and even conception. Christianity, these Platonists objected, is but another idolatry, all the more offensive for representing the exalted God as a crucified man. Augustine calls meeting this latter challenge of the Platonists a "more difficult task, calling for more subtle reasoning."¹⁴ This "more subtle argument" is indeed the beating heart of the wide-ranging *De civitate dei*.¹⁴ For present purposes we can reduce Augustine's rebuttal of the Platonists to this: the world is not, as at root they suppose, a static and eternal cosmos but a temporal creation. It is as a whole in motion. It is not permanent and neither are human beings and their religions, philosophies, cultures, empires. The temporal world is good, but not absolutely good, for only the eternal God who is being itself, who exists necessarily in relation to all else that exists temporally and contingently as His creature, is absolutely good. The true good of the creature is not itself, nor even its world, but the eternal God. In this temporal life, the creature has God

¹² Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death* trans. David Wills (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) 108.

¹³ The apostolic father, Ignatius of Antioch, held that the Eucharist is the one true worship of God because it is "as the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father by his goodness raised up" (Smyrnaeans 6:2). The world, in other words, is full of "eucharists," i.e., thanksgivings, sacrifices, worship, attempts to ingratiate or propitiate the gods, as I analyze in detail in discussion of the Girard thesis in Luther and the Beloved Community, Chapter Two. In the Eucharist, as the very early, anonymous Didache shows, the Christians offered a sacrifice of praise and thanks through Christ for the peace God had made known (Didache 9-10). It was a sacrifice of self in union with Christ, which required reconciliation with God and one another (Didache 14) in contrast to bloody rites of expiation on all sides. The new and "bloodless" sacrifice in the Christian community, not of irrational beasts, but of themselves in, with and through Christ in the power of the Spirit for service to the Father's dawning reign, differs from all these others, which do not know about the grace of God in Christ. "The general charge of atheism or impiety (non-participation in the state cult) touched upon the Eucharist, for the Christians abstained from the common sacrifices of the civic community, offering their own peculiar sacrifice and excluding others from participation in it. This inevitably led to charges that the Christians were undermining the state by declining to participate in the propitiatory sacrifices required by the polytheistic state cult." Daniel J. Sheerin, *The Eucharist, Message of the Fathers of the Church Series*, Vol. VII (Michael Glazier, 1986) 23-4.

¹⁴ In the words of Diogenes Allen: "Augustine, who was led through a study of the Platonists to recognize a transcendent reality, remarked after he had become a Christian that the Platonists had everything but an incarnation of the Word. As Augustine matured in the Christian faith, he displayed in his Confessions and even more fully in *The City of God*, his discovery of the reality of historical existence, with divine intentions being revealed and realized in the life of individuals, peoples, nations and entire civilizations. He impressed this on Western Christianity and Western culture." The "reality of historical existence" -- by this Allen means that all created reality is history, and that the Christian God participates in this history. Like the Platonic God, the Christian God eternally transcends the world, but, unlike the Platonic God, He is simultaneously capable of something new, an Incarnation, a real participation in the created realm - that's a revision of metaphysics! Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World: The Full Wealth of Conviction* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989) 162. The page numbers of quotations from this book are provided in parentheses in this section.

only in acting by faith in love, i.e., in dependence on the God who is love. God is love in that, out of no inner need, He has freely given the world to exist and given Himself to it in the missions of the Son and the Spirit. This living justly by faith in love is the true image of God on the earth; it denotes ever new acts which bless God for His blessings just as also accepting chastisements from God.

In this perspective, the natural evils of creaturely life in the world are not moral evils at all. That we are limited by the laws of physical possibility and by the existence of other persons with their needs and claims, that we experience pain physically and psychologically, that we are born without any choice and likewise must someday die -- none of this is morally evil. We perceive and experience these creaturely limitations as evil only because we do not want to be creatures but want to be gods (just as the young Luther would put it a millennium later in his *Disputation concerning Scholastic Theology*¹⁵). Yet such limitations characterize everything which exists, which is not God; they characterize all creation besides the Creator, who is by contrast unlimited, infinite, boundless in His incomparable act of eternal being. Thus in the economy of this God's creation, natural evils are in fact good. They teach us, in the latter-day Augustinian Luther's words from the Large Catechism, that "none have life of themselves;" they awaken us to the fact that we must live by faith not by sight, not by bread alone but by the Word of God, not alone but for others as also fellow creatures of God destined with us for the Beloved Community. On the way to this best of all possible worlds, such 'natural evils' point us to God as the One on whom we depend to exist at all. Admittedly, heeding this testimony can be spiritually wrenching. When we suffer, as did holy Job, we discover our mortality and learn our littleness in the universe before the God who speaks out of the whirlwind. So we may, albeit painfully, be rid of the egocentric anthropocentrism in which we have lived, as if the universe existed for our convenience, humbled by the very law of creation: the First Commandment, the Difference that we are creatures not the Creator, the reign of God!

Moral evil consequently is not the fault of nature, but the fault of rational creatures, men and angels, who refuse the reign of God. In the final analysis, Platonists have no understanding of this root of moral evil in the human heart and how it drives the lust for domination in the City of Man. They can only blame the body, the animal part of man, as a source of disorderly passions (just as Luther would centuries later explain to his opponent, Erasmus¹⁶). Their best remedy encourages education as a means by which reason comes to enlightened self-interest and acquires mastery over the bodily impulses with their insatiable desires. In this way, however, the Platonists overestimate the power and innocence of reason. Consequently they fall into despair when the darker powers of willful unreason and unbearable, accumulated guilt erupt into wild violence, as regularly they do. All the same, it is not the bad body which causes the good soul to sin; it is rather the morally evil soul which causes the good body to sin. Moral evil does not arise from the lower bodily passions but from the higher spiritual powers of the soul, pride, the lust for domination, despair. Reason itself then is no infallible guide, but itself in need of a guide, just as the human being is in need of a new heart, a new birth, a new identity, a new society. This new covenant is given in Jesus Christ. Those Romans who are in despair at the fall of their eternal city should penitently come to understand the "Ifrauds, lies and deceptions" which have brought this judgment about and, repenting, find salvation from the guilt and the power of sin in the cross

¹⁵ LW 31: 10.

¹⁶ For one example among many, Luther writes, "Ignorance and contempt [of God] are not seated in the flesh, in the sense of the lowest and grossest affections, but in the highest and most excellent powers of man, in which righteousness, godliness, and knowledge and reverence of God, should reign -- that is, in reason and will, and so in the very power of 'free - will', in the very seed of uprightness, the most excellent thing in man!" Bondage, 280.

of Jesus Christ. Such Platonists have invested in a false faith in their efforts to humanize the City of Man. They should let themselves be changed by the encounter with Jesus Christ and become agents of God's new and universal humanity by joining His body, the Church universal, harbinger in time of the eternal *civitas Dei*.

Such change in us reflects what the young Martin Luther called "the good of the cross," while, in contrast, it is the "theologians of glory," like Augustine's Platonists, who "call the good of the cross evil..."¹⁷ This cruciform account of human transformation, and the need for it, is the deep, and in my view, ineradicable connection between Luther and Augustine.

The 'Post-Modern' Good of the Cross

Some 12 centuries later, Augustine's crucial distinction between natural and moral evil reappeared at the center of Leibniz's book, *Theodicy*, and played a determinative role in its argument. Summarily put, "evil may be taken metaphysically, physically and morally. *Metaphysical evil* consists in mere imperfection, *physical evil* in sufferings, and *moral evil* in sin."¹⁸ What is less known, and may be of greater import, is that in the 20th century Karl Barth not only took note of this distinction, but, as I have argued in *Paths Not Taken*, he also appropriated it for his own doctrine of creation. "Leibniz did not dispute that we are confronted at this point by an objective conundrum grounded in the reality of the creaturely world." What he denied was that evil's "riddle is ultimate and insoluble, that the actual contradiction can persist."¹⁹ Leibniz' distinction between "metaphysical evil" and "moral evil" at its best serves not to dissolve the intellectual riddle of moral evil's actuality in the best of all possible worlds but rather to clarify what it is and how it is to be exposed as evil, endured, opposed and finally defeated. Thus Barth rightly interprets Leibniz's meaning: "that the real created world is the best does not mean that it is absolutely good and perfect. If this were so, it would not be the created world. From its being as such, the non-divinity of its existence, there follows necessarily its imperfection..."²⁰ This 'non-divinity' of the creation is what Leibniz means by the term, "metaphysical evil," i.e., the ontological vulnerability to non-being of any conceivable creature which by definition (given the Christian doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*) arises 'out of nothing.' 'Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust'--any conceivable creature has come into being and will pass again from being. This imperfection of creation in the metaphysical sense of the non-divinity of the creature, on the other hand, "confirms the good will of God to reflect His glory in the best and most perfect way in this other being..." The intended reflection of divine glory in the imperfect creature attests to the good and gracious will of God, if only in faith the creature learns to trust in it. But here we detect the very origins of moral evil: we do not trust, but "we dispute both this good will of God and the actual but limited perfection of creation if we try to dispense with metaphysical evil..."²¹

Refusing to endure our sufferings ecologically, or to act for public rather than private good, we become morally evil disputants whose egocentric unhappiness fueled by envy or greed drives us to rend the web of life in aggressive acts of expropriation -- the moral evil that I highlight by calling it 'actual evil' in distinction from (but not in contradiction to) the venerable private account of 'natural' evil in Augustinian tradition.

¹⁷ LW 31: 53.

¹⁸ Theodicy, 136.

¹⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*: III/1, The Doctrine of Reconciliation trans. G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1974) 390.

²⁰ *Ibid*.

²¹ *Ibid*.

Diogenes Allen, a Princeton philosopher of religion who has written on Leibniz,²² is one contemporary thinker for whom theodicy as faith which justifies God in His judgment is key to the 'post-modern' theological possibility. In this approach, it is not the Incarnation which needs to be reformulated to fit into a Platonic²³ or any other world view. It is rather the Incarnation of God in the Crucified Jesus which calls into question our preconceived ideas of God's transcendence and our hidden assumption that this world-order is the ultimate reality, to which even God is subject. Reminiscent of the fundamental pre-Kantian question posed by the alternatives of Spinoza and Leibniz,²⁴ Allen asks whether "this universe [is] ultimate or not?" (3). This, he argues, "is the real question" (67) which "cannot be settled scientifically or philosophically" (154), because this "controversy is between a theological view and a rival theological view, that is, between saying, 'God is the reason we have a universe' and saying, 'The universe just is'" (82).²⁵ Both views, Allen argues, are metaphysical in the broad, non-technical sense of speaking to ultimate matters of interpretation, how to take the cosmos as a whole. Moreover, one of these two basic views is inevitably adopted by every human person, insofar as she is a purposive agent who must live an historical life, seeking to realize goals and fulfill duties in the physical reality of the world. Living historically in the world, the question of whether it is to be taken as ultimate is inescapable. Moreover, the kinds of goals we adopt, and the priorities we assign when conflicts arise between among various goods in face of physical necessities and moral duties, are decided by a basic epistemic choice, if we are following the Jews Jesus and Paul.²⁶ Do we live for self, brief flicker of light in endless, unchanging, eternal night? Or do we live for the Lord, who has worlds yet to create? Is this present order ultimate or not? That is the question!

According to Allen, it is a question which contemporary science itself is coming to pose. The discoveries of contemporary physics have sealed the fate of modern rationalism by uncovering the radical contingency of all that exists. This discovery that "it might have been otherwise" underscores the "post-modern situation" of thought characterized by a loss of the "modern" confidence in the "power of reason alone," which had, as in Spinoza,²⁷ based itself upon the presumed timelessly rational necessity of all things. Allen points to four breakdowns in this confidence. First, there is the emergence of scientific cosmology which "actually points toward God" as an answer to the questions, Why does the universe have this particular form (which led to the evolution of humanity) instead of some other? Why does the universe exist at all?²⁸ Second, there is the failure of the Enlightenment to find a basis for morality in social life that is not parasitic upon the Judeo-Christian legacy.²⁹ Third, there is the collapse, after

²² Diogenes Allen, "The Theological Relevance of Leibniz's Theodicy," Studia Leibnitiana. Supplementa. Vol. 14 (1972).

²³ As in Paul Tillich's famous restatement of the Platonic axiom in his *Systematic Theology*. 3 volumes (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967) II: 138ff.

²⁴ Matthew Stewart, *The Courtier and the Heretic: Leibniz, Spinoza, and the Fate of God in the Modern World* (NY & London: W.W. Norton, 2006).

²⁵ On this point, see also John Hedley Brooke, *Science and Religion: Some Historical Perspectives* (Cambridge, U.K., Cambridge University Press, 1993).

²⁶ See Luke 14, 11 - 15. "If the dead do not rise, 'Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Cor. 15:32b). But if the dead do rise, "Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15, 58).

²⁷ Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650 - 1750* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²⁸ Witness the already famous conclusion of Stephen Hawking with Leonard Mlodinow, *A Brief History of Time* (NY: Bantam Dell, 2005): "The question remains, however: how or why were the laws and the initial state of the universe chosen?" (140).

²⁹ In corroboration: Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Second Edition (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) 51ff. Now - surprisingly - further corroborated by Jürgen Habermas, *Time of Transitions* trans. Ciaran Cronin & Max Pensky (Cambridge UK & Malden, MA: Polity, 2008) Chapter 12, 140 - 169.

Hitler, Hiroshima and Stalin, of the rationalistic faith in inevitable progress with the renewed perception of moral evil as a deeply rooted and powerful force that cannot be overcome merely by education.³⁰ Fourth, the idea that knowledge is inherently good has become questionable. When we consider the new technological possibilities for mass destruction which the growth of knowledge facilitates, confidence evaporates in the proposition that all knowledge is beneficial and all change is for the good.³¹ All these "breakdowns" of rationalism make for a "postmodern" situation which provides Christian theology with a tremendous opportunity, provided that it faces the challenge to warrant its faith rationally, i.e. not to demonstrate faith (impossible! God must demonstrate faith), but rather to make faith intelligible as an interpretive response to the promissory narrative of God in Christ.³² In that case, theology shows how Christian faith "makes sense" provisionally of the whole cosmic story³³ by telling of the justice of God which justifies the ungodly; that is, as theodicy of faith.

When Allen argues that the fundamental question is whether this world is ultimate, then, he is not (*pace* Nietzsche) denigrating this world as inferior or bad. That would be to interpret him as a (bad) Platonist,³⁴ or rather a Gnostic, not as a Paulinist and an Augustinian. Allen's purpose is quite the contrary. He wants to affirm the world, but the world as it really is: as fragile and contingent, as a precious and passing state which had a beginning and will have an end, as a natural order which operates lawfully, bound by physical possibilities, in which humanity has emerged. He does not want to proffer a false, rosy picture of the world as a 'steady state,' secure and permanent, which we may then take for granted, as if it all existed for our sake and we had license to use and consume it all for wholly immediate and selfish ends. Nor does he want to obscure the necessity with which the laws of nature both bless and afflict us.³⁵ He insists that we take the world as it really is, where the vast universe which modern science has discovered does not exist just for human beings, where a single asteroid colliding with earth could end humanity's existence in the twinkling of an eye in an uncannily literal fulfillment of Jesus' talk about the end of the world (cf. Mark 13, 24 - 27). Existentially it is precisely the age old human experience of "meaningless" suffering inflicted by natural evils which raises acutely the question of whether this natural-world order is the ultimate reality (92). If there is an answer to the question, stuttered from the lips of the afflicted, if there is a "purpose, and not just a cause [of 'meaningless' suffering], this purpose must reside outside the universe" (93). As in Augustine, natural evils in this way point to the Creator God, the *intellegentia extra mundam* (Leibniz).

³⁰ In corroboration: Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960).

³¹ In corroboration: Martin Heidegger, *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (NY et. al.: Harper & Row, 1977).

³² Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987).

³³ Thus already Alan Richardson's 'neo - Augustinian' Christian Apologetics (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1947); more recently, the pregnant remarks at the conclusion of George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984) 117.

³⁴ Ancient Platonism set itself against the Gnostic devaluing of this visible world of becoming. That is evident in the pagan critic, Celsus, to whom Origen eventually responded. See Celsus, *On the True Doctrine: A Discourse against the Christians* trans. R. J. Hoffmann (NY & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Closer to Augustine, see Margaret R. Miles, Plotinus on Body and Beauty: *Society, Philosophy, and Religion in Third Century Rome*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

³⁵ So Ned Wisniewski, *Preparing to Hear the Gospel: A Proposal for Natural Theology* (Tanham, Maryland: The University Press of America, 1998).

To understand this perhaps surprising³⁶ theological argument for the "indifference of nature" (but note Jesus' statement in Matt. 5, 45), one must recall the background of the question in modern philosophy and theology. David Hume devastated the so-called cosmological proof for the existence of the Cosmic Engineer, on which so many Enlightenment-era theologians of Deism tried to build their theological systems. Hume pointed out that even if we grant that some Cosmic Engineer designed the world, "we cannot infer that the alleged designer of nature is either purely benevolently or purely malevolently disposed" toward humanity. The existence of so many natural evils alongside natural blessings prevents either inference. The more likely inference is that nature's "alleged designer is unconcerned with or indifferent" to human welfare. This inference of course constitutes "an insuperable barrier to a rational belief in the goodness of God" (112). Allen does not evade the force of Hume's argument. On the contrary, he receives it, in part because it exposes the false theological premise of Deism's natural theology. The God of the Bible is not at all adequately represented in the figure of the Cosmic Engineer -- this idea is nothing but a personification of the mechanism of the natural order, which is indeed indifferent to humanity's moral purpose as such. By the same token, the goodness of the biblical God is not decided by anything less than the grant of eternal life -- life in God, with God, before God--to a created nature which is inherently, naturally mortal as its moral purpose. The equation of the biblical God and the Cosmic Engineer falsely robs the former of the moral purpose for which the world is created and by which divine goodness is to be assessed -- essential, not accidental markers of this God's identity. On the other hand, it can be rightly said that the Nazi death factories were "intelligently designed."

Thus Allen insists upon the "bitter truth" which Hume uncovered in his refutation of the proof of Deism's God from the design of the world: "... to come to terms with our vulnerability to [indifferent] nature is to come to terms with the truth about ourselves: we are natural beings and, like all natural beings, we are mortal and vulnerable to disease, accidents, and natural catastrophes" (113). The background of Allen's discussion here of course lies in Leibniz' theology and Augustine's theology, which turned upon the same difficult but crucial distinction between natural evil and moral evil, i.e. between the ontological vulnerability as such of all created beings as temporal-spatial bodies in relation to others and the existential aggression creatures undertake as souls or moral agents to secure their threatened existence at the expense of others. No genuine creature can be conceived apart from such intrinsic bodily and psychological vulnerability -- the "evil" which is "natural" to anything that has come into being. Indeed, its unique, creaturely freedom as moral patient-and-agent lies precisely in how it responds to its intrinsic vulnerabilities in the changes and chances of its own unique life. Natural evil provides the possibility of, but does not necessitate, moral evil.

In this light, the true force of Allen's basic question, Is *this* world ultimate?, becomes apparent. "Only when we face the fact that nature operates by regular laws, that it is indifferent to our welfare and causes both good and evil, and allow it to break our egocentric and anthropocentric perspective, can we even conceive of One whose goodness is beyond"

³⁶ It might be objected, in the words of Jonathan Sorum (personal correspondence, 8/9/09) that "the church has traditionally taught that pain, sickness, and death are a consequence of human sin (i.e., the curses in Genesis 3). I certainly cannot look on death, even in faith (especially in faith) as a "natural part of life." It is not wrong to hate death as the negation of all God's goals for us. Jesus himself hated death and even feared it. Can natural evil be justified because it supposedly teaches us to live by faith? I wouldn't try that on any of my parishioners. All of this applies to Barth's reading of Leibniz, pp. 14f. and Allen's apologetic." I am grateful to Dr. Sorum for articulating this objection. Complicated questions about the "spiritual" interpretation of the Christian "Old" Testament which dogged Augustine in the West and Origen in the East are involved here as well as the reception of current scientific thinking in theology. But I acknowledge here a debt to be paid in future work.

(114) natural evils and natural blessings. Only when we are shocked into awareness that this world and we in it are not ultimate do we realize that the good "which God seeks to give us is the good which is God himself" (115). This leads Allen to the (perhaps too sweeping) claim that the "indifference of nature" is ordered by God to lead us to God. If nature's blessings have not led us, as they ought, to lives of joyful praise and thankful service, its afflictions shock us into awareness of our own fragility and need. As the idols crumble, we are led to seek our true good, not in any other creature, but in the Creator alone.

When we are opened by the experience of suffering to this truth about ourselves, we may at last apprehend the "good of the cross," the strange salvation which the Christian gospel offers in telling of the obedience of Jesus.³⁷ Otherwise "we are inclined to think that because Christ suffered for us, we do not have to." But "the good which God would do to us in not available apart from suffering, but is achieved precisely in and through suffering. Much of our suffering is useless. It springs from our egocentric and anthropocentric illusions and our acts of injustice." But the suffering of the Incarnate Son of God, who takes the violence of human greed, envy and deception upon Himself rather than perpetuate it, forces us to learn -- not merely intellectually!-- the distinction between natural and moral evil. He who was under no necessity to suffer took upon Himself the creature's condition of suffering. He who had the authority to destroy evildoers rather endured their evil-doing in His own person. In encounter with this Jesus Christ we learn the difference between "the suffering which results from egocentrism, anthropocentrism, and our own injustices, and that suffering which is the inevitable result of being a creature and a victim of injustice" (118 - 119). *This penitential learning about the natures of evil is the good of the cross.* The good of the cross is not that the sinner escapes, but that the sinner dies; not that the victim avenges, but that the victim is vindicated. The good of the cross is that dying with Jesus, "we can truthfully say [that we are just], if we are loved by one who loves us in spite of our failure to be just. This love enables us to speak truthfully about ourselves because it is the love of one who is wholly just, who innocently suffers the consequences of other people's injustices, and who as the creative Word of God has the power and authority to identify itself with every victim of injustice and, as the one who suffers at our hands, grants us absolution for our evil. In our self-evaluation we may truly believe that we are filth because we believe that we can be changed and in fact are being changed." (109) Such is the theodicy of faith, which justifies God in His judgment, where God's judgment is taken as "a saving revelation, that is, [which] shows and mediates a path to righteousness... Jesus Christ reveals the full depths of God's saving mercy since it is the actual endurance of suffering which is the cost of God's mercy toward human unrighteousness, a suffering which is borne by very God" (208). But "the problem is: do Christians who address others about God so understand the cross themselves?" (196).

This final question formulates *the* essential problem of Christian theology, taken both as critical dogmatics and as a pastoral theology within the life of the pilgrim church.³⁸ So also the young Luther, drawing upon Augustine's *Confessions* and his treatise, *On the Spirit and the Letter*: "This is the [true] people of God: it constantly brings to bear the judgment of the cross upon itself."³⁹

³⁷ In Luther and the Beloved Community, Chapter Three, I mount a defense of Luther's atonement theology as propitiation, not expiation.

³⁸ Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994).

³⁹ *Commentary on Romans*, 120. I insert the word 'true' because in context Luther is distinguishing "the new people, the believing people, the spiritual people" from the false and hypocritical.