



The Divine Predicament

THE GOOD AND LOVING GOD created the universe. Thus, the universe not only is essentially good; it also is explicitly designed for human existence.¹ Paradoxically, however, the universe also is permeated with evil. For over 3,000 years mankind has pondered the frustrating problem of evil: If there is a good God who is omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent, how can evil exist? There have been countless efforts to resolve this problem — and countless efforts to avoid the problem. The Scottish philosopher and historian, David Hume (1711-1776), expressed the issue this way:

Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able?
Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing?
Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and
willing? Whence then is evil?

and:

Why is there any misery at all in the world? Not by chance, surely. From some cause, then. Is it from the intention of the deity? But he is perfectly benevolent. Is it contrary to his intention? But he is almighty. Nothing can shake the solidity of this reasoning, so short, so clear, so decisive.²

*If there is a good God
who is omnipotent,
omniscient and
omnipresent, how can
evil exist?*

In an effort to resolve this age-long problem, we must first address the emphatic statement found in Second Isaiah:

I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things. — Isaiah 45:6, 7.

“The only other biblical writer who espouses so uncompromising a version of monotheism is the author of the Book of Job, in which a God who can create darkness and evil is submitted to the most profound philosophical protest: ‘Your hands molded and made me, and then turned to destroy me. Remember it was of clay you made me; and back to dust will you return me?’ (Job 10:8-9). The ambivalence of God, the presence in him of a destructive as well as creative side, Job challenges, and only in the final revelation does he get free

from his anguish and allow the monstrous and fearful side of God. Job suffers personally from the same God whom Second Isaiah announces as the lord of history.”³

Outside the Bible itself, “the rabbis of the talmudic period . . . insisted that as good derives from God so, ultimately, does evil. This insistence was intended to discount any implications of duality, the idea of a separate deity from whom evil springs being complete anathema to the rabbis, who even say, ‘Man should bless God for the evil which occurs in the same way that he blesses Him for the good’ (Ber. 33b).”⁴

These statements sound almost blasphemous. Nevertheless, God deliberately, even unabashedly declares that he and he alone is the Author of evil. Evil does not originate from some original chaotic essence, from an evil deity or demon, from a fallen angel or a malicious serpent, or from a tempted man or woman. God himself is the Author of evil!

God deliberately, even unabashedly declares that he and he alone is the Author of evil.

Is it a mortal sin even to imagine this? Is it irreparably dangerous even to address this? Or after 3,000 years, is it finally time to confront this? Let us then attempt such an encounter.

1. For God, ultimate good is the blessing of relational co-existence with and among all other beings. Thus, God’s ultimate intention has always been to create and sustain such “otherness.” However, the problem is that, before God embarked on creation, there was no “otherness.” There was only the triune “Oneness” of God himself. This “Oneness” of self-existence is traditionally defined as the ultimate substance, essence or *ousia* that allegedly exists in isolation apart from relationality with everyone and everything else. Yet in the mind of the Relational God, the self-existence of such “Oneness” is itself the primal evil.

2. For God, goodness involves mutual and equitable agreement between and among all “others.” However, the problem is that, in the “beginning,” God had no external “otherness” with whom he could enter into agreement. God could have extended himself to include divine offspring (*creatio ex deus*), but they would not have been “other” to himself. They would only have been extensions of himself. In this situation God had to resort to command to bring forth Creation out of nothingness (*creatio ex nihilo*). Nevertheless, to command the “other” is itself evil! Commanding the “other” is evil because it assumes domination over the “other” and the respondent submission of the “other” apart from a mutual and equitable relationship.

3. God's goodness is founded on mutual relationality with all "others." Thus, the possession and/or dispossession of "others" is itself evil. "Sin is . . . the abrogation of relationship — of all relationships."⁵ However, in the process of creation, God initially endowed primitive humanity with a non-relational, possessive "god-consciousness."⁶ God did this to protect the emergence of mankind and to grant it the ability to domesticate plants and animals and to develop technology that would aid mankind's survival and prosperity. Yet in the end, the possession of "others" is itself evil.

In the end, the possession of "others" is itself evil.

4. God acted between 4,000 and 1,000 BCE to gradually remove mankind's primitive "god-consciousness" and to allow the exercise of free will in mankind's multifarious decisions. In the words of Genesis 1:31, this was "very good." It was good because God had created the universe with infinite possibilities — both negative and positive. Ultimately, such possibilities would become manifest. However, faced with the loss of god-consciousness, mankind immediately launched a desperate effort to repossess God and his consciousness by whatever means possible — through religion (re-ligation), through political structures, and through the exercise of violence, suppression and exclusion of "others" by dominating power structures. Thus, while the gift of free will was both good and necessary, it quickly resulted in evil power structures.

5. In his act of creation from nothingness, God granted life to myriad forms of biological species. Life for "others" as well as life for God was good. Yet because of the negative contingencies associated with a universe of infinite possibilities, God also instituted death for "others" in order to restrict the negatives. This too was good. But does it justify the torture and death of millions of human beings? "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin . . ." (1 Corinthians 15:55, 56).

In summary, since God is the Author of self-existence, of command and possession, of negative possibilities, errant free will and death, then God himself is the primary Author of evil as well as of good! This is the divine predicament. On one hand, it is essential to exculpate God, because his intentions have always been the best. Furthermore, God and his Creation are destined to enjoy the best eternity, with infinite possibilities for good. On the other hand, in the face of age-long disease, suffering, violence and myriad catastrophes, God himself — as well as Creation itself —

Since God is the Author of self-existence, of command and possession, of negative possibilities, errant free will and death, then God himself is the primary Author of evil as well as of good!

must be brought to account. God's attempts to resolve the problem of evil through death and/or violence must — and will be — addressed. God himself must repent.

The Covenantal Solution

Thus, the only legitimate solution to evil is to address the Author of evil. And since God is the Author of evil, it is only just that he himself must become its solution. In order to accomplish such a solution, however, God must represent all parties to the solution:

1. God must represent himself as the uncreated Author of evil.
2. Also, God must represent his own created order and its victim(s).
3. Finally, God must represent the intervening principles that led to evil and its consequences.

In summary, God must himself become the Corporate Person to (1) represent the uncreated divine party, (2) to represent the created order as the human party, and (3) to represent the covenantal principles that were established between these two parties.⁷

Then, as the Covenant, God himself must bear the isolated and solitary consequences of uncreated self-existence. He must bear the consequent burden imposed on Creation by uncreated command and possession, by surrogate power domination, and by violence and death. That burden necessarily involves the demise of the uncreated, self-existent God, the death of command and possession, the termination of dominating power structures, and the extinction of violence and death. And there is more. God also must inaugurate and fulfill a new created universe, based on relational co-existence and on mutual, equitable and egalitarian agreements. It must be a new universe that is eternal, irrevocable and filled with infinite, positive possibilities. In effect, God himself must constitute both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant.

God has already given mankind profound encouragement that he has and will fulfill these essential responsibilities. In the First Temple metaphors God promised that he himself would become human.⁸ In the prophetic declarations God assured mankind that he would appear as the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 53). Then he appeared as a baby, born in a manger in Bethlehem (Luke 2:7). In his manifestation as human, God immediately began to bear the burdens of Creation. He also began to fashion the solutions to these problems. In his death and resurrection, he inaugurally solved the problem of evil and inaugurally instituted the universal, irrevocable and eternal “otherness” required for co-existent relationship.

The solution to evil must embrace the universe.

But the inaugural solution to the problem of evil is not sufficient. The solution to evil must embrace the universe. It must embrace all nature, all life, all humanity, and all of God himself. Disease, disaster, deceit, violence, suffering, death and eternal isolation must finally and irrevocably cease. “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Romans 8:22). As the corporate and covenantal Representative of all Creation, God must eventually consummate what he has already inaugurated.

The predominant question is, “What is God waiting for anyway?” Is God waiting for a final conflict to take place in order that the predestined “elect might be” raptured” (translated) from earth to heaven? Is he hoping for his followers to attain total spiritual and embodied sanctification by their works? Does he expect mankind to submit to some religio-political power structure? Does he intend to endow selected human beings with the transformative fullness of the Holy Spirit? Or could it simply be that God is patiently, sufferingly waiting for mankind to understand, accept and celebrate his adoption of humanity as his own eternal and noncontingent reality?⁹

As we consider the divine predicament, is it not time for us to accept the solution that God himself fulfilled in his human manifestation as Jesus Christ? Here we encounter a profound paradox. The alleged primal problem was that mankind sinned by determining to be “as [divine] gods, knowing [*yada* = covenantally knowing] good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). In the final solution mankind will personally and individually fully know [*epiginosko* = fully and covenantally know] the God who abandoned self-existent divinity to become human. “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know [*epiginosko*] even as also I am known” (1 Corinthians 13:12). We shall then have become co-equal partners to the covenant!

Conclusion

The ultimate reason for the incarnation of God into, and as constituted by, Creation is the simple but profound fact that “the hour of his judgment is come”! (Revelation 14:7). Not only the created order, but the Supreme Divinity who adopted Creation, must pay the painful price required to bring into existence an eternity of blissful Creation. The Christ event must thus be understood not only as “covering” for the fallenness of mankind, but also as inaugurally terminating the painful necessity of self-existence, command and possession as well as the afflictions of disaster, disease, death and annihilation, along with dominating power structures.

Not only the created order, but the Supreme Divinity who adopted Creation, must pay the painful price required to bring into existence an eternity of blissful Creation.

It is therefore in the interest of theodicy¹⁰ — “a vindication of divine justice in the face of the existence of evil”¹¹ — that mankind must finally address both the Christ event and the imminent transformation of God’s Creation. The divine predicament was inaugurally resolved at Calvary. When representative mankind finally accepts and celebrates God’s true humanity, the divine predicament will be fully resolved at the imminent *parousia* (Second Coming). It is in this context that the world is now witnessing the final stage in the disclosure of all evil and the promised revelation of all good.

Endnotes

1. See “Anthropic Principle,” at zebu.uoregon.edu/~imamura/209/mar31/anthropic.html.
2. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, pt. X, pp. 88, 91.
3. Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 109.
4. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, CD-ROM ed. (1997), s.v. “Good and Evil.”
5. Douglas John Hall, “Creation in Crisis,” *Dianoia* 2, no. 2 (1992).
6. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990).
7. See H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1981).
8. See “The First Temple: United Monarchical Period.” *Outlook* (November 2001).
9. See Dan O. Via, *The Revelation of God and/as Human Reception: In The New Testament* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1997).
10. The German philosopher and mathematician, Baron Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz (1646-1716), coined the term *theodicy* for the title to his treatise on the origins of evil, published in 1710. This treatise is now available in English translation: G. W. Leibniz, *Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man, and the Origin of Evil* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985).
11. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (1976).